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Representation of Violence from Imaginary to Symbolic: Identity Formation in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*

İmgeselden Semboliğe Şiddetin Temsili: John Banville'in *Kanıt Kitabı*'nda Kimlik Oluşumu

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Öz: Bu makale, John Banville'in, kahramanın birinci şahıs bakış açısıyla anlattığı bir suç öyküsü olan Kanıt Kitabı'nı Lacan'ın ayna teorisine atıfta bulunarak Lacancı bir bakış açısıyla okuma sunmaktadır. Tanıklık edebiyatının bir uzantısı olarak roman, içe dönük bir kendini inceleme anlatısı olarak kabul edilir ve böylece metne paralel bir "benlik" yaratımı ortaya çıkar. Kahramanın geriye dönük anlatımına, Lacan'ın İmgesel düzeninde olduğu gibi sadece kendini ifade etmenin değil, aynı zamanda kendini tasvir etmenin ve sunmanın da olduğu alternatif bir dünya fikri eşlik etmektedir. Ancak bu kendi kendini yaratma, göründüğü kadar masum olmayabilir. Bunun nedeni, ayna evresinin her ne kadar İmgesel düzlemden Sembolik düzleme geçişi içerse de özneyi toplumun yasası olan simgesel olana alıştırmak için Ötekinin, biyolojik olarak annenin, rolünü ön plana koymaktadır. Ancak başkarakter ve anlatıcı olan Freddie, annesinin varlığından "hiçbir şey" olarak bahsettiği için toplumsal yasalara uyum sağlamasını kolaylaştıracak hiçbir yatıştırıcı bulunmamaktadır. Burada Freddie, Lacan'ın toplumda küçük kesim olarak gördüğü, toplumda yaşayan ancak kendi kuralları doğrultusunda hareket eden prototipi temsil etmektedir, ki bu da romanla ilişkilendirilen eril şiddetin birincil ilkesidir. Dolayısıyla bu makale, aynı zamanda Freddie'nin eril şiddeti performansına Lacan'ın kimlik teorisi üzerinden geliştirilen psikanalitik önermeler doğrultusunda yanıtlar bulmaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: John Banville, *Kanıt Kitabı*, Jacques Lacan, ayna teorisi, eril şiddet, narsisizm.

Abstract: This article proposes to read John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*, a crime story narrated from the protagonist's first-person gaze, from a Lacanian perspective by referring to his mirror stage theory. As an extension of testimonial literature, the novel is deemed to be a narrative of introspective self-examination, thus introducing a creation of "the self" paralleling the text. The protagonist's mnemonic narrative is accompanied by the idea of an alternative world of not only self-expression but also self-depiction and presentation, as in Lacan's Imaginary. This self-creation, however, may not be as innocent as it seems. The reason for this is that although the mirror phase involves a transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, it presupposes the role of the other, biologically (m)other, in order to accustom the subject to the law of society. However, just because the protagonist, Freddie, mentions his mother's presence as "nothing," there is no soothing force for his adaptation to societal laws. Here, Freddie is subject to what Lacan sees as a minor prototype who lives in a society and yet is attached to his own rules, which is the first principle of male violence associated with this novel. Therefore, this article also tries to find answers for Freddie's performance of male violence within the axis of psychoanalytic postulations elaborated on Lacan's identity theory.

Keywords: John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*, Jacques Lacan, mirror stage, male violence, narcissism.

Introduction

Though rooted in the early 1960s with the emergence of *Biography of a Runaway Slave* by Miguel Barnet, testimonial narratives have yet to intersect with the canonical flow until the late 1970s. Recognized as *testimonio,* the questions about the testimonial narratives mostly encompass their functions in establishing national, cultural, and collective identities. According to Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney's formulation in their introduction to a special issue of *Latin American Perspectives* in 1991, this unique genre leans on a national holocaustic legacy and is marked by a colonial past (1991: 4). These narratives stand out primarily for their reflective exploration of societal possibilities and subsequent adjustments envisioned for the future. What distinguishes them is the use of a first-person narrator adopting

an objective stance to reassess and reconsider potential social alternatives. In this formula, the objective narrator's voice becomes just a symbol, and the re-examination establishes the collective national identity that the output pertains to.

Nonetheless, this fact presupposes the act of creating the first-person narrator's own identity in retrospection in tune with the testimonial body's *word-after-word* creation. At this point, Laura Beard in *Giving Voice: Autobiographical/Testimonial Literature by First Nations Women of British Columbia* draws attention to the fact that first-person narrators who are granted testimonial authority envision the self within the borders of what could be surveyed under the autobiographical creation, for the words pertain to past tense flexing onto the future due to their "documentary aspects … to re-examine" the past and the self-identity inherent in it (2000: 65). Hence, the objectivity of the narrators of this genre remains uncertain, leaving room for speculation about whether it is merely a subjective manipulation at play.

Inspired by a similar sense of national predicament, John Banville's novel *The Book of Evidence* (1989)[1] is an addition to this ensuing flow of testimonial tradition that leans upon Ireland's heavy colonial past. The novel unfolds as a part of the art trilogy,[2] in which narcissist Freddie Montgomery stays steadfast as the narrative voice in each. Although reflecting the ill-traits of the Irish past of "the situation of exploitation and oppression" under English imperialism in a fragmented narrative (Beard 2000: 65), *BoE*'s narrator, Freddie, separates himself from his variations of being just a mere collective and symbolic voice of historical oppression. As Mark O'Connell remarks in *John Banville's Narcissistic Fiction*, most parts of Freddie's narrative are given over to his "relentless introspection and self-examination" (2013: 52). When considered alongside O'Connell's statement, Freddie's narrative gesture is apt to reveal a door towards the rediscovery of his personal identity through persistent introspection and self-examination, rather than serving as a conduit for a national identity.

In the case of *BoE*, moreover, Freddie's guilt-driven nadir is his focal point for his mnemonic journey of recording a testimony for the court that zooms in to Freddie's vulnerable yet overlappingly brutal experience of violently murdering a maidservant, Josie Bell, in a Big House. Recalling the perceptual selectivity in the process, Freddie manifests the very characteristics of an absolute author(ity)[3] and manipulation within his symbolic order. Freddie's narration is highly contingent on *subjective* psychoanalytical symbolism which superimposes Freddie's first-person authorial

[1] Henceforth, *BoE*.
[2] *The Book of Evidence* (1989), *Ghosts* (1993), and *Athena* (1995).
[3] Note that the PIE root (Proto-Indo-European morpheme) for the word "author" is *aug which means "*to increase*." *Online Etymology Dictionary* applies this fact to the word's Old French origin, *acteor-auctor*, which means "originator, creator" linked to "producer, progenitor," more literally, "one who causes to grow; doer," https://www.etymonline.com/word/author (accessed May 19, 2022). In a similar vein, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines the word as "the person who creates or starts something" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015: 84). Albeit the definitions that the dictionaries reveal differ, it is evidently steadfast that there is an emphasis on the absolute ability of agency, namely author(ity). To reinforce this approach, Michel Foucault in his *What is an Author?* bases the author-formation on this stance and thus claims that authors are those who "establish the endless possibility of discourse" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979: 29). Oscillating between historical and literary context, Foucault's rechannelled reconstruction here lies on an author's "transdiscursive position," unfolding as free circulation and manipulation (1979: 28).

gaze on the violent male gaze in praxis[4] in the novel. Here, Freddie's self-reflexive testimony construes a complementary twofold deduction: Freddie's narrativization is (1) an emblematic of his authority in self-gaze in an autobiographical identity formation and thus (2) an addition to the intellectual cycle of male gaze associated with this novel, in which Freddie becomes not only the author of his own identity but also that of the female Other in the novel who equally shares Freddie's own authorial/male gaze. Gülden Hatipoğlu also follows a similar line and writes that "Freddie's testimony becomes his artistic performance of creating an autobiographical narrative of confrontation rather than vindication, with a strong sense of imagining a possible world of self-representations" (2023: 194). The way Freddie handles the testimony with a strong urge for observation of the immediate environment, likewise, introduces "a way of voyeuristically observing … the object of the gaze" (2023: 195), namely women. These complementary gaze functions attributed to Freddie flesh out the imprints of Lacanian mirror stage theory at the heart of a discomforting transformation of how a self-perception turns out to be a male gaze. The main reason is that while Freddie, the murderer, recollects the past, he vividly perceives his fantastic self, which later digresses into voyeuristically gazing at female bodies around him. Therefore, this novel requires a reading based on more of a critical outlook than just being assessed as a testimonial narrative. This article approaches Freddie's introspective testimony as a contour for his autobiographical identity with reference to Lacan's mirror stage. This article also proposes to pinpoint the implicit motives behind the prolonged male violence depicted in the novel through a Lacanian lens.

Author(ity) Unbound: Creating an Identity of One's Own

BoE opens up with Freddie's memorable words, "My Lord, when you ask me to tell the court in my own words, that is what I shall say" (Banville 2001: 3). Following this, it ends with his paradoxical statement when asked by the inspector if his testimony is true: "All of it. None of it. Only the shame" (2001: 220). As prevaricating as it seems, Freddie's storyline subsists in an amorphous reliability. Placing his storyline in his testimonial stage performance after committing a murder, Freddie exhibits an absolute author(ity) in re-experiencing his ill-affected journey from pursuing an academic career into being submerged in debt to Señor Aguirre, who is a Spanish crime lord. Besides, this is the novel's most prominent aspect in that it provides the reader with a vast hermeneutical ground for commentaries because, throughout the novel's chaotic narrative structure, we cannot be sure whether Freddie tells the truth or not.

During his narration, Freddie occasionally interrupts himself, claiming that what has been just narrated is not true and would "mean too much" (2001: 8), or, as is reiterated on many pages, that his statements are quite unnecessary, so much so that he wants to take back the sentences he articulates. So, this idea, one way or another, presupposes "the possib[ility] that [his] memory has conflated two separate [things].

[4] Noteworthy examples that read *BoE* through a lens of male violence include: Irena Księżopolska, "Nabakov and Banville: Hidden Stories in *Despair* and *The Book of Evidence*." *Journal of Literature and History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2020: 101-124); Caroll Del'Amico, "John Banville and Benjamin Black: *The Mundo*, Crime, Women." *Éire-Ireland* (Minnesota: Irish-American Cultural Institute, 2014: 106-120); Joakim Wrethed, "The Aesthetics of the Flesh in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*, *Eclipse* and *Shroud*". *Nordic Irish Studies* (Aarhus: Dalarna University Centre, 2014: 49-70); Patricia Coughlan, "Banville, the Feminine, and the Scenes of Eros". *Irish University Review* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2006: 81-101).

It is possible" (2001: 33). Nevertheless, it may also denote that in retrospective narration, Freddie treats reality as a palimpsest, which he covers – or colours – with authorial power, bending the trajectory of objectivity into his own favour. Such an oracular usage of arbitrariness in self-examination gives an intriguing hallmark in pinpointing several psychodynamic ordinances alongside the text. The foundational essence within a rhetorical mechanism of validating one's own existence encapsulates, albeit indirectly, the process of self-construction engaged in dialogue with the text.

This is by no means the first time that a scholar puts forth a motive dependent on an inter-existence between the narrative voice and the text in retrospective fiction. As has been noticed by Susan Lanser in her *Fictions of Authority*, the narrative voice and the narrated world are reciprocally constitutive of one another (1992: 4); the narrative voice authorises the text, and vice versa. Inasmuch as her focal point may put an accentuation upon reciprocal construction, if we are to interpret Banville's novel in terms of Lacan's mirror stage theory that sheds light upon the biological impetus underpinning psychic development, we should follow Bran Nicol's statement in *Retrospective Fiction* that goes as far as claiming that retrospective narrative voice undergoes his "genuine rebirth" in praxis (85). If that is the case, Freddie, who is bisected into his two separate manifestations of the same self as the "one who narrates and who experiences" (2004: 82), could survey his transition in the mirror phase through his subjective memorial line flexing backwards and onwards simultaneously.

In the novel, which opens with Freddie's captivity and imprisonment after having fulfilled his own "worst fantasies" (Banville 2001: 3), his genuine rebirth, as quoted above, orbits around his retrospective testimonial rebuilding. As Freddie's memorial journey for the testimony in the prison occurs, we witness Freddie's fantastic psychodynamic zone inside out, which is by all means applicable to Freddie's developmental psychic structures from Imaginary to Symbolic.

In the Imaginary/pre-linguistic stage, which encompasses most of the novel, Freddie practically represents the key aspect of Imaginary through his Platonic self-perception. This psychological foundation not only elucidates the novel's artistic merit intertwined with Banville's trilogy but also illuminates the inseparable perceptual nature inherent in Freddie's character, who is self-described as a "floating eye" (2001: 64). The novel oscillates between how Freddie projects himself and how those projections are reflected in his mirror world, which is responsively perceived by the present Freddie himself while recording his testimony. Following Joseph McMinn's description in *The Supreme Fictions of John Banville*, throughout the novel's structure as "an ingenious parable of perception" (1999: 123), every self-image that Freddie predominantly observes conveys what he wants to blend as his ideal *imago* into his own symbolic registration: "Somehow I pictured myself as a sort of celebrity, kept apart from the other prisoners in a special wing … [with] an elegant pose" (Banville 2001: 5). In Freddie's artistic vision, the chain of images follows one another; each image is replete with the ego's grandiloquent auto-erotic state of mind, posing for the visual narcissism: "I looked in their eyes and saw myself ennobled there" (2001: 11). Quite redolent of the ego in the Imaginary, Freddie starts to form his autonomy in his totalized image here.

His immediate circle, which stands for Lacan's Symbolic/predefined social order, constantly reminds him of the unvested nature of such a self-image. According to Lacan, the self-image reflected as the ideal-I occupies the fictional reality of the Imaginary, functioning as the Other that will never be captured because it is constructed with what the ego *lacks*. It is inviolable in a peculiar sense. This disturbing disjunction between the internal source and externality, furthermore, turns oneself into an anticipator for a synthetic I situated in the evasive horizon within their perception's border – ϕ. At this point, Lacan delivers in *Écrits* that the subject tries to mimic and attain the *imago* "before it is objectified" by the Symbolic/universal order but cannot fulfil it (2001: 2). Like Lacan's impossible quest, Freddie's lacunae cannot be filled and thus are forged into the "hysterical repression" (2001: 4): "I had a vision of myself … as if it were not myself I was remembering, but something … *lost to me forever* in the depths of my own past" (Banville 2001: 45) (emphasis mine). Although the insufficiency and incompleteness are assuaged by "nursling dependence" (Lacan 2001: 2), it misses out on Freddie's situation since his "[mother] had cut [him] long ago" (Banville 2001: 170). Therefore, as a concomitant of nursling independence, Freddie is marked by impending aggression and narcissism throughout the process. In tandem with his behaviours, his narrativization cooperatively becomes aggressive, too, and thus introduces a cinematographically emphasised troubled masculine violence under his *worst fantasies* without knowing where to stop in an unstable maternal formation around him. As we will witness, this *tragedy* that Lacanian scholars associate with the mirror stage becomes parasitic upon Freddie's identity formation throughout the process.[5]

Mirror Stage: An Identity Formation or a Tragedy?

A key factor contributing to the subject's inability to claim such an image stems from Lacan's perspective, which elides the distinction between the ego and imagination. To Lacan, the ego's dynamism is overtly imaginative. Under *méconnaissance,* in Lacanian terminology, the ego "neglects, scotomizes, misconstrues" (Lacan 2001: 17) and thus falls into the passage of self-centeredness, narcissism, and auto-eroticism by addressing the Imaginary. Affirming Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy's words in *The Works of Jacques Lacan*, this state of excessive phantasm introduces the self's "primordial rivalry" against "complex social institutions" (1986: 58) because the subject seeks ossification to ensure the constitution of the ideal identity and maintain the prioritisation of the ideal self in dialogue with the misconstructed phantasm. The paradox is that the more the subject does so, the more s/he deteriorates their integration into Symbolic and social codes of behaviour. This explains the reason why Freddie stands on "Banville's most extremely narcissistic" ground (O'Connell 2013: 2) and his epiphanic "recognition … that his essential sin [is] a failure of imagination" (2013: 206). Tragic or not, Freddie comes into prominence with violent actions steeped in self-centeredness, leaving us pondering Lacan's views on this matter.

From the Lacanian perspective, the explanation involves the contrast between what the subject expects and what s/he experiences. Although Lacan does not fully

[5] See Jane Gallop, "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where to Begin?". *Center for Twentieth Century Studies*, in which she traces the chronological reception of Lacan's mirror stage theory by citing various scholars and thus concludes: "The mirror stage is thus [a] high tragedy: a brief moment of doomed glory, a paradise lost. The infant is decisively projected out of this joy into the anxious defensiveness of history; much as Adam and Eve are expelled into the world" (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989: 123).

acknowledge this, he refers to Anna Freud's theory. According to her view, as Lacan delivers, in the absence of the ideal image a person seeks, they go through a profound sense of isolation described as "paranoic alienation which dates from the deflection of the specular I into the social I" (2001: 4). This alienation occurs when individual expectations do not match with the reality of the Symbolic, which is a conflict that "will always remain irreducible for the individual" (2001: 2). In a tragic realization, the reflection of oneself becomes more than just a recognition of the Other; it becomes an adversary, reminding the individual of potential social castration. At this point, the detachment of oneself from the firmly grounded Imaginary principle becomes on par with a threatened sense of incompleteness due to the "aggressive disintegration in [oneself]" (2001: 3). The person becomes aware that their fate is sealed within the "armour of an alienat[ed] identity" (2001: 3). Elaborating on Freddie's words, it does not take a genius to state that his psyche suffers from such an aggressive disintegration: "It was as if I—the real, thinking, sentient I—had somehow got myself trapped inside a body not my own. But no, that's not it, exactly. For the person that was inside was also strange to me, [another] version of me … I have always felt—what is the word—bifurcate, that's it" (Banville 2001: 95). Although this fragmented body image that reverberates Lacanian sense of *imago du le corps morcele* – body in bits and pieces – [6] seems to be the pre-totalized form before seeing the mirror reflection leading to complete recognition of reality, it has been boded ill for Freddie himself: "I used to believe … that I was determining the course of my own life, according to my own decisions … I did not always think of my life as a prison in which all actions are determined according to a random pattern thrown down by an unknown and insensate authority" (2001: 15-6). From the Lacanian perspective, before such a confrontation with social reality, Freddie has a Platonic image of himself that he wants to carve into reality, which he mentions as "my other self" (2001: 17). However, Freddie realizes his predetermined destiny, for which he must be donned with the armour of an alienated identity; he also finds that his ideal self becomes decomposed in the polyvalent amalgam of social determinants. His dyadic split indicates that since Freddie has no guidance throughout the process, he can neither detach himself from his ideal *imago* "in this pretend-world" (2001: 97) nor mute the cacophony of *what could have been* against *what must be*.

Narcissistic Forms of Violence in the Novel

Generally, as Lacan delivers, (m)other plays a crucial role as an innate Other to "stabilize the imaginary tension opening toward the future [with] a sign of consent, of beseeched love – in short, an answer that comes from the other" (in Licitra et al. 2021: 4). Actually, Lacan here emphasises what Sigmund Freud takes the initiative for in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, that is, the constitution of the ego accordant with society. Given Freddie's personal accounts, however, we inherently understand that his bond with his mother from the very beginning of his biological temperament is lacking. Specifically, in a nostalgic reminiscence, Freddie recalls her in his childhood as a "remote presence" since "[s]he is so much, and, at the same time, nothing" (Banville 2001: 41). In this respect, as much as forming a totalized I for Freddie becomes problematic, so does resorting to a soothed mindset with maternal affection because Dorothy has already dismissed him by replacing him with "the stable-girl" (2001: 46), who works for her mother, and similarly, in whose eyes Freddie sees himself in an ameliorated bond with his mother, which, of course, he will be unable to put into practice. From this perspective of maternal instability around him, Freddie is laden

[6] See Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego." *Influential Papers from the 1950s* (London: Karnac, 2003: 297).

with *efficacity*[7] (Lacan 2001: 9) that generates *death instincts*, rendering him an aggressive pursuer wreaking havoc upon the notion of the Other.

Hence, Freddie instantiates the prototype, which Lacan mentions with a strict link of aggression based on the unachieved integration to the social-I in the mirror stage. This aggression, however, is central to sexual politics, as apparent in Lacan's pursuance of the former analysts' theorisation on death instincts and sexual libido characterized by primary narcissism. As Lacan elaborates:

> It [the primary narcissism] also throws light on the dynamic opposition between this [narcissistic] libido and the sexual libido, which the first analysts tried to define when they invoked destructive and, indeed, death instincts, in order to explain the evident connection between the narcissistic libido and the alienating function of the I, the aggression it releases in any relation to the other. (2001: 4)

At this point, Lacan not only strategically combines death instincts with sexual libido but also makes the implication that the persistence of aggression nicks at female bodies as far as the sexual imbalance of the world is concerned.

In order to clarify this, Lacan's conception of phallic *jouissance* is of capital importance here. In the mirror stage, *jouissance* appears to be the limit of satisfactory knowledge between the subject and the Other. Yet, in his seminars between 1969 and 1970 entitled *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan deals with the designated *jouissance* with its impossibility, encapsulating an insatiable desire to know the Other, which later transgresses the pleasure principle within "the order of tension, of forcing, of expenditure, even of exploit" (2006: 46). *Jouissance* remains uncontrolled and dissatisfied. It goes beyond the homeostatic mechanism as long as there is always an Other that is to be reduced to *objet petit a* to know further to the extent that the intentions contain the borderline of aggression. This stance is highly associated with the erotic experience, in which the line that separates the narcissistic subject from the *atopic* body becomes blurry, so much so that it lays the ground to infringe on the *atopic* experience of the (m)other.[8] This is reified as violence because as much as it is associated with both sexes, phallic *jouissance* is linked to masculine structure.[9] Undoubtedly, then, it marks the female body and psyche as the Other subjected to the "pain" of masculine structure (2006: 46).

Indeed, Freddie's symbolic order is a quintessential domain for this purpose. Isomorphic to his troubled mind, Freddie's narrative becomes aggressive as well, thus marinating the female body into his *objet petit a* in order to know and exploit further. The basic deduction on this matter is the fact that during his testimonial stage performance that unfolds as his own story and his own words, Freddie functions as the "surrogate author" who "possesses an independence" (Nicol 2004: 76). This peculiar quality distinctly foreshadows an assertive playground for Freddie, within which dialectical Others in relation to him find themselves subjected. In his "toy surrounding" of the textual space (Banville 2001: 126), Freddie possesses the ability to

[7] Note that Lacan conceptualizes this term in *Écrits* as the manifestation of the subject's "aggressive intention … in the formative action" (2001: 9).

[8] Note that there is no sufficient translation in English of this word. Translated as "enjoyment" by Alan Sheridan in the same source as the one used as the reference in this article, *jouissance* is the enjoyment of rights, of property, which transgresses the borders of social law whilst containing sexual connotations within.

[9] See also Sheridan's note to *Écrits* that the verb, *jouir,* is also slang for "to come" in French, thereby indicating a sense of sexual aggressiveness orbiting around masculine authority (2001: iii).

transform other characters into *objet petit a* with a sense of voicelessness. This transformation serves to maintain a narcissistic equilibrium for Freddie, functioning as an extension of the ego's indulgence in "a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of sexual relation[s]" (Lacan 2001: 5), which Lacan sees as a minor point yet to be equally present in Freddie's situation. Through this preliminary aspect of *jouissance*, Freddie's narration goes beyond just an act of contemplation; it becomes a means of violation.

Freddie's Male Gaze

Freddie's visual pleasure is at the heart here. Apart from its constitutive aspect, the visual system in the novel responds to Freddie's narcissistic aggression. In a sexual imbalance, according to Laura Mulvey, the male gaze is a formulaic frame for the sexual equivalent's repression, the female. Urging for scopophilia, female bodies are reduced to *objet petit a* in an erotic way of seeing by the masculine gaze. Coalescing a psychoanalytic approach into the visual field, Mulvey maintains that women characterize the "spectacle" and men take up the privilege of "the bearer of the look" (1975: 12). As for Freddie's situation, no other but the same dialectical relationship could be observed. Freddie's extreme personality predisposes him to efface female subjectivity. This element is one of the tenets of Freddie's narcissistic stream of consciousness that he is granted to satisfy his self-absorbed characteristic, even in his dyadic relationship with Daphne. This essence is reflected in the following elucidation:

> What was it in us—or rather, what was it about us—that impressed them? Oh, we are large, well-made, I am handsome, Daphne is beautiful, but they cannot have been the whole of it. No, after much thought the conclusion I have come to is this, that they imagined they recognised in us a coherence and wholeness, an essential authenticity which they lacked, and of which they felt they were not entirely worthy. We were—well, yes, we were heroes … *I enjoyed it*. (Banville 2001: 11) (emphasis mine)

One may consider this situation as Daphne and Freddie's mutual victimization; still, I insist upon claiming that Freddie's belied agency in positioning Daphne in the spotlight of social gaze reverberates his sadistic quality, generating a passive scopophilia that leans upon female objectification. It would not be far-fetched to opine that Freddie functions here as a director, then. In this social auditorium, Daphne's stylized body evokes a sense of "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1975: 11), indicating her suppression, which Freddie clearly enjoys. Here, Freddie utilises Daphne's body as his *objet petit a*. Therefore, recalling Lacan's assertion on phallic *jouissance*, Freddie's situation underscores the pursuit of the subject's exploitation for personal enjoyment.

The symbolic focalisation on the male gaze is equivocally conceived as a matter of innate hostility, which results in Freddie's glorified perception that allocates him for the grandiose agency etched on his voyeuristic manner of observing the female body. As expected, in a symbolic dialogue between the subject and its object, the privilege of the gaze is attached to the narcissistic body to "make the other insubstantial" (Lacan 2006: 242). Freddie's description of himself regarding this ocular-centric dominance is as follows: "I am a sort of floating eye, watching, noting, scheming" (Banville 2001: 64). The doctrine of Freddie's voyeuristic gaze solely subsists in the dialectical structure of power; that is, *to see* is an active process, not a passive one like *being seen*. Utilising this mode of relation, like Lacan's emphasis on the Other's insubstantiality in masculine enjoyment, Freddie's personal rhetoric, as he confesses, mostly focuses on what female bodies are on the surface (2001: 72). Not only, then, does the gaze provide Freddie with a self-preserving tool, but it could also condone an act of active harm in a masculine aesthetic rhetorically given in his description of

himself to the reader. In this verity, his gaze becomes the vehicle of phallic *jouissance* against the Others inflicted with "the pressure of [his] humid gaze" (2001: 101), rising on the narcissistic equilibrium of his storyline. In framing the Other for negation, the female bodies become the privileged objects of Freddie's gaze. In his retrospective re-building, for instance, Freddie remembers an instance of his physical copulation with Daphne, which arouses his erotic mastery in an optic spectrum. His mind situated on the "voyeuristic fantasy" suppresses her agency into an object (Mulvey 1975: 7). Thus, he utters: "[A]lways when I saw her naked I wanted to caress her, as I would want to caress a piece of sculpture, hefting the curves in the hollow of my hand, running a thumb down the long smooth lines, feeling the coolness, the velvet texture of the stone" (Banville 2001: 8). Freddie here exhibits active scopophilia. Not limited to Daphne, in fact, Dorothy, as his own mother, is also inflicted by his male gaze, morphing her into a "statuesque, blank-eyed … like a marble figure" (2001: 41). Such associations of theirs with statuesque female figures – or even objects – root in the "tender damage [he] inflict[s] on her" (2001: 9) and the female *in toto*. Thus, the abundance of Freddie's specific references to the voyeuristic male gaze upon women becomes the substructure of his own authority in that they mark the aggressive violence that oppresses female emphasis for male enjoyment, or any kind of authorial emphasis through his "piercing eyes" (2001: 161).

At some point, I daresay that Freddie's violence flexes into his storytelling. Allen Feldman and Richard Jenkins in *On Formations of Violence* reduce narratological violence into "intrusive or manipulative editing," which is the nucleus of "storytelling" (1992: 595). Designing a story for oneself may imply an idealized sense of authority. However, imposing this narrative on others could suggest a form of aggressive violence, as it becomes intertwined with the author's manipulative control, of which Freddie's "authoritative voice" becomes an affirmative tool in that this practice enables him to "tell [his] side of things, in [his] own words" (Banville 2001: 182) solidified as his supremacy in relation to the object of narration.

In the novel, Freddie's frame narrative about the female figure in a seventeenth-century painting, *Portrait of a Woman in Gloves*, befits such an assertion in that the painted female figure's fictional fate epitomizes Freddie's inimical manipulation in his "little toy world" (2001: 141). Within the framework of his own devise of the story, Freddie is apparelled with omnipotence, saying *be there a story and there is a story*. In seeing the painting in the Big House, Freddie conjures a quite lengthy story of the insentient figure in the painting, starting with "I try to make up a life for her" (2001: 105). More strikingly, in this frame narrative, the woman is the object of gaze as well. Imagining the process of painting, Freddie recounts an artist who "fixes his little wet eyes on her, briefly, with a kind of impersonal intensity" (2001: 106). Manipulated into a victim by the male gaze, the female figure "flinches" (2001: 106). This Hegelian master-slave relationship suggests the fact that Freddie overflows from his autobiographical line, ergo *penetrating into* the fictional fate even of an insentient figure. With a little time for reflection, when we consider that Freddie's narcissistic masculinity is isomorphic to his narration, Freddie's frame narrative engenders *a symbolic rape*. From this perspective, Freddie responsively endeavours to seal a fate, like his identity's fate has been done so by society.

Freddie's Authority

For Philippe Julien, the *efficacity*, which narcissistic bodies including Freddie resort to, is associated with a pre-Lacanian concept called primary narcissism, which has been mentioned in the preceding sections as a source of Freddie's aggression. In *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud*, Julien makes it clear that the rationale lies behind

an astray subject's insistence upon a homogenous drive for any kind of Other that jeopardises ideal-I (1994: 34). His assertion runs the gamut from biological Other to social Other, which excludes the subject's absolute authority. Freud's own statement in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* is worth quoting in this regard: "[G]reat criminals and humorists, as they are represented in literature, compel our interest by the narcissistic consistency with which they manage to *keep away from their ego anything that would diminish it*" (2012: 89) (emphasis mine). In his disorganized passage of self-formation, therefore, Freddie relies on a mono-phallic substructure. In his ideal space, he is one and only in terms of authority due to primary narcissism. Therefore, for Freddie, another glimpse of a male figure as a performer of authority disturbs Freddie's homogeneous and ideal construction within social discourses.

On such a basis, Freddie is obsessively on a knife edge in the prospect of a heterogeneous aspect of authority. Subtle though they are, certain psychodynamic symbols surface in the novel. Through the Gestalt, Freddie reverberates his anxiety by zooming in on the salient phallic object, hands. In the inchoate structure of the novel, the phallic units are hinged upon inept authorial figures who eventually die. It is thus notable here to remember that Freddie's symbolic domain related to his narcissistic pleasure is purported to dredge life out of their bodies with a symbolic reference to phallic castration. He is a criminal, after all. After Freddie articulates his father's death, for example, a full volume of a sentence is devoted to his hands without any rationale: "His hands" (Banville 2001: 48). Moreover, the same sentence is inexhaustibly reiterated on the following page, as expected from an obsessed monomaniac who generates a narcissistic libido to master his ambience. This fetishistic obsession reveals his distressed preoccupation with his absolute authority that incontrovertibly falls short of social determinants. As also noticed by Daphne, Freddie pays a great deal of attention to a male figure's hands: "She noticed such things" (2001: 12). Needless to opine, the mentioned male body becomes both symbolically and physically castrated by getting one of his ears cut in the novel. In this sense, the repetitive hunt quest recalls Melanie Klein's concept of projective identification, on which Hannah Segal elaborates in *Introduction to the Works of Melanie Klein*:

> In projective identification parts of the self and internal objects are split off and projected into the external object, which then becomes possessed by, controlled and identified with the projected parts. Projective identification has manifold aims: it may be directed towards the ideal object to avoid separation, or it may be directed towards the bad object to gain control of the source of danger. Various parts of the self may be projected, with various aims: bad parts of the self may be projected in order to get rid of them as well as to attack and destroy the object, good parts may be projected to avoid separation or to keep them safe from bad things inside or to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation. (1988: 27-28)

In this context of the narcissistic defence mechanism, Freddie alertly analyses the possible threats to eschew but noticeably cannot help emphasising them cinematographically, as is also obvious in his story about the painting of a woman in gloves: "I am to emphasise the hands … She refuses. (Her hands, indeed!)" (Banville 2001: 107).

Another symbol that is contingent upon phallic intrusion, metaphorically speaking, reveals itself in the context of the aforementioned painting entitled *Portrait of a Woman in Gloves,* which Freddie himself pursues to recover from a family known as the Behrens. My interpretation is that in the mirror phase, the ego must be integrated into their social-I by the external libidinal investment since, in social demand, "phallic jouissance is interdicted" (Licitra Rosa et al. 2021: 2). Therefore, an external object

"comes in its place as a substitute" (2021: 2). Clearly, the constant flow of libidinal investment needs organizing upon an external object so that the subject leaves the auto-erotic state into what is called social-I, which is in agreement with dualities. In mentioning the portrait, Freddie illustrates a unique bond with the picture: "[T]he picture, *my* picture" (Banville 2001: 109) (emphasis original). The italicised possessive determiner in the original work painstakingly highlights a special bond between Freddie and this painting, which could be interpreted via the substitute of surplus *jouissance* function because the object is mentioned as "my future" by Freddie himself (2001: 59). Notwithstanding, whilst visiting Dorothy, he later learns that she has sold it with all the family collection to Charlie French, who is an art dealer and later trades the collection with the Behrens. When read in conjunction with this fact, the excessive libidinal flux organization for Freddie becomes ailed by his own mother, who is supposed to ameliorate his process instead. She steals his *future* and thus brings illness to his identity process.

Furthermore, it is within this context that his act of murder unfolds. Deprived of his mother's earnest love, Freddie struggles to decode the intricacies of social order, which prolongs the overvaluation of male authority with respect to phallic *jouissance*. Considering this, as Freddie attempts to pilfer his painting from the Behren House, his attention is drawn to the secondary images within the artwork. In *Dora: Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Freud likens the secondary figures in a painting to phallic units (in Peter Benson 1994: 102). Freud's reference point is Medusa's gaze. To crystallise this idea, like one is mesmerized by Medusa's phallic gaze based upon her secondary erections, so is Freddie before the painting. As Freddie looks into the insentient aesthetic space of the picture, the secondary images, *a fortiori*, look back. That is, they watch him: "I, this soiled flesh, [was] the one who was being scrutinised, with careful, cold attention. It was not just the woman's painted stare that watched me. Everything in the picture, that brooch, those gloves, the flocculent darkness at her back, every spot on the canvas was an eye fixed on me unblinkingly" (Banville 2001: 79). In this scene of reciprocal gaze-competence, so to speak, Freddie's exposure to those figures' specifically pinpointed gazes threatens his scopic agency, and thus he responsively kidnaps and kills a physical body who, in a similar fashion, authoritatively watches him steal the painting: "Those eyes were staring into mine, I almost blushed. And then – how shall I express it – then somehow I sensed, behind that stare, another presence, watching me. I stopped and lowered the picture, and there she was, standing in the open window … wide-eyed, with one hand raised … I was outraged" (2001: 110). The threatening authorial figure is Josie Bell, who is the maid of the house and representative of Freddie's counter-agency, seeing Freddie's action and thus claiming the authorial "raw force" (2001: 113) without being seen from the depths of the room. Seeing the correlation within the reversed power dynamic, Hatipoğlu notes that "[h]is masculine, dominant gaze … loses its power" (2023: 201). Here, Freddie slips from being the subject of the gaze to being the object of *her* gaze. If this occasion is as traumatic as Freddie mentions in the following pages, which he clarifies by articulating the following words: "I had never been so exposed in my life" (Banville 2001: 112), we could uphold a plausible argument that when his troubled psyche is all of a sudden juxtaposed to the heterotopic presence of authority, Freddie's narcissistic libido piles top on the defence mechanism of the projective identification with an only gateway for salvation through murdering the maid with a hammer. This "Hegelian murder" (Lacan 2001: 5) in tune with the narcissistic homogeneity is imminent, but it could be evidently associated with his mother's lack of assessment of social and biological dualities in this process all along.

Besides, it is here worth mentioning that Freddie's bolding Josie Bell's last words at the point of death, just like the particularization of hands, is purported to speak for how much the flow of maternal affection has been drained away – or has never been filled up for the mirror transformation: "*Mommy*" and "*Love*" (Banville 2001: 148) (emphasis original).

Due to the retrospective narrative act, the novel ends with its opening scene. Hence, the statement, "It was as if I were adapting to an illness, after the initial phase of frights and fevers" (2001: 184), is intertwined with Freddie's recognition of his initial assimilation into the social self. In the opening scene, Freddie succinctly reverberates the characteristics of acknowledgement, showing no more aggression under the immanent paradigm of "[society's] privilege," in which he is just an "exotic animal" that has no superiority over society (2001: 3). It is clear that he has reached a plateau in self-formation. He concedes that his idealised authority and self cannot befit the social parameters and thus becomes disappointed in the dissipation of aggression and narcissism. This "existential negativity" (Lacan 2001: 4) within the edict of institutionalised self under the *prisonlike* panopticon overtly pinpoints Freddie's rough, if inherently inescapable, transformation, like a paradise lost.

Conclusion

All in all, Freddie's retrospective testimonial narrative becomes his own constructed identity, for as Freddie projects his past onto the symbolic order, he obviously re-lives it. In doing so, he underpins a formulaic process of his introspective identity formation, which is supported by Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and its fusion of discordant qualities of Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Nevertheless, in this process, the fully nurtured subject's mindset by a (m)other figure is replaced by an example without the maternal emphasis, culminating in the subject's tendency to cut across all boundaries with the Other, so much so that it goes beyond social interaction to violence. Freddie's unceasing performance of narcissism and aggression, embodied by his male gaze, epitomizes the void of (m)other around him, not only in terms of gendered-specific dualities but also his discomfort with phallic authority in connection to figures of authority. But, eventually, in this predetermined world, Freddie acknowledges that *sometimes a pen may not be mightier than a sword,* thus forcefully embracing what has been destined for him.

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