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Trauma of the Gaze in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*

John Banville'in Tutanak Defteri Başlıklı Romanında Bakışın Travması

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Abstract: John Banville'ın sanat üçlemesinin ilki olan *Tutanak Defteri*, okuru bakan özneler ve bakılan nesnelerle dolu bir hikâye evrenine sokan, ekfrastik bir suç anlatısıdır. Kendisini "yüzergezer bir göz" olarak tarif eden bir katilin ağzından anlatılan roman, öznelik, bakış ve güç/iktidar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiye dair sorular ortaya koyar. Bu makalenin amacı, *Tutanak Defteri* başlıklı romanın sembolik evrenini, anlatıcı karakterin travmatik cinayet deneyiminde bakışın ve bakma eyleminin oynadığı belirleyici rol açısından okumaktır. Bu çerçevede, tartışmanın genelinde, benliğin Öteki ile ilişkisinin oluşumunda ve teyidinde bakışın ve bakma eyleminin önemini irdelemeyi amaçlayan bir eleştirel izlek takip edilecektir. Bir tür semiyotik mekanizma olan bakışın, bakılanı nesneleştirmede bir iktidar aracı olarak kullanılması, özellikle eril bakışın erkek egemen dinamikleri bağlamında ele alınacaktır. Bu tartışma çerçevesinde, makalenin, Banville ve *Tutanak Defteri* üzerine şimdiye kadar üretilen literatüre katkıda bulunması ve sunduğu farklı kavramsal mercek ile Banville'in ekfrastik içeriğine dair üretilen eleştiri arşivini zenginleştirmesi umulmaktadır.

Keywords: John Banville, *Tutanak Defteri*, Bakış, Eril Bakış, Öteki, Travma

Öz: John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*, the first book of his art trilogy, is an ekphrastic crime novel that introduces the reader to a storyworld populated with gazing subjects and gazed objects. Narrated by a murderer who describes himself as a "floating eye", the novel raises questions about the complex link between subjectivity, gaze, and power. This article aims to introduce a critical reading of the symbolic universe of *The Book of Evidence* in terms of the shaping role the gaze plays in the protagonist's traumatic experience of murder. The overall discussion will follow a critical trajectory that seeks to explore the pivotal significance of the gaze and the act of looking in the formation and affirmation of the self in relation and response to the Other. The gaze as a particular semiotic mechanism will be addressed as a tool of exercising power on the object of the gaze especially in the context of the phallocentric dynamics of the male gaze. With this argumentative frame, the article seeks to contribute to the critical literature on Banville and *The Book of Evidence* by introducing a different conceptual lens that may enrich the archive of readings on Banville's ekphrastic content.

***Anahtar sözcükler*:** John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*, Look, Male Gaze, The Other, Trauma

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History decays into images, not into stories.
(Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 476)

Recipient of many awards including the Booker Prize, John Banville is one of the most celebrated and prolific writers of contemporary Irish fiction. What marks Banville's idiosyncrasy as a novelist is the ekphrastic quality of his textual universes and his use of transgression as the main thematic axis of storytelling. He belongs to a generation of Irish novelists who digressed from the insular nationalist codes of fiction writing and addressed ways and discontents of being human on a more global modern scale. This is not to say that Banville's fiction lacks local colour in terms of cultural context, theme or symbolization. A trained eye of an experienced reader of Irish literature would not fail to notice layers of subtle yet obvious references to remote or recent Irish history or his murmuring dialogues with the Irish novelistic convention. *The Book of Evidence* (1989), the first book of Banville's art trilogy (along with *Ghosts* [1993] and *Athena* [1995]), is an excellent open text *per se*, inviting and supporting diverse interpretations including but not limited to its Irish context. Revealing the details of a gory murder through the eyes of the murderer/narrator, Banville sets this individual trauma against an obscure background of the violent and traumatic bombings of the Troubles. As will be shown in the course of the discussion, act of narrating, in this historical context, is processed through introspection into traumas of the self which are not independent from collective traumas. The troubling link Banville builds between confrontation and selfhood in *The Book of Evidence* is problematized through the theme of crime and violence, with a particular focus on the agency of the look. What I aim to explore in this article is the focal significance of the *look* in the novel that depicts a symbolic universe populated by gazing subjects and gazed objects, and to read this particular semiotic mechanism as a communicative tool of exercising power especially in the context of the phallocentric dynamics of the male gaze.

The Book of Evidence is a testimonial prison account of Freddie Montgomery, a disinherited middle-aged son of a middle class Irish family, who has violently murdered a young maidservant for spotting him in the act of stealing a painting from a Big House. Years after his flight from his family and country to pursue an academic career on science, the protagonist returns to Ireland, his place of origin, where homecoming culminates in a traumatic experience of violence. The guilt-ridden murderer's testimony, which lacks linearity as in most narratives of traumatic experience, goes back and forth between his childhood memories, dreams, and events that lead to the murder, unveiling certain concealed and suppressed discomforts from his past. Freddie's shattered vision denies him the comfort of a well-defined form of textual space, and reflects an acknowledged truth about trauma: "*[n]o narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way: it has a time signature that must fracture conventional causality*" (Luckhurst 2008, 9). His fractured mnemonic gaze into his own history also raises questions about possibilities and unfulfilled potentials, verifying John Berger who observes that "*[v]ery few stories are narrated either to idealize or condemn; rather they testify to the always slightly surprising range of the possible*" (1985b, 15). 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-representation. In this, *The Book of Evidence* shares a common trait with many of Banville's novels which Mark O'Connell describes as "*self-directed*" narratives and "*textual self-portraits for which the narrators are objects as well as subjects*" (2013, 1). To stabilize his floating self, Freddie uses his testimony as a frame that provides a shaping contour for his place in the world. As he recollects the past with vivid detail, his memory becomes a template on which he reflects his self-image captured by his introspective gaze. His self-reflexive book of evidence re-opens the wounds of the past to authenticate a self through confrontation. At the heart of

Freddie's testimony of confrontation lies the complicated psychodynamics of the discomfort and shame he feels under the frozen inanimate look of the woman in the painting – the art object for which he has committed murder. Banville places the semiotic centre of the novel onto this scopic field where Freddie's male gaze meets the destabilizing look of the female figure on canvas.

Banville penned down *The Book of Evidence* in the decades when Guy Debord's seminal concept of "*the society of the spectacle*" was still a stimulating critical topic in Western intellectual circles. In one of the most salient aphorismic sentences in his work, Debord builds a disturbing connection between inanimate bodies (symbolic of death) and objects of display: "*The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the non-living*" (2014, 2). Exemplifying this connection, *The Book of Evidence*, a self-reflective narrative on death and killing, opens with the narrator's recollections of his arrest which has become a public scene of spectacle. So much so that, after Freddie's "*capture*", people "*clawed at each other to get a look at [him]*" (Banville 2001, 3). This explicit association between crime and look is fortified by Freddie's self-description as an object of curiosity compared to a "*locked up . . . exotic animal, last survivor of a species they have thought extinct*" (Banville 2001, 3). He continues to speculate on how the crowd would relate and respond to this spectacle of monstrosity: "*[t]hey should let people to view me, the girl-eater, svelte and dangerous, padding to and fro in my cage, my terrible green glance flickering past the bars, give them something to dream about, tucked up cosy in their beds of a night*" (Banville 2001, 3). The urban space crowded by curious bystanders in this scene may also be conceived as a representation of what Mark Seltzer calls the "*pathological public sphere*" in his influential article on "*wound culture*" and trauma (1997). Seltzer argues that gaze and looking are important components of the formation and expression of collective interest in and even fascination with violence, trauma, and death. In a similar vein, connecting the act and agency of looking to the concepts of violence and death, Banville introduces the gaze as a mode of engagement with the world, a way of voyeuristically observing the object or subject of violence. In the narrative space of *The Book of Evidence*, the act of looking and gazing becomes a way of exerting some kind of power and control over the object of one's gaze. Regarding the association between look and power, Banville directs our critical gaze to the heart of the matter in the very first paragraphs of the novel (Also see M. Ghassemi's "Reading Banville with Lacan: Hysteric Aesthetics in *The Book of Evidence*", in which the author underlines Freddie's desire to turn his performing self into an aestheticized image in the eyes of public spectators).

In these opening lines, however, little does the reader know that the imagined scene of Freddie's public display is truly ironical. That he has committed the crime of murder for the sake of a painting – an aesthetic object for display – transforms the novel's ekphrastic content into an almost philosophical inquiry on the criminal psychology of gaze. As Neil Murphy states, the use of ekphrastic elements in novel writing is one of Banville's strategies that "progressively deepen[s] the possibilities for prose fiction by infusing his work with ways of seeing – and being" (2019, 247). In *The Book of Evidence*, the emphasis on *look* in the opening paragraphs is further reinforced throughout Freddie's testimony which abounds in frozen images from the past that are re-imagined almost as posed moments in paintings. He visualizes himself retrospectively as a posing figure in past scenes, making his past image the object of his present gaze. In one of his narcissistic moments of recollection, he relates the following: "*And there I am, striking an elegant pose, my ascetic profile lifted to the light in the barred window, fingering a scented handkerchief and faintly smirking, Jean-Jacques the cultured killer*" (Banville 2001, 5). Describing himself as "*a sort of floating eye, watching, noting, scheming*" (Banville 2001, 64), Freddie recollects and articulates the scenes preceding and following the murder with certain emphasis on the visual aspect of events, objects and characters. The distinguished place of sight among senses is

famously noted by Berger who observes in *Ways of Seeing* that "*[i]t is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. […] We never look at one thing; we are always looking at the relationship between things and ourselves*" (1985a, 7, 9). As highlighted by Berger, when we look at something, we do not do so in isolation but in relation to our own experiences, mnemonic archives, and cultural or ideological contexts. The act of looking is not a neutral or objective process but is shaped by various cultural, social and psychological traces. Also, as manifested in many of the scenes of psychological or physical conflict in *The Book of Evidence*, acts of looking and seeing are inseparable from the ontological unrest associated with being either the subject or object of the gaze.

Gaze, as a powerful agency of control and dominance, can reduce the object of the gaze to an inferior position. In the context of patriarchy in which men hold power, the power dynamic of the act of seeing can result in women being objectified and seen as passive objects of male gaze. Ann Kaplan states that "*the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position*" (1983, 30). Kaplan's definition reflects Freud's theory of the gaze as a phallic activity in his essay on "Medusa's Head", as well as Laura Mulvey's critique of the male gaze in her 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In Mulvey's words, woman "*stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning*" (1999, 834). Male gaze becomes the representative of power in the culture of patriarchy in which men, "*as the bearer[s] of the look*", position women as spectacle (Mulvey 1999, 834). This reflection becomes prominent especially in the scene where Freddie almost freezes in front of the painting in the Behrens House and feels a weird sense of shame. This moment of metaphorical ossification, which will be elaborated in more detail later in the course of the discussion, needs to be interpreted in the context of Freddie's relationship to three women – his wife Daphne, Anna Behrens, and his mother. Before he narrates the gory details of the murder, Freddie provides us with lengthy accounts of how he perceives them as objects or targets of his act of looking. His descriptions of these women render them to aestheticized objects of masculine gaze, positioning Freddie almost as a spectator, even a critic, judging a work of art. When he spots Anna in Berkeley "*in a gallery*", he *"[stands] in the street for a moment watching her – admiring her" and compares her to "a piece on show, standing there so still in that tall, shadowless light behind sun-reflecting glass*" (Banville 2001, 62). In his eyes, his wife, Daphne

> *is a big woman, not fat, not heavy, even, but yet weighty, and beautifully balanced: always 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).

His gaze similarly traces the curves of his mother's body as a visualized, lifeless bulk of material object, and he again uses vocabulary of reification. Echoing his description of Daphne, he compares his mother's body to a marble statue:

> *She is a large, vigorous woman with the broad face and heavy hair of a tinker's wife. In describing her thus I do not mean to be disrespectful. She is impressive, in her way, at once majestic and slovenly. I recall her from*

> *my childhood as a constant but remote presence, statuesque, blank eyed, impossibly handsome in an Ancient Roman sort of way, like a marble figure at the far side of a lawn* (Banville 2001, 41-2).

Also, as noted by Anja Müller who provides a much more detailed reading of Freddie's treatment of women as framed objects, Freddie "*represent[s] women by relating them to paintings and by almost treating them as if they were pictures*" (2004, 186) and he "*construct[s]" them "along the line of a painterly tradition that represents them as objects of the male imagination and of the gaze*" (2004, 187).

Such descriptive passages in Freddie's testimony are significantly linked to his crime seemingly committed for the sake of a certain painting he has come across in a Big House owned by the wealthy Behrens family to whom Freddie's mother has sold the family collection. The seventeenth-century painting is called *Portrait of a Woman in Gloves* which displays "*[a] youngish woman in black dress with a broad white collar, standing with her hands folded in front of her, one gloved, the other hidden except for the fingers, which are flexed and ringless*" (Banville 2001, 78). The woman's "*prominent black eyes have a faintly oriental slant*" and she is standing in "*the lighted doorway of a room*"; the "*darkness behind her is dense and yet mysteriously weightless*" (Banville 2001, 78). Freddie provides the silent object of the artist's gaze with a story, devoting more than four pages of his testimony to a detailed imaginative account of the woman and her partially exposed hands. He, thus, creates an imaginative historical background for both the picture and the posing figure it displays, and somehow crystalizes the "*darkness behind her*", the space beyond vision, with the voyeuristic gaze of his imagination. He extends his privilege of seeing beyond the frame and into the privacy of the female figure's thoughts and feelings.

That Freddie describes the "*darkness behind her*" as "*weightless*" is also significant. He uses the same vocabulary to describe his physical being in the world prior to the murder. He comments on his pre-murder self as follows: *"How shall I describe it, this sense of myself as something without weight, without moorings, a floating phantom? Other people seemed to have a density, a thereness, which I lacked"* (Banville 2001, 16). It may be argued that having one's story told is what gives a subject weight, providing him/her with necessary density to have spatial belonging, a "*thereness*". Similar to his testimonial narrative that places his self within a framed narrative, Freddie gives the anonymous woman a story to fill the weightless darkness behind her. This association might be one of the possible reasons why his "*floating phantom*" is curiously anchored to the spot in front of the painting, and why his "*floating eye*" is fixed on the mysterious figure. (Freddie considers the painting as the work of an anonymous master, yet Rudiger Imhof in his monograph on Banville identifies the artist as Willem Drost and the painting as *Portrait of a Woman* which is currently accommodated in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest)

The story Freddie tailors for the woman in the painting is of a vulnerable, peripheral figure, a spinster with certain domestic power she has taken over from her late mother whom she despised. Despite her diffident self-judgement that she is "*no fit subject for a painter*", her father insists to have her portrait painted and arranges an appointment with a painter (Banville 2001, 106). Freddie imagines how she might have felt under the scrutinizing and objectifying gaze of the male painter: "*he fixes his little wet eyes on her, briefly, with a kind of impersonal intensity, and she flinches, as if caught in a burst of strong light. No one has ever looked at her like this before. So this is what is to be known! It is almost indecent*" (Banville 2001, 106-107). Under the gaze of the male Other who is in the position of power and authority, "*day after day*" she feels as if she is "*floating away, away out of herself*" (Banville 2001, 107). When she finally sees her own image painted

on the canvas, she "*looks and looks. She had expected it would be like looking in a mirror, but this is someone she does not recognize, and yet knows. The words come unbidden into her head: Now I know how to die*" (Banville 2001, 108). These words uttered by a woman subjected to the dominating look of the Other may be interpreted as the metaphorically fatal agency of the male gaze. Like Freddie who tailors a story for her in his imaginative narrative, the painter gives her a mimetic form on his canvas. Freddie's narrative gaze and the painter's artistic gaze melt into one another as agents of some kind of power. Under their gaze, she falls from her own history/story.

Although Freddie's imaginative version of the story behind the image could be interpreted as a liberating act of giving voice to silence, it would be more compelling to read it as his way of exercising his male power over the silent female figure. He tailors a story for her as he considers fit for a designable object, using his narrative gaze as a means of control and dominance over the anonymous and therefore story-less figure. Inventing a life for the "dead" image on canvas, however, does not disperse the uncanny effect of her "*calm, inexpectant*" and hollow looks on Freddie (Banville 2001, 78). The unease he feels in front of the painting is indicative of a coping mechanism activated to shake off the disturbing, domineering, exposing and estranging effect of her look. The painting, in this sense, becomes a symbolic social space of dialectics that dictates the dependence of the self on the other for existence, as well as the significance of the gaze in this relationship. The biography he sketches for the silent posing figure in the painting is an attempt to reposition the ontological status of the woman from the looking subject (autonomous eye) to the looked object in order to postulate a sense of superiority. The discomfort, even terror, of being looked at is thus transformed into the hegemony and command of being the looking subject, enabling Freddie to turn the image into an object of gaze in his imagined narrative. He thus adopts the "*painter's sovereign gaze*" (Foucault 2008, 5). Recalling what Foucault says in his reading of "Las Meninas" in terms of the position of the spectator, although Freddie is "*greeted"* by the gaze of the woman in the painting, he is "*also dismissed by it*" and "*replaced by that which was always there before [he was]*" (2008, 5). In response to losing his position as the owner of the gaze, he reclaims that "*sovereign*" position by imposing his narrative gaze upon her in his imagined biographical account. Also, the translation of the visual into the verbal in this case creates a substantial contrast with the end effect of his confessional testimony in which he fashions a kind of fragmented self-portrait, symbolically translating the verbal into the visual. The painting and the letter, or the image and the sign, become identical. The painter's brush and the writer's pen are allies in how they operate, in the analogous manner the brush touches the canvas and the pen touches the paper.

Moreover, in his first encounter with the painting, not only the "*fortitude and pathos of her presence*" (Banville 2001, 79) but also her insistent and silent gaze creates a possessing and discomforting effect on Freddie. In *The Space of Literature* Maurice Blanchot asks "*what happens when what you see […] seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze […]?*" (1989, 31). According to Blanchot, this contact gives us "*fascination*" which "*robs us of our power to give sense*" (1989, 31). Freddie's fascination with that particular portrait is linked to a similar sense of loss of control, making him feel overtly conscious, even self-conscious of his physical being in the world and anchoring his gaze to a hermeneutical space. To imagine the woman in the painting and to give her a story is Freddie's attempt to regain control. Yet, as he stands in front of the canvas "*staring*", he begins to feel "*a kind of embarrassment [...] a hot, shamefaced awareness of [himself]" as if he was "the one who was being scrutinized, with careful, cold attention*" (Banville 2001, 79). The painting itself becomes an "*eye fixed on [him] unblinkingly*" (Banville 2001, 79). As Sartre observes in *Being and Nothingness*, "*shame is a*

confession" and it is the recognition of one's being "*that object which the Other is looking at and judging*" (1956, 261). Shame, according to Sartre, results from our awareness of our existence as the object of the Other's look and perception. We feel shame when we experience ourselves as an object that is being looked at and judged. In Sartre's words,

> *shame is only the original feeling of having my being outside, engaged in another being and as such without any defense, illuminated by the absolute light which emanates from a pure subject. […] Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object; that is, of recognizing myself in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the Other* (1956, 288).

It is in this moment of shame that Freddie is *seen* by a maid whom he will brutally murder the next day in their second encounter. When his privacy of shamefaced moment is witnessed by an Other, he feels "*an inexplicable, brief rush of annoyance – a presentiment, perhaps, a stray zephyr sent ahead of the storm that was to come*" (Banville 2001, 79). It is telling that he experiences a similar moment of shame when he places his hand on the naked animal body of the pony outside his mother's house: "*[he is] startled by the solidity, the actuality of the animal, the coarse dry coat, the dense unyielding flesh beneath, the blood warmth. Shocked, [he takes] his hand away quickly and [steps] back*" (Banville 2001, 46). With the sudden and bizarre self-consciousness he feels, he is "*aware of [his] toenails, [his] anus, [his] damp, constricted crotch", and he is "ashamed*" (Banville 2001, 46). Touching the animal (the Other) creates in Freddie a feeling akin to that he feels when he has caught himself as the object of the Other's look. Senses of touch and look trigger similar discomforts that destabilize Freddie's subjectivity, and expose the materiality of his body as a physical presence in the world where he exists in contact with the Other and as an object that "*appear[s] to the Other*" (Sartre 1956, 222).

It is noteworthy in this context that the association between the visual and the physical emerges in various forms in mythical stories that end with fatal transformations. In Greek mythology, Medusa, the female Gorgon, with hairs of baneful snakes, turns whoever gazes upon her into stone. Freud in his essay "Medusa's Head" metaphorically identifies this ossification ("*becoming stiff*") with erection. This stiffing, according to Freud, reassures the gazer of the fact that "*he is still in possession of a penis*" (1997, 265). The eye symbolically becoming a substitute for the male organ, as Freud infers, generates fears about the eye and derives from the fear of castration. The threatening effect experienced by the subject of the look, who becomes the gazed object of the object of his look, is explained later by Lacan in terms of castration anxiety. In "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*" Lacan distinguishes the *gaze* (regard) from the *look* (eye). Unlike Sartre who defines the subject primarily as a "*seeing subject*", Lacan defines the human condition as that of "*beings who are looked at*", with reference to Merleau-Ponty (1998, 75). In Žižek's paraphrasing, "*the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object. When I look at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see*" (1992, 109). Lacan maintains that "*the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture*" (1998, 106). More importantly, as glossed by Lacan, gaze is a weapon which must be "*laid down*" and "*abandoned*" when confronted with a painting:

> *The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which, in part, at least, of the painting, might be summed up thus—You want to look? Well, see this! He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. This is the pacifying,*

> *Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze* (1998, 101).

In his/her encounter with the gaze of the Other, the looking subject loses his privilege of seeing without being seen, and realizes that the Other is also a subject whose gaze reduces the looking subject to shame. Although Lacan agrees with Sartre's definition of the subject as the owner of the look, he identifies the eye (the look) with the subject and the gaze with the object. Lacan's concept of the gaze involves the psychological dynamics of how the subject perceives himself/herself through the eyes of others, and it highlights the role of perception in the way individuals construct their sense of self and navigate their self in their social semiosphere. In this navigation, the gaze may become a source of anxiety for the male subject in the patriarchal order, as it evokes the fear of being objectified or reduced to an object of the look. The reason for this anxiety and unease originates from the fact that male gaze is conceived and used as a tool of reification in order to assert dominance.

In *The Book of Evidence*, the simultaneous fascination and discomfort Freddie feels in front of the painting, *Portrait of a Woman in Gloves*, splits his sense of self into two ontological compartments, namely the subject and object of the gaze. His Apollonian male gaze is challenged and demasculinized by the female gaze that registers a "*pacifying*" effect. This ontological split is projected back to the owner of the look in the painting, the woman in gloves, as he imagines her posing in the artist's studio, subjected to the mastering male gaze of the artist. He thus counterattacks this pacifying effect by repositioning the woman in the painting from the status of a *seeing subject* to the status of a *seen object* in his mind's eye. The projection of this ontological split onto the woman in the painting is also significant in the sense that it highlights the way in which gendered power dynamics can be internalized and reinforced through the act of looking.

Freddie's profound unease, which arises primarily from his ontological shift from being the subject of a dominant male gaze to being the object of a female gaze, will ultimately drive him to commit murder. Freddie kills the maid, Josie Bell, seemingly because she catches him in the act of stealing the painting. The deeper motive, however, is much more complicated. On a wider plane of thought, his impulse may be explained as the decentralizing effect of the presence of the Other as mentioned by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* where he infers that "*[t]he appearance of the Other in the world corresponds […] to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, do a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting*" (1956, 255). The disturbing presence of Josie Bell as the representation of the Other is symbolically linked to the disturbing gaze of the woman in the painting. In his first visit to the Big House, his first private encounter with the painting is disrupted by Josie Bell when he realizes her "*standing in the open french window*" (Banville 2001, 79). With the french window providing her image with a frame, she appears to Freddie as a frozen image almost in a painting: "*Her eyes were wide, and one knee was flexed and one hand lifted, as if to ward off a blow*" (Banville 2001, 79). During his clumsy attempt of robbery, he again sees Josie Bell at the "*french window*". As he meets her "*eyes staring into [his]*", he almost blushes and "*sense[s], behind that stare, another presence, watching [him]*" (Banville 2001, 110). It is highly telling that the maid stands "*just as she had stood the day before, wide-eyed, with one hand raised*" (Banville 2001, 110). Josie Bell's frozen image and disturbing gaze symbolically brings her on par with the "*woman in gloves*". He flings Josie Bell and the painting into the car and drives away. On the road, not far away from the Big House, he strikes Josie Bell on the head with a hammer. He "*expect[s] to feel the sharp, clean smack of steel on bone, but it [feels] more like hitting clay, or hard putty*" (Banville 2001, 113).

With the force of the final blow, she "*close[s] her eyes and turn[s] her face away from [Freddie]*" (Banville 2001, 114). He kills her the way one smashes up a sculpture of "*clay, or hard putty*" with a hammer. It would not be erroneous to assert that this violent murder is committed not only to silence the witness but to silence the gaze.

On another level, gaze can function as a means of upholding class distinctions and maintaining power hierarchies. The functioning of all hierarchies entails creating a separation between those who are deemed superior and those who are considered inferior. The dynamics of power that exists within the communicative scopic realm of the observing subject (in the masculine performative role) and the observed object (in the feminine performative role) are also applicable to hierarchal distinctions between different social classes. When put into the perspective of class, encounters with the gaze of the Other may have telling implications in Freddie's case in terms of the interplay between gaze and the politics of power. Freddie's response to the gaze of the Other is actually very much class-bound and differs in accordance with the social status of the subject or object of the gaze. The peasant he meets in the train compartment on his way back to Ireland, for example, annoys him because his "*peasant*" eyes are constantly and carelessly watching him. He notes the following with contempt and possibly with disgust: "*They stare like that, these people, they have so little sense of themselves they seem to imagine their actions will not register on others*" (Banville 2001, 25). Or, when the stable-girl who works for his mother turns crimson as he speaks to her, Freddie with a sense of superiority sees himself through the girl's eyes: "*a tall, tanned hunk in a linen suit, leaning over her on a summer lawn and murmuring dark words*" (Banville 2001, 46). His masculine, dominant gaze, however, loses its power when he is in Whitewater, the Big House where he sees the painting. After he is spotted by the maid during his first visit to the Whitewater, he steams out of the room into the garden and sets off down the drive. When he looks back at the house, he thinks that "*the windows were ablaze, and seemed to be laughing fatly in derision*" (Banville 2001, 80). The house becomes a gigantic eye of a wealthy, privileged, upper class Other, under whose gaze he feels belittled and mocked:

> *I saw myself as if from one of those sunstruck windows, skulking along here in the dust, hot, disgruntled, overweight, head bowed and the fat back bent, my white suit rucked at the armpits and staging in the arse, a figure of fun, the punchline of a bad joke, and at once I was awash with self-pity* (Banville 2001, 80).

The abasing gaze of the symbolic eye of the Big House is starkly contrasted to the "*watching*" eye of the garden he sees from the window of the room in which he spends the night at his mother's house. The way he describes his mother's garden as an embodied gaze is informing: "*It seemed to me the garden was watching me, in its stealthy, tightlipped way, or that it was at least aware of me, framed here in the window, wringing my hands, a stricken starer-out [...] with the room's weightless dark pressing at my back*" (Banville 2001, 53-4). Interestingly, anticipating his encounter with the captivating painting later that day in the Big House, Freddie's description of his self-image "framed" at the window is almost a rephrased description of the framed *Portrait of a Woman in Gloves*, with particular common emphasis on "hands" and "dark" background. It is important to recall at this point how Freddie describes and imagines the woman in the painting almost as a subaltern, or as someone who belongs to an underprivileged and marginalized ontological category – especially in his emphasis on her "*black eyes have a faintly oriental slant*" (Banville 2001, 78). The implied association between Freddie and the woman in the painting may reflect Freddie's own sense of spiritual and ontological displacement.

The use of spatial symbolism in representing Freddie's mother's house and the Behrens'

Whitewater estate as representatives of distinct social classes becomes significant to the overall argument. The way Freddie remembers and describes himself as a self "*conscious of being an object*" (Sartre 1956, 271) is similar in both instances, but with a distinction. Freddie sees himself being watched by the surrounding garden of his mother's "*rotting*" house (Banville 2001, 45) which stands for the object of his loathing. A similar sense of "being-looked-at" catches him outside the Behrens's Big House which stands for the object of his desire in terms of being the material signifier of the privileged social status of wealth that Freddie admires, and of being the residential space of Anna who is the object of his sexual desire. It is significant that the gaze of the symbolic Big House (the object of his desire) is directed from inside out, whereas the gaze at his mother's house (the object of his loathing) is directed from outside in. This reverse effect is reinforced further with the fact that the Big House owned by the Behren family hosts an immense art collection on display for visitors, turning the house into a vast art gallery, whereas Freddie's family house has been emptied off of its collection. The antithetical representations of abundance and lack, or possession and dispossession, correspond to a cultural divide in Irish post/colonial history. The transfer of Freddie's inheritance (his father's paintings) from his mother's house to the Big House may be analogous to the ways in which Ireland was exploited and deprived of its resources, culture, and sovereignty during the colonial period.

The particular space, the Big House (Whitewater), where Freddie is traumatically captivated by the portrait, is therefore of focal significance. The effect of the emasculating female gaze on Freddie, in this regard, is powerfully connected to the spatial dynamic that runs in visual encounters. The spatial dynamics of looking refer in the most general sense to the way in which gazing subjects are positioned in relation to one another in a given space. In the case of the emasculating female gaze in the painting, symbolic meaning of the space in which Freddie experiences this feeling of emasculation, or castration in Freudian terms, is informing. It suggests that the emasculating effect of the gaze is not just psychological but also has a physical dimension, one that is related to the way in which the gaze is experienced in space. The class-bound symbolization of Whitewater, therefore, may be conceived as a significant factor that triggers Freddie's traumatized reaction and response to the painting in question.

Since the whereness of the encounter of gazes in *The Book of Evidence* has a shaping influence on the reception and interpretation of the gaze, it is worth devoting a brief space for elaborating on the historically significant symbolization of the Big House in the Irish context. In spatial terms, Banville uses an architectural marker to connect Freddie's individual trauma to Ireland's national trauma buried in its colonial past. Big Houses are the social and historical signifiers of the Protestant ascendancy class in Ireland, and remnants of a colonial past. As illustrated on a fictional plane in Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* as early as 1800, as well as in the Big House novels of Elizabeth Bowen in the twentieth century, the Big Houses of Protestant landlords and landowners in Ireland often became the target of attack in times of revolution. These architectural traces of Ireland's colonial wounds are representative of a social class – like that of Anna Behrens whose family owns "*diamond mines . . . companies . . . [and a] priceless art collection*" (Banville 2001, 200). Freddie admits that he is "*impressed, even a little cowed*" by Anna's agile and careless movements and gestures that represent for him "*the impatient assurance of the rich*" (Banville 2001, 81). When Freddie comes across Anna in Whitewater, he notices her "*bloodstained shoes*" that stand in contrast with her "*laughter*" and "*glazed stare*" (Banville 2001, 83). We learn how she got her shoes bloodstained during her visit to the hospital in the city due to her father's "*mild attack*": "*A bomb had gone off in a car in a crowded shopping street, quite a small device, apparently, but remarkably effective. She had wandered unchallenged into the casualty ward. There were bodies everywhere. She walked among the dead and dying, feeling like a survivor*

herself" (Banville 2001, 82). Shortly after Freddy relates these details about his encounter with Anna, he remembers "*turn[ing] and look[ing] up at the house*" and says, "*It seemed to be flying swiftly against the sky. I wanted my share of this richness, this gilded ease. From the depths of the room a pair of eyes looked out, dark, calm, unseeing*" (Banville 2001, 83). In these revealing confessions, Freddie's class-bound inferiority complex is traumatically linked to the discomfort and shame he feels in front of the painting.

In the light of the above mentioned spatial symbolization in *The Book of Evidence*, it may also be inferred from subtle references to certain historical events from the Irish past that the manifest layer of the protagonist's testimonial narrative conceals a latent layer of traumatic national history. In the act of *silencing* the witness of his crime, the protagonist, unaware that he is re-enacting a national drama, is perplexed to discover the concealed other or stranger within, "*shut up for so long*" (Banville 2001, 95). This traumatic encounter with the buried psyche unleashes his concealed self and provides the protagonist with evidence of his past traumas. Homecoming in Banville's novel, in this context, does not resonate with positive connotations, and bears heavy overtones of mnemonic denial which symbolically finds expression in Freddie's "*lowered gaze*" as he walks in the streets among his native folk who has "*the shocked look of survivors*" (Banville 2001, 30). His reflexive act of lowering his gaze with the fear that he "*might see horrors*" (Banville 2001, 30) is brilliantly contrasted to his wide open gaze almost locked to the gaze of an inanimate figure in a painting.

That Banville places a work of art at the centre of his story of crime and trauma introduces further conflicts. The way the narrator transforms his self-representational account into a kind of self-portrait gains further significance in the Irish historical context, for it introduces a conflict between self-representation and historically/officially manufactured representations. All these aspects that surround the dominating role and presence of the gaze in the novel are somehow connected to forms of individual and collective senses of displacement and the problematic relationship of inside and outside. It is important to remember in this respect that trauma, like the gaze, pierces "*a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication*", and it "*violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound*" (Luckhurst 2008, 3). Banville, in *The Book of Evidence*, provides us with a fascinating example of how the act of looking and the agent of the gaze may reveal and even betray those passageways and connections.

Consequently, the ekphrastic content of John Banville's highly acclaimed novel, *The Book of Evidence*, provides a critical axis around which the writer weaves the psychodynamics of a testimonial murder story. As it explores the complex relationship between violence and gaze, Freddie's narrative self-portrait reveals the pivotal significance of the gaze and the act of looking in the formation and affirmation of the self in relation and response to the Other. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is obsessed with watching and observing others, often using his gaze as a means of control and dominance. This is particularly evident in his relationship with women, where he objectifies and occasionally sexualizes them through his gaze. When his testimonial narrative is read through the critical lens of theories of the gaze, it may be inferred that the power dynamics of Freddie's masculine gaze is ultimately reversed when he becomes the object of the gaze himself. The pathology of violence in the novel is thus closely linked to the gaze, as the novel highlights the ways in which power and control are tied to the act of looking, and how the gaze can be used to either assert or challenge patriarchal power structures that are based on the hierarchal distinction between men who possess the power to look and women who are positioned as the objects of that controlling male gaze. Freddie's trauma of the gaze, in this context, also

reveals his vulnerability and insecurity, particularly when he becomes the object of the gaze of the Other. He becomes acutely aware of his own visibility as if he is caught naked in the eyes of the Other, and he pathologically attempts to manipulate his reflected self-image through violence in order to regain control over his masculinity and subjectivity.

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