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Like a “Helpless Animal” (*D 41*)? Like a Cautious
 Woman: Joyce’s “Eveline,” Immigration, and
 the Zwi Migdal in Argentina in the Early 1900s

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In his 1972 essay “Molly’s Masterstroke,” Hugh Kenner challenges the “conventional and superficial” readings of “Eveline” that suggest this (anti)heroine remains paralyzed in the end, unable to embrace a promising future with Frank in Buenos Aires.¹ Katherine Mullin, for her part, presents compelling evidence on the discourses of white-slave trafficking circulating in Europe around the time Joyce was writing and revising “Eveline” for publication.² In this note, I will provide further key facts supporting Kenner’s and Mullin’s reading of the story, since a historical look at the circumstances of Frank’s tales further reinforces questions about the sailor’s honesty.

“Eveline” was first published in *The Irish Homestead* on 10 September 1904. One month later, on 8 October, Joyce moved to Pola for a brief period and later to Trieste, where he began his permanent exile. By that time, heavy immigration from Europe to Argentina had already started; as H. S. Ferns observes, “in the early 1820’s, Argentina excited interest as a new Eldorado in Liverpool and London, and attracted both people and capital.”³ Between 1830 and 1930, sporadic waves of Irish immigrants reached Argentinean coasts in search of a better future, tempted by the “spectacularly rapid economic and cultural development” happening during those years.⁴ These groups, however, constituted a noticeable minority when compared to the influx from other nations such as Spain, Italy, France, and Germany (to a lesser degree). By 1914, “around one-third of the country’s population was foreign-born, and around 80 percent of the population comprised immigrants and those descended from immigrants since 1850,” with Italians and Spaniards encompassing the greatest slice of the foreign community.⁵ Thomas F. McGann explains that, in fact, “one-half of the total of economically active people in the country in 1914 were foreigners.”⁶ As Sidney Feshbach suggests in his response to Kenner’s argument, it sounds credible that Frank could have attempted a new life in Buenos Aires,⁷ but a deeper look at the historical context raises questions about the successful picture he paints of himself and thus

about his intentions.

The most obvious of Frank's fabrications lies in the seductive "stories of the terrible Patagonians" he tells the young girl (*D* 39). A quick look at any Argentinean history book can confirm 1) that the Patagonians had long been wiped out by the time Frank traveled around the world, and 2) that they were not nearly as "terrible" as Frank portrays them. Don Gifford notes that "[i]n late Victorian times little was known of [the Patagonians] except that they were said to be the tallest of human races," while he further observes that "[l]egend took over from there and created a race of near monsters."⁸ In reality, Jonathan C. Brown explains, the native Patagonians were "quite small . . . families or clans" of hunters who "moved mainly on foot and set camps based on the seasons and hunting opportunities"; their "tools were simple, usually bone and stone weapons and scrapers, products of their Stone Age existence."⁹ When the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century, the conquistadores set in motion a systematic crusade of annihilation against the native aborigines in Argentina, which was relatively easy to accomplish because the tribes were scattered around the territory and never managed to constitute strong empires such as the Incas in Peru or the Aztecs and Mayans in Mexico. This near genocide continued for centuries until General Julio A. Roca's infamous "Conquest of the Desert" in 1879, where he completed "the end of indigenous resistance [by extermination]" and, therefore, the "southern Pampas and Patagonia became open for settlement," according to Brown (287). Unlike most of the rest of South America, Argentina had very few of its native inhabitants left by 1879.¹⁰ From a historical standpoint, then, the "terrible Patagonians" Frank describes to Eveline were clearly a myth, while one can speculate that the author possibly knew that the monstrous Patagonians only existed in the collective unconscious of conquistadorial minds. After all, by the time Joyce was revising *Dubliners* for publication in 1914, Argentina and Italy had already consolidated strong cultural ties with the vast number of Italians in contact with relatives in the new continent, all of whom could testify that the dreadful Patagonians were nowhere to be seen.

The second of Frank's problematic assertions comes from the supposed "home" he claims to have in Buenos Aires (*D* 38). By the beginning of the 1900s, Argentinean oligarchy prided itself in the possession of land and property, which makes it very unlikely that Frank, or any other working-class immigrant, would have been able to purchase (very expensive) real estate. Most likely, he would have shared the fate of other sailors, who managed to make a decent but far from prosperous living (unless, of course, his business differs from the one he describes to Eveline). Non-educated immigrants could obtain jobs, but their status generally remained marginal. As Arthur P. Whitaker

contends, it was “the oligarchy’s unwillingness to admit [uneducated immigrants] on terms of equality that kept them from becoming full-fledged members of the Argentine nation” (58). Whitaker further explains that it was easy for immigrants “to acquire citizenship by naturalization after only two years’ residence, but . . . they could still neither vote nor hold office, and naturalization would only subject them to compulsory military service” (58-59). As a result, by 1914, Whitaker notes, “the vast majority of foreign-born residents remained aliens,” which only makes it more improbable that someone like Frank could have owned anything in Buenos Aires (59). David Rock observes that “in 1914 it was estimated that four-fifths of [immigrant Buenos Aires] working class families lived in one-room households” in what used to be called *conventillos* (175). This sounds like the most plausible of Frank’s alternatives, and here Kenner’s “seduction and swindle” hypothesis unsettles conventional interpretations.¹¹

Finally—and to complicate the historical background even more—I mention that during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Buenos Aires was the headquarters of an international Jewish criminal association fully dedicated to sex trafficking: the Varsovia (Warsaw), better known later as the Zwi Migdal.¹² At the time, there were other sex-trafficking rings operating in Argentina, such as the French Le Milieu, yet the Zwi Migdal managed to become more powerful and lucrative in part because the association received official recognition from the Argentinean government as a society of mutual help (the Warsaw Jewish Mutual Aid Society), which gave its members a convenient cover for their illegal activities. The Zwi Migdal’s modus operandi consisted in catching impoverished women—generally Eastern-European Jewish girls—through false promises of marriage and a better future in the new continent. French procurers, on the other hand, offered the women jobs as prostitutes but did not resort to pledges of courtship or marriage. In this respect, Isabel Vincent notices that “what made the Zwi Migdal unique, and so successful, was its focus on impoverished Jewish women and girls who were easily duped into religious marriages” (11). Could the enigmatic Frank be following such tactics with Eveline?

Indeed, prostitution was a bleak feature of Buenos Aires with its thriving port, which, according to Rock, “reflected the marked lack of women immigrants” (176). Mullin emphasizes that, by 1904, “the city was perceived to be the international capital of the White Slave Trade” and that “the phrase ‘going to Buenos Ayres’ was turn-of-the-century slang for ‘taking up a life of prostitution, especially by way of a procurer’s offices.’”¹³ The hysteria about white slavery and the city’s “terrible international reputation as the port of missing women [was such that] [t]he very name Buenos Aires caused many a European to shudder.”¹⁴

If Frank was, in fact, a liar or a recruiter planning to profit from Eveline, the girl's prospects would be deplorable. At the time, the options of a young Irish girl—who did not speak Spanish and was alone in an unfamiliar city where the main source of income for lower-class aliens came from the port—were next to none. In this respect, let us also remember that Joyce was still revising this story while living in Trieste, a cosmopolitan area with a thriving port where tales of enforced prostitution in Argentina would have likely been heard.¹⁵ After all, according to Donna J. Guy, the “vast majority of [European women involved in white-slave trafficking] came from eastern Europe, France, and Italy” (7). Clearly, a look at the broader context of “Eveline” considerably complicates Eveline’s “idyllic” plan of escape, and Frank’s invitation looks far from innocent.

NOTES

¹ Hugh Kenner, “Molly’s Masterstroke,” *JJQ*, 10 (Fall 1972), 21.

² Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 56-82.

³ H. S. Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 2. Ferns notices that “[t]he tide of men and women from Britain and Ireland never flowed as strongly to Argentina as it did to the United States and the British dominions, but capital and the business men and technicians . . . flowed to the River Plate with almost torrential force in the 1880’s” (p. 2).

⁴ Arthur P. Whitaker, *Argentina* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 2. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. For a detailed description of Irish emigration patterns to Argentina between 1886 and 1904, see Mullin, who explains, in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Purity*, that Irish emigration to Argentina progressively decreased, with none recorded between 1902 and 1904 (p. 62). This stoppage does not seem coincidental, for in 1902 the Argentinean government passed the “Ley de Residencia” to restrict immigration, in part to prevent the entrance of traffickers, while the Asociación Nacional Argentina Contra la Trata de Blancas (National Argentinean Association Against White Slave Trafficking) was founded among local anti-white-slavery campaigns organized by the newspaper *El Tiempo*—see Ivette Trochón, *Las Rutas de Eros* (Montevideo: Taurus Publishers, 2006), p. 281.

⁵ David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1982: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), p. 166. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Thomas F. McGann, *Argentina: The Divided Land* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1966), p. 31.

⁷ Sidney Feshbach, “‘Fallen on His Feet in Buenos Ayres’ (D 39): Frank in ‘Eveline,’” *JJQ*, 20 (Winter 1983), 225.

⁸ Don Gifford, *Joyce Annotated: Notes for “Dubliners” and “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), p. 51.

⁹ Jonathan C. Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina* (New York: Facts on

File, 2003), p. 17. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ Ferns explains that “[i]n 1878-9 General Roca put an end to [the natives’ presence in the South of Argentina]. *Salidas de Roca* penetrated deep into Indian territory, villages were destroyed, many of the young men and women were massacred, and the remainder were dispersed throughout society or driven into the distant wilds of farther Patagonia” (p. 387). Ferns further observes that “[a]fter the conquest of the Indians the gaucho became finally and forever a picturesque farm labourer. Thus land and men were made available, and the frontier of enterprise was widened” (p. 387).

¹¹ See Margot Norris, “The Perils of Eveline,” *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 56.

¹² For further information on the Zwi Migdal and white slavery in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, see Isabel Vincent, *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced Into Prostitution in the Americas* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005)—here Vincent notes that, “[i]n its heyday, the Zwi Migdal criminal enterprise controlled brothels in places as diverse as Johannesburg, Bombay, and Shanghai. But the centers of their criminal activities were Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and, to some extent, New York” (p. 10), while, by the turn of the century, Buenos Aires became the international headquarters. Unfortunately, much of the evidence of the organization’s operations has been lost or destroyed; the 1994 terrorist attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires erased most of the remaining archives, yet, according to Vincent, some documentation and statistics still exist (p. 11). Further references to the Vincent work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹³ Mullin, “Don’t Cry for Me Argentina: ‘Eveline’ and the Seductions of Emigration Propaganda,” *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), p. 189.

¹⁴ Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 5. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Like Mullin, Guy notes that white-slavery stories were highly exaggerated by the European media, but they certainly gave the impression that young European women were in danger in Buenos Aires, a subtext that Joyce could have woven into his tale, as Mullin argues in her essay in *Semicolonial Joyce*.

¹⁵ For a complete analysis of Joyce’s years in Trieste, see John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2004).