



METAPHORS OF AUTHORITY: POWER POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION IN IRISH TEXTS

Otorite Metaforları: İrlanda Metinlerinde Kimlik ve Algının Güç Politikaları

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ABSTRACT

The central aim of this article is to explore the power politics of perception between English and Irish representations within selected canonised Irish texts. The focal point of this article orbits around the relationship between the observer and the observed with an essential emphasis on the roles of defining and defined subjects. Focusing on the metaphorical framework of Father England as the authority of gaze and Mother Ireland as the object of gaze, this article introduces Ireland's post-independence era as the inception of a transformative journey that is characterised by a promise of self-definition after liberation from English dominion. In navigating the power dynamics of perception between Father England and Mother Ireland, this article takes a focused approach by analysing key literary works. Specifically, James Joyce's "The Dead" (1914), Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *The Key* (1949), and John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* (1989) serve as illustrative examples. With these texts, this article aims to depict the trajectory of Ireland's evolution from a position of being defined to a self-defining position.

Keywords: Ireland, self-perception, James Joyce, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, John Banville.

Öz

Bu makalenin temel amacı, kanonlaştırılmış belirli İrlanda metinleri kapsamında İngiltere ve İrlanda arasındaki algıya ilişkin güç politikalarını araştırmaktır. Bu makalenin odak noktası, tanımlayan ve tanımlanan öznelerin rollerine esaslı bir vurgu yaparak, gözlemci ile gözlenen arasındaki ilişki üzerinde durmaktadır. Algıyı şekillendiren otorite olarak Baba İngiltere ve inceleme nesnesi olarak Ana İrlanda'nın metaforik çerçevesine odaklanan bu makale, İrlanda'nın bağımsızlık sonrası dönemini, mahrum bırakılan şeyi geri kazanma ile karakterize edilen dönüştürücü bir yolculuğun başlangıcı olarak tanıtır: benlik algısı. Baba İngiltere ile Ana İrlanda arasındaki algının güç dinamiklerini incelerken bu makale, önemli edebi eserleri analiz eden odaklanmış bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Özellikle James Joyce'un "Ölüler" (1914), Máirtín Ó Cadhain'in *Anahtar* (1949) ve John Banville'in *Tutanak Defteri*

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(1989) açıklayıcı örnekler olarak gösterilmektedir. Bu makale, bu metinlerle İrlanda'nın tanımlanmış bir konumdan kendi kendini tanımlayan bir konuma doğru evriminin yörüngesini tasvir etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İrlanda, kendilik algısı, James Joyce, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, John Banville.

Introduction

Nicholas Miller notes that “as a nation, Ireland has been defined from the *outside* for most of its existence” (2002: 9) (emphasis original). This external framing of Irish identity comes into sharper focus when examining nineteenth-century caricatures featured in the British journal, *Punch*. Notably, visual narratives such as “The Irish Frankenstein” and “The British Lion and the Irish Monkey” amplify the discourse on how Ireland has been historically subjected to external definitions and observations. In *Ireland's Other*, Elizabeth Cullingford highlights the same concern with a close association of sexual metaphors of Father England and Mother Ireland by arguing that the multifaceted external depictions of Ireland's identity were rooted in England's solipsistic perception until the postcolonial era (2001: 4).

In the early 1900s, during the embryonic phase of Irish independence, influential figures such as James Joyce and W. B. Yeats played a pivotal role in challenging and dismantling the prevailing stereotype of Irish passivity by fostering the nation's bygone identity and contesting the internalised norms, most notably in Yeats' “Easter, 1916” and Joyce's *A Portrait*. This critical re-evaluation left an enduring legacy for subsequent authors to grapple with in their literary endeavours.¹ As postcolonial performances mean counterfactual authority against external dominion, they likewise promise a way of liberation from the connotations of power politics of the gaze, like misrepresented identity and manners. Ireland's emancipation project, particularly starting with the postcolonial era, points out the same

¹ In *Modern Irish Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, Alexander G. Gonzalez makes a clear distinction between the terms “Irish Literary Revival” and “Irish Renaissance.” The simple difference is that while the former denotes a time period, precisely between 1925 and 1940, in which Ireland tried to come to terms with its Celtic past, the latter implies a political consciousness that shows “no sign of flagging [...] let alone dying” (1997: xiv). This political awareness serves as the source for the authors to draw their substance from, dating from Ireland's post-independence to “the present day” (1997: xiv). After the nation's rebirth, therefore, most Irish texts are optimistically related to the cultural and national development of the status quo, which provides the incentive to describe these texts as epitomes of their own time, rooted in this national growth process.

socio-political assurance that necessitates a newfound autonomy of “self-fashioning” as well (Miller, 2002: 8). In this regard, this autonomy transforms the once passive object of external observation and definition into an active subject engaged in self-definition in such a way that the sense of perception is involved.

Indeed, while perception encompasses a vast spectrum, extending from existentialism to phenomenology and from aesthetics to cultural studies, it remains a complex and multifaceted subject. In the context of this article, the following elucidation aims to clarify the methodology employed in understanding the sense of perception:

Perceptually a person is a viewer, who sees himself at the centre of the world surrounding him. As he moves, the centre of the world stays with him. Considering himself the primary centre, he sees the world populated with secondary objects, eccentric to him. Looking at [anything] means sending out a vector toward that object: seeing is a manipulation of the object on the part of the viewer. But here [...] *the dynamics of any centre operate reciprocally.* (Arnheim, 1988: 3) (emphasis mine)

Despite the mutual quality of the centre, Elmar Holenstein notes that “[t]he lived body alone centralizes only when, by any chance, it happens to function as the domineering figure of the perception” (2004: 60). The departure point of perception, as well as orientation, cannot be expected to be associated with the Irish body reflected in the canon mostly as “a weak and obsequious person” when the influence of English dominance has firmly established itself with a “strong and self-confident personality” (2004: 61). As Ireland undergoes a transition, marking its egress from England, a shift in the focal point of perception is inherently expected to accompany this change.

This article endeavours to explore the evolution wherein Ireland progressively assumes an active agency in the realms of looking and observing, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of its cultural and literary trajectory. Irish literature uniquely captures this trajectory of growth, spanning Ireland’s postcolonial era (1920s–1940s), subsequent modernization (1950s–1960s), and eventual transition into the postmodern era (1960–Present) (Gonzales, 1997: 14). The selected works for examination include James Joyce’s “The Dead” (1914), Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s *The Key* (1949), and John Banville’s *The Book of Evidence*. Each of these works, as will be shown,

contributes to our understanding of different phases of Irish identity growth, intricately weaving the evolution of perception throughout these intervals.

(Post)colonial Mode of Perception in Joyce’s “The Dead”²

James Joyce’s “The Dead” (1914) in *Dubliners* is a colonial narrative by date with postcolonial motives by taste. Despite the historical trend that treats the canonical Joyce as an apolitical figure, due to the hitherto estimation of Joyce’s prose as an innovative experiment, the recent critical re-evaluations responded to these high modernist claims with the term “post-colonial Joyce.”³ Although it is not ideal to deal with the discussion of whether Joyce is an apolitical writer from the canonical perspective or whether Joyce is a postcolonial writer with an overindulged engagement in political discourse of the status quo, one thing is to a large degree true that, as Cheng observes, “Joyce wrote insistently from the perspective of a colonial subject of an oppressive empire” (1996: 82). Therefore, his works both participate in political discourse and serve as tangible manifestations of the colonial realities of the Irish nation.

In this regard, James Joyce’s “The Dead” presents a stark dichotomy between Father England and Mother Ireland, with the former exerting a dominant influence ingrained in the colonial past. For this very reason, in the story, Joyce strategically delves into the domestic sphere to craft an analogy that vividly portrays the passive treatment of Irishness. Within the narrative, Gabriel, who is remembered as a “West Briton” (2004: 384), symbolises Father England, embodying the disposition of a coloniser’s energy. In contrast, his wife, Gretta, finds herself predisposed to uphold Irish sentiment without an autonomous voice in the colonial era. Building upon the historical context outlined above, one revealing aspect of Gabriel’s superiority, emanating from Ireland’s tumultuous state, is the concept of gaze, which superimposes Gabriel’s machismo on the ocular-centric superiority and thus leads to the male gaze distinctly focused on Gretta. In this nu-

² Although Joyce’s collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, was published in 1914 when Ireland was still a colony and Dublin a colonial capital, Mark Wollaeger observes in *Joyce in Postcolonial Tropics* that Joyce’s categorization as a postcolonial writer “derives from Joyce’s over-determined availability as a postcolonial subversive par excellence” (2001: 69). Alongside the publication date that locates the story amidst the colonial time of the nation, Joyce’s subversive rule-changing motivations in his writings, including this story, condition us to issue a bilateral title.

³ The term belongs to Vincent Cheng’s work entitled *Of Canons, Colonies, and Critics: The Ethics and Politics of Postcolonial Joyce Studies*.

anced portrayal, Joyce's analogy, perhaps unintentionally, resonates with the prevailing zeitgeist, depicting a lack of granted opportunity for female-colonial autonomy in the realm of perception.

Taking this a notch further, it is imperative to examine the argument through the lens of Frank B. Farrell's assertion in *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism*, wherein he expounds on the imperial self's inclination to project its own modes of articulation onto everything it encounters "so that all otherness is swallowed up into its working" (1996: 248). The ramifications of this historical principle manifest especially in Gabriel's brief portrayal of Gretta through the prism of the male gaze:

There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of if he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. Distant Music he would call the picture if he were a painter (Joyce, 2004: 402).

While Gabriel may seem to imbue Gretta with angelic innuendo, a closer examination reveals his attempt to assert dominance in his mode of expression, echoing Farrell's perspective, in an active-passive agency of looking. Within this narrative, Joyce skilfully crafts a hierarchical framework by portraying the painter as a wielder of ocular-centric dominance. This familiar image of the objectified female body incites how the male gaze is superimposed on the artistic process, resembling an artistic way of butchery by mirroring the historical imposition on colonised Ireland.

Gabriel's upper hand in perception still remains ambiguous, particularly in terms of the gendered nuances at play. The Morgan's party, depicted in the story, forcibly instigates a spatial shift in addressing the supremacist issue of patriarchal monopoly when Gabriel articulates the reasons for his and Gretta's late arrival to the party: "Here I am as right as the mail, Aunt Kate" (2004: 375). The witty humour behind this rhetorical statement is pun intended. Joyce navigates not only the reference to the infamous imperial force, the Royal Mail of the British Empire, which is celebrated for its punctuality but also orchestrates a phonetic manoeuvre that resonates with the male ego. It is quite reminiscent, as Vincent Cheng writes, that "both the empire and the male ego are employed in the activity" (1993: 28). By delv-

ing into this linguistic complexity, Joyce's political consciousness emerges, which operates on a spectrum of domestic and continental dominance. This reveals a substructure where the roles of male and female are caricatured beneath the overarching hierarchy symbolised by Father England and Mother Ireland. The confluence of wordplay and historical symbolism reinforces the neatly woven layers through which Joyce constructs a narrative that goes beyond mere storytelling, hence making a subtle remark about the depths of socio-political commentary.

Perhaps due to Gretta's lagging image in stark contrast to Gabriel's bold standing, Cheng offers insight by using Edward Said's concept of infantilization from *Orientalism*. The concept encompasses both the inimical aspects of governance and the parental dismissal of children.⁴ Contextualising this theoretical framework within the narrative, Cheng interprets Gabriel's response to Lily's relief at their belated arrival, "– I'll engage they did, said Gabriel, but they forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself" (Joyce, 2004: 375), as an essential image of the British Empire. This portrayal, disguised as a "good-humoured comment," as Cheng writes, reveals an "affectionate attitude [...] towards its colonies [by] essentializing the female in a form of infantilization" (1993: 27). The infantilization retains its significance as a means to inspire an objectified female working in the favour of the paterfamilias' mastery, against which Gretta misses out on claiming a right to defy. The transmutation of infantilization takes on a deeper dimension and extends to a central authority asserting knowledge about Gretta beyond her own comprehension. This time, it is embedded in the gosh in question, but with a further context in disguise:

– But as for Gretta there, said Gabriel, she'd walk home in the snow if she were let.

Mrs Conroy laughed.

– Don't mind him, Aunt Kate, she said. He's really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom's eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Eva to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it! ... O, but you'll never guess what he makes me wear now!

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin): The coloniser treats their colonies as "what is already evident: that they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves" (1977: 36).

She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband, whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily, too, for Gabriel's solicitude was a standing joke with them.

- Goloshes! said Mrs Conroy. That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. To-night even, he wanted me to put them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit. (Joyce, 2004: 378)

To Aunt Julia's ignorance of the popularity of wearing goloshes, Mrs. Conroy responds that they are "Guttapercha things [...] Gabriel says everyone wears them on the continent" (2004: 378).

Nevertheless, the matter goes beyond the plain act of wearing goloshes. Gutta-percha, a rubbery material, is sourced from Malaya and exploited for the economic benefit of the British Empire. "Thus, the wearing goloshes becomes a correlative for a more civilized dominant European culture" (Cheng, 1993: 29), which Gretta vehemently rejects. The material rejects the Irish mentality to *know* herself, and the same also follows for perception; then, Gretta's framed portrait at that very specific moment, as given at the beginning of this section, contextually suggests layers of externally supervised ocular-centric dominance for the Empire. Moreover, the Joycean symbol of the snow at the end of the story denotes equality by falling down on everyone, both living and dead, equally. It heralds a bright future where the marginalised self is acknowledged. At this moment, we, as readers, are left wondering whether the trajectory of orientation will return to the Irish self or not, which is further problematized in the modernization and post-modernization eras.

A Room of (N)one's Own: Perceptual Fragmentations in *The Key*

The first stages of the subordinate psyche within colonised territories, as portrayed through the domestic setting in Joyce's work, lead to a more confined place that is exemplified in Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *The Key* (1945) [2015]. The storyline of this novella allegorically represents the factual experiences of the Irish nation in its modernization process. Composed right after the Second World War, throughout which the nation hid in its *isolated nut* to preserve itself against catastrophic events of the war (Lanterns, 2000: 233), the novella tells the story of "a man like any other" (2015: 17), named J., working at a civil service. The only plot in sight commences with J. locking himself in a room to which there is no exit other than a dysfunctional door

itself: “He turned it again, right and left, put his knee against it, set his shoulder to it but the door wouldn’t budge [...] The door was locked from the outside [...] J. was locked in a room with no other exit, no window or chimney, no skylight or tunnel or ventilation shaft” (2015: 23). By locking himself into a Kafkaesque claustrophobic place, J., entrapped in his “self-contained otherworld” (Lanters, 2000: 233), symbolically surrounds himself with the national device of Ireland’s neutrality in the Second World War. Yet, wherever J.’s gaze is cast, it leads only to a dead end. The paradox is stark: if, as Merleau-Ponty argues in *Phenomenology of Perception*, the world is what we perceive, then Irishness has a long way to go – at least beyond this enclosed space that equally elicits the national obstacle in the national active agency in perception.

After the events of “The Dead,” Irish femininity transforms, redirecting its focus towards J.’s effeminacy and finding a familiar terrain characterised by passivity within power dynamics. At this point, the novella starts with a subtle power relation through the convention of pathetic fallacy, attaching human relations to objects, giving them personifications and agency that the reader could sympathise with. Notably, the narrative dedicates several pages to describing these “living things” (Ó Cadhain, 2015: 9). In contrast, J.’s description is encapsulated in a solitary sentence on the first page: “J. was a paperkeeper” (2015: 7). In the novella, the objects are disruptively lively, and J. is frighteningly inert and deprived of identity. Possibly, the protagonist is reduced to being a mere (J)unior, which is actually one of the characteristics of the novella, as it does not take a genius to say that another character, S., who is J.’s superior in the work environment and seems to be on vacation throughout the action in the plot, comes to the foreground of being a (S)enior. In this Kafkaesque realm of passive identity and motion, parasitically linked to J., the claustrophobic space orchestrates what Minna Vouhelainen terms “deprivation of consciousness” within an enclosed realm of both space and perception (2010: 25). The metaphor overlaps between Ireland’s recovery by transitioning to modern city life with “office work, crowds, [...] lack of open spaces and fresh air” and its immediate inadaptability to such a condition (2010: 30). For this very reason, the novella secures the space where “visibility is lacking, and the characters feel lost and vulnerable” (2010: 30).

The passive substructure behind the claustrophobic space accompanies the imprisonment of J.’s reality. As observed by Merleau-Ponty, the reality that shapes our existence arises from an active process of assessing

our surroundings, where every encounter is a “meaning-giving operation” (2002: xii) that necessitates an “impregnable subjectivity” (2002: xi). This perspective involves a shift “from constituted to constituting” (2002: 70), where the suffix “-ing” serves as a token of active agency, emphasising the transformation from being shaped by external forces to actively shaping one’s own reality. Unlike Merleau-Ponty’s argument, J., like Ireland, slips backwards into the position of being constituted rather than engaging in an active mutual process. His only chance to connect with the broader reality is through the other character’s voices while trying to extricate him from the room. J. finds himself contingent upon fragmented descriptions provided by outsiders. For him, one chain of reality follows another. His reality and thus existence pertain to a slippery ground of polyvalent perceptual amalgam, corresponding to “consciousness among consciousness,” a condition Merleau-Ponty deems “a weakness” (2002: xiv).

Furthermore, the mechanisms of active agency in perception extend beyond a crude emphasis on ocularcentrism. Bodily stimulation, facilitated through mobility, allows the subject to attribute significance to what is touched (2002: 238). Nevertheless, Ó Cadhain’s chiasm of J. as an allegory of Ireland gains another layer with an obstacle through which J.’s actions confront constraints. In the novella, J.’s entrapment within the metaphorical “unbreakable nut” is intertwined with “the pipe [...] that circulated authority” (Ó Cadhain, 2015: 45). Hindered by a mental inability to challenge this authority, J. refrains himself from touching anything, as “[t]he walls have ears” (2015: 49). Notably, on a specific occasion, he is “not allowed to use [the telephone] without S’s say-so” (2015: 25), despite its potential to rectify the situation. There is no reliable source for J., then, to orient himself into a complete reality, which recalls Ireland’s isolation within an ever-recurring sameness of trying to bind up the colonial wounds: “Not only did he feel imprisoned, *he felt every part of his body under lock* (2015: 59) (emphasis mine).

The nexus of J.’s imprisonment makes it clear that rather than what he perceives, what he cannot perceive is what is important to the Irish self in modernization. However, the intended shift from being a (m)other self, as in “The Dead,” is still noticeable. To delve deeply into the exploration, this article proposes a shift in focus to John Banville’s *The Book of Evidence*, specifically examining the vivid characteristics of the narcissistic Freddie Montgomery. Unlike Gretta’s somewhat maternal inferiority or J.’s inertness, Freddie delineates an exact contrast.

Self-Perception: *The Book of Evidence*

In the late 1980s, John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* (1989) convinced us to acknowledge Irish authors' never-ending engagement with the national politics of the bygone era. The novel supposedly reflects the national predicament of Ireland's colonial consciousness through its fragmented and retrospective form. Furthermore, the novel puts itself in kinship with testimonial narratives through Freddie as the protagonist, as he says: "My Lord, when you ask me to tell the court in my own words, that is what I shall say" (Banville, 1989: 3). The symbolic nature of this genre serves as a guidepost, prompting us to recognise the interplay between Freddie's personal experiences and the nation's postcolonial memory since the testimonial narratives construct the protagonist's narration as a compelling urge to reclaim the bygone history of the nation.⁵ The novel's structure, which Joseph MacMinn terms "an ingenious parable of perception" (1999: 123), contributes to the Irish way of engagement in the historical and political liberation process with the sense of perception.

The narrative's adoption of the first-person perspective requires us to scrutinise subjective perception, a doctrinal cornerstone in Freddie's narrativization. However, this perception extends beyond Freddie's subjectively filtered observations; crucially, it embodies a literal form of being both an observer and an observed at the same time, thus raising critical questions about Irish identity:

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 [...] [E]very self-image that Freddie predominantly observes conveys what he wants to blend as his ideal image into his own symbolic registration (Ayrım, 2023: 18).

Therefore, the novel is reminiscent of a public display designed to meet Freddie's specific needs. For this very reason, the general discussion point raised concerning the novel would be the focus on the artistic perception of a self-pastiche, as laconically summed up here: "I looked in their eyes and

⁵ Georg Gugelberg and Michael Kearney formulate the spectrum of this genre as its reliance on the colonial past of the nation that the work pertains to. In this formula, the first-person narrator is just a symbolic voice representing the nation, and accordingly, the narrator's retrospective narrativization is affirmed to be the post-colonial tendency to reclaim the national past that has been taken away.

saw myself ennobled there” (Banville, 1989: 11). Another line of scholarly inquiry, not directly causative but impactful, delves into male violence. Freddie’s gaze, fixated on his idealised self, extends to the objectification of female bodies in various forms since the first-person narrativization “superimpose[s] Freddie’s first-person authorial gaze on the violent male gaze in praxis” (Ayrım, 2023: 16-17).

One way or another, however, we could infer that the Irish self becomes the zero-point of orientation, a pivot utilised for self-observation or a deliberate choice to observe others. The sense of perception at best deviates through historical growth from being subjected to power to wielding power. Yet, the constitutive function of perception buried in the novel’s main theme of male violence as a voyeuristic phantasy remains an unexplored facet. Therefore, a definitive connection between Freddie’s tendency towards male phantasmagoria that violates the female body and the constitutive sense of perception has yet to be established.

A pointed critique emerges when examining Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage, wherein the subject’s perceptual orientation towards self-perception, akin to Freddie, is juxtaposed with a destructive and perhaps darker aspect. “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” (Ayrım, 2023: 17). The contemporary debates on this novel do not miss out on introducing us to the psychoanalytic layer of the novel. As Lacan builds his theory on Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on perception,⁶ Lacan also makes it possible for us to make a connection between Ó Cadhain’s novella and Banville’s novel through a similar development in perception. Freddie’s unwavering inclination to project his idealised self onto reflective surfaces implies a manifestation of the ego within Lacan’s Imaginary realm. Reading the novel from a Lacanian perspective, Freddie unveils the trajectory of identity formation, which indicates the constructive influence of perception. Freddie, alternatively referred to as Ireland, undergoes a profound rebirth and identity transformation through the capacity for self-observation.

In the novel, which opens with Freddie’s captivity and imprisonment after having fulfilled his own “worst fantasies” (Banville, 1989: 3), his genuine rebirth, as quoted above, orbits around his

⁶ See (Licitra Rosa, et al. 2021). According to this article, Merleau-Ponty’s works influenced the trajectory Lacan pursued in his theories (Licitra Rosa et al., 2021: 3).

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 [...] His immediate circle, which stands for Lacan's Symbolic/predefined social order, constantly reminds him of the unvested nature of such a self-image [...] 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, 1989: 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 (Ayrım, 2023: 18-19).

At this point, what transposes Freddie's perception to a destructive force is the impossible quest of claiming his ideal reflection in the mirror world, which elicits a pragmatic level of aggression to the notion of the Other just as much as the ideal self is the Other per se for being far away from reality. That is why Freddie, who is by nature a male, evinces male violence in the bond of biological *otherhood*, namely female bodies. Not only does this fact explain Freddie's narcissistic qualities, but it also underlines the active perception of his identity formation from a Lacanian perspective.

Penned roughly half a century later, the perspective on perception derived from Joyce's "The Dead" stands in complete contradiction. Instead of signifying surrender to external forces of ocular dominance, it represents an era characterised by self-awareness, governed and emphasised through the lens of identity formation. As depicted in Banville's narrative, the Irish mindset undergoes a transformative awakening, evolving into a formidable and independent entity. This newfound state of self-governance serves as the focal point, which centralises the perception within the individual's own realm of influence.

Conclusion

In the instances elucidated above, the exploration of perception in Irish literature unfolds as a narrative of progressive homecoming. Initially, the archival ocular-centrism portrays Ireland in a passive role, observed and defined by external forces. This dynamic undergoes a gradual transformation, however, as the narrative evolves towards a self-perception where the individual becomes the observer and definer of their own identity, liberated from external influences. This postcolonial trajectory aligns chronologically with Ireland's journey towards self-definition, illuminating Ireland's evolution from a state of passive and inert political agency to a proactive and engaged consciousness. In Joyce's "The Dead," the perception is tarnished, and the Irish representative, Gretta, finds herself subjected to England's dominance in the act of being defined. Ó Cadhain's *The Key* delves deeply into a historical account of the Irish nation during World War II, presenting a fragmented self-perception within an enclosed space through its protagonist. J. Banville's novel takes a different stance, portraying a national liberation from a defined entity to a defining subject with the power of perception steeped in a narcissistic protagonist, Freddie. In all of these works, nevertheless, the steadfast theme orbits around the literary device of power relationships within the domain of perception.

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