

The Book of Evidence: Iconotext in John Banville's Ekphrastic Novel

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Abstract *The Book of Evidence* (1989) is one of John Banville's ekphrastic novels which are typical of verbal representation of visual representation. This paper aims to explore the intersemiotic transposition of literature and visual images by analyzing the way in which the two forms of signs interweave and the novel's themes combine with the verbal representation of visual images. It is argued that the derogative verbal representations of laborers and women, as the protagonist's perceptual images, denote the verbal/visual social coding and power relationship between the ekphrastic speaking subject and the mute semiotic other. Paintings to which ekphrastic texts are alluded to demonstrate the narrator's displacement of colonial inborn superiority and racism towards the subordinated other. Verbal representations of pubs and drinkers vividly present the pregnant moment, moment of stopped actions displayed in paintings. The implications of verbal representations function as "a speaking speech" and evoke the power-dominated colonial history and critique its consequences of the overall inequality in Ireland between the 1980s and 1990s, identity hybridity and alcoholism in a new social order which resembles that of the colonized one. By comparing the narrative verbal representations of the woman in the portrait with the descriptive verbal representations of the maid, the paper probes into the protagonist's inability to see others in real life and the denial of others' alterity. In virtue of the language's arbitrariness and freedom in conveying emotions and ideas, the ekphrastic narrative texts interpret and comment on the iconic woman's portrait, which "envoices" the mute object and parodies the disregard for innocent lives and alienation resulting from long-term colonial violent conflicts between

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. Critique of racism, alcoholism and violence in post-war Ireland is conveyed by integrating visual images' highly ambiguous and socio-political implications into the texts, which makes the novel an iconotext where intersemiotic transposition occurs.

Keywords *The Book of Evidence*, Ekphrasis, Colonialism, Iconotext, Intersemiotic

1. Introduction

The Book of Evidence (1989) is a novel written by the contemporary Irish writer John Banville (1945-). The book was shortlisted for Britain's Booker Prize and won Ireland's Guinness Peat Aviation Award in 1989. This novel not only marks Banville's thematic shift from science to art but also his creation matures. It was compared with the writing of Albert Camus and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The narrator of the story is Freddie, a 38-year-old scientist, who has been living abroad for many years and returns to his ancestral home seeking money after falling foul of a gangster in the Mediterranean. Shocked to discover that his mother has sold the family's collection of paintings, Freddie attempts to get them back and murders a servant girl during an attempt to steal one of the paintings from the rich neighbor. He also reflects upon his atrocious crime after being arrested. A mixture of literature and visual images is one of the typical features of the novel. An important part of Freddie's analysis of his brutal murder

concerns the painting *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* which has fascinated and tempted him into committing a crime. Besides, there are many representations of pictorial works of art by painters like William Hogarth, Jan Steen, El Greco, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Ekphrasis is a central concept in studies dealing with relations between word and image. The word derives from the Greek 'ekphrassein' which means speaking out or expressing. In ancient Greek, ekphrasis, as a rhetoric device, involves "the rhetorical description of a person, place, or thing" with verbal techniques [1]. Ekphrasis can be of any length, any subject matter, composed in verse or prose. During the Renaissance, the term evolved into a poetic device and referred to poems inspired by a certain visual art. It did not become current in critical discourse until the second half of the twentieth century. Only when was it applied regularly to modern literature such as poetry, plays and fiction. A modern understanding of the term involves literary genre and mainly refers to "the verbal representation of visual representation" [2] and is defined as a narrative or descriptive illusion to a verbal work of art, real or imagined. The modern definition of ekphrasis deriving from Heffernan is narrower. Subject of modern ekphrasis is restricted to visual arts which excludes non-representational visual images like buildings. The book is defined as ekphrastic novel due to its juxtaposition of verbal representation and visual images. The current discussion gravitates toward the ancient definition of ekphrasis, at it aims to explore the interactions between words and visual images, with its subject matter limited to mainly paintings and occasionally perceptual images of persons and places.

Ekphrastic passages usually represent events and characters in visual images, physical medium of its object, its creator and the eyewitness who reacts to the object. Unlike graphic *novel* and comic strips, the modern example of combining of words and visual images whose "representation of visual images is abbreviated and reduced almost to the same extent as the text is" [3], ekphrastic passages are adjunct to a larger text. Visual images are often implied as pretexts or subtexts, resulting in an iconotext in which "verbal and visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images" [4]. Ekphrastic texts involve the intertextual use of one medium in another medium or intersemiotic transposition. "Ekphrasis is a process of intersemiotic transposition, i.e., verbal representation of nonverbal systems" [5]. The intersemiotic transposition makes literature a much more complex system of aesthetic signs whose elements are borrowed from other complex sign systems. Thus, literature is a "secondary semiotic system" where its materials and constituents serve other semiotic purposes [6]. This paper aims to explore the iconotext's intersemiotic transposition between arbitrary language system and visual images, either material or perceptual, and explore how the combination of these two forms of signs is achieved and how novel's themes are embedded in

verbal representations of images.

Critics have been bickering about the novel's ekphrastic texts. Mark O'Connell [7] acknowledges the central significance of paintings in terms of characters' psychology and argues that Freddie's engagement with art is "deeply narcissistic". Murphy [8] focuses on the connection between the spatial stillness of paintings and the narrative frame of the novel, holding that "the painting affects the temporal sequence that shapes the novel by introducing some of the quality of the stillness that is so frequently *associated* with the still-life painting" However, neither of them takes the historical background against which the story set into consideration. Both neglect the connection between paintings, cultural signs, and the novel's sub-themes. Initially, the paper discusses derogative verbal descriptions of economic disadvantaged labor people and women without subjectivity, analyzes how these verbal representations of perceptual images project paintings with racism implication and demonstrates the narrator's displacement of his inborn racism. Considering the economic and social background of the story, the paper seeks to analyze the ekphrastic representations of pubs and demonstrates that the verbal representations are alluded to a series of symbolic paintings with profound colonial implications. It is suggested that the verbal representations of a single moment, also known as the painting's pregnant moment, imply Irish Anglophile's identity crisis, the overall inequality between 1980s and 1990s as well as social problems such as alcoholism. Finally, the paper focuses on the comparison between the imagined life, ekphrastic narration of the woman in the painting and the scene in which Freddie ends the maid's life. It is concluded that the protagonist's inability to see others in real life and the indifference among people critique the violence between Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland. The intersemiotic transposition between words and images not only makes the novel an iconotext but also makes the influences of colonialism, such as racism, alcoholism and violence, manifest in the novel.

2. Racism: Semiotic Other of Perceptual Images

The vivid verbal descriptions of residents in Spain's vacation spots are the representation of Freddie's perceptual images and denote Freddie's intrinsic racism. Compared with material graphic *images* such as pictures, statues and designs, perceptual images are less stable and more psychological based [9]. Emanating from "sense data", "perceptual images" of the gazed object is created. It often reveals the speaker's "key values of culture and the images attached to them" [10]. In the novel, the descriptive verbal representation of people in the Mediterranean vacation spot is derogative. For Freddie, the shop owner is "*swarthy and fat*", women are "*hard eyed*" and "*gone*

leathery”, people on the island are generally depicted as “rabble” and “poor fools”, who have “worried, placatory, doggie sort of look”. The scene depicted in the novel is also disturbing. Spain is a “brutish, boring country”, the city “smelled of sex and chlorine” and “the night train is jammed with half a dozen reeking peasants in cheap suits” [11]. In ekphrastic passages, the author resources metaphor and simile to achieve vividness and brings the subject matter before the reader’s eye. Ekphrasis uses “verbal techniques” and “brings its subject before the eyes” [1]. These derogative similes and metaphors invite readers to identify with the narrator and imagine these metaphors of discriminating implications.

Perceptual images of people on Mediterranean island are products of Freddie’s arbitrary language symbolic system which entails a sense of political and cultural domination. Language is an arbitrary symbolic system which “signifies its object by means of association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified” [12]. In the interweaving of words and images, the relationship between ideas conveyed by words and the signified perceptual image fundamentally concerns a power relation. An ekphrastic text or the act of representing visual images verbally is a process by which language encounters its own semiotic other. In other words, the silent and fixed image is subject to the driving forces of symbolic language and the verbal interpretation. The verbal representation of visual image amounts to a “re-inscription of language authority speaker” and visual images are the semiotic others as they are “not given a voice to dictate their own stories”. The otherness of perceptual images reflects the social structure of ekphrasis where a seen object is othered by a speaking/ seeing subject. The intersemiotic transposition of language and images is associated with the difference between the (speaking) self and the (seen) other. “Self” is often understood to be an “active, speaking, seeing subject”, while “the other is projected as a passive, seen (usually) silent object or semiotic other” and “racial otherness is open to precisely this sort of visual/verbal coding” [13]. The marginalized race often is often reduced to a mute object defined by skin color, facial features, hair, and so on. Superior race, by contrast, is the speaking subject with a normative subjectivity and humanity. As specified above, Freddie is the active and speaking subject who likes an “exiled king”, “heroes”, has a “coherence and wholeness, an essential authenticity”, and receives “tributes” [11], while inhabitants on the island are the semiotic others afraid of him and paying tributes. Languages couched in debased terms reflect Freddie’s racial discrimination and displaced identity as the active speaking subject.

Freddie’s sense of superiority and hostility towards Mediterranean labor people is closely connected to Ireland’s colonial history. Although Britain’s colonization of Ireland ended in 1921 with the signing of *Anglo-Irish Treaty*, centuries’ oppression and domination led to serious psychological and social problems as well as cultural

pathologies. The emergence of racism is a manifestation of one of these *pathologies* which is labelled “displacement of anger”. It refers to a pattern where “anger which is rightly felt towards the colonizer is displaced onto peers, such as the colonized or onto groups who are more subordinate” and “revulsion at the sight of scenes of destitution and poverty being re-enacted” [14]. Both the scientist’s pro-British identity and Irish economic boom starting from 1980s enabled him to displace his anger towards subordinated labor people.

Freddie is a descendant of those who tend to follow English practices in matters of culture, science, and law, which bestows him a role of superiority. His father is an Irish Catholic who sticks to British identity and supports British colonization. The old man despises Irish native people and refers to the native Irish language as the “native jabber”, wears expensive handmade shoes and “Charvet ties” imported from Britain. *Influenced* by his father, Freddie displays his superiority early in childhood, imagining himself as a “prince enthroned on the high seat of Morris Oxford” and “star[ed] back at the passing promenade” who are afraid of him [11]. As Jones [15] puts it, Freddie’s role of superiority could be “interpreted as springing from a mimetic origin”. Besides family identity, the social-economic dominance of Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s further confirms his colonialist and racist identity. By the 1980s, Irish economic development was such that it was “sufficient to narrow the gap between Irish and British incomes” [16]. The economic boom in 1990s, also known as Celtic Tiger, made Ireland “more pluralist, egalitarian and international in outlook at the end of twentieth century than it was earlier in that century” [17]. The economic gap between Irish and Spain empowers Freddie’s sense of superiority and discrimination against people of a lower social status.

The Mediterranean people naturally become the seen object and semiotic other for Freddie via his depiction of their clothes, appearances and living conditions. Compared with Ireland, Spain was less-developed in the 20th century. In contrast, at the beginning of the 20th century, Spain was still mostly rural and modern industry existed only in few provinces even with the stimulus of World War I. The gap was widened even worse with the 1973 oil crisis:

Because of the failure to adjust to the drastically changed economic environment brought on by the two oil price shocks of the 1970s, Spain quickly confronted plummeting productivity, an explosive increase in wages from 1974 to 1976, a reversal of migration trends as a result of the economic slump throughout Western Europe, and the steady outflow of labor from agricultural areas despite declining *job* prospects in the cities. All these factors joined in producing a sharp rise in unemployment [18].

As a result, Spain was depicted as the undeveloped subordinated region where hostility can be displaced. Both the Pro-Britain identity and the country’s economic edge

contribute to *Freddie's* affirmation of superiority and his displacement of anger towards people of a lower social class.

The perceptual images of women, even Freddie's wife, are the semiotically othered as well. Freddie's verbal/visual coding of his wife also conforms to his colonialist identity by alluding to paintings imbued with implications of discrimination. According to Ashis Nandy [19], colonialism "produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity". Women, like the poor, belong to the subordinated groups where anger and hostility can be displaced. In the history of ekphrasis, ekphrasis often stages "the dominant gender stereotypes into the semiotic structure of the image-text where the image is identified a feminine while the speaking/seeing subject of the text is identified as masculine" [13]. His wife, Daphne, whose name originally indicative of a statue, is a semiotic other subjected to the gaze of her husband. Like other female characters, Daphne never obtains her own voice throughout the novel and remains the visual other and mute object represented by Freddie. As Frehner [20] suggests, women in Banville's novels are "complementary figures" who are all "mediated through the mind of a male protagonist, a narrator". Recalling their first encounter in America, Freddie notes that "*Daphne was sitting cross-legged in a canvas chair, shelling peas into a nickel bowl. She wore a bathrobe, and her hair was wrapped in a towel*" [11]. The ekphrastic text's association with painting is prompted by the semantic value of the words used in the portrayal. Daphne is seen against a canvas who cannot speak for herself. Male dominance is more striking in terms of the ekphrastic text's allusion to real paintings. The ekphrastic scene is alluded to the painting entitled "Woman Shelling Peas", which is "a realistic rendering of a domestic scene by a Spanish or Dutch master" [21]. For Freddie, Daphne appears to be a person to be painted who is wrapped in canvas silently and waits to be interpreted by a master.

Words used to represent people of a lower social and economic status as well as women make the novel an iconotext where visual images and alluded paintings provide subtext for the novel. On the one hand, the verbal representations of images make readers "see" the subjects in their mind's eye. On the other hand, the ekphrastic contexts and the otherness of visual representations point to the subordination of the mute semiotic other and the emergence of racism displayed by the Anglophilic protagonist.

3. Alcoholism: Speaking Parlare of Symbolic Images

Ekphrastic descriptive texts about buildings such as

prisons and pubs show *evidence* for a pervasive use of drugs and alcohol. Instead of focusing on the construction and appearance of the building, Freddie represents the prison in terms of "res ipsae", events and persons in visual images, and the "animadversor", eyewitness who reacts to the object [22]. With the representation of prisoners' behavior and Freddie's own feelings for prison as an eyewitness, the silent prison becomes a symbol of alcoholism and drug abuse. "It [the pub] was a cavernous place, very dark" and the working-class pub is "with protective steel mesh covering windows and old vomit-stains around the doorway". Even institutions such as prisons have become a secret market where drug and alcohol trafficking is deliberately covered up.

I know that on one, not even the prosecution, likes a squealer, but I think it is my duty to apprise the court of the brisk trade in proscribed substances which is carried on in this institution. There are screws, I mean warders, involved in it, I can supply their numbers if I am guaranteed protection. Anything can be had, uppers and downers, tranqs, horse, crack, you name it—not that you, of course, your worship, are likely to be familiar with these terms from the lower depths, I have only learned them myself since coming here. As you would imagine, it is mainly the young men who indulge. One recognizes them, stumbling along the gangways like somnambulists, with that little, wistful, stunned smile of the truly zonked [11].

Descriptive ekphrastic texts often focus on "qualities of persons, objects or places, multiplicity of details and sensory appearances and impressions" [22]. The ekphrastic passages speak to *Ireland's* wide prevalence of alcohol-related problems in a less explicit manner by specifying the name of the drugs and the drug abusers' strange behaviors. At that time, the independent country had among the highest rates of alcohol consumption and drug abuse in the EU. An earlier health policy document, the *Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Interim Report* had noted that "between 1989 and 1999, alcohol consumption per capita increased by 41%, while ten of the European Union Member States showed a decrease and three other countries showed a modest increase during the same period" [23]. The high-level alcohol consumption and the prosperous alcohol industry are closely connected with the colonial history. Thus, the prison transcends a building for punishment and attains a kind of "visible speech or parlare" [24], a speech full of symbolic meaning and implications.

The high tolerance of drunkenness and drug abuse in the novel reflects the country's vulnerability to the dominated global capitalism and its new hegemonic structures reminiscent of those of colonial domination. Drinkers with messy dresses in dirty and noisy working-class pubs represent the poor majority in the increasingly industrialized and globalized country. By the late 1980s, Ireland achieved great economic success and the 1990s saw the great economic development, widely referred to as

“the Celtic Tiger”. Increasing exports, higher personal consumption and a rapid increase in investment have contributed to the country’s increasing prosperity. The alcohol industry has become one of the key economic sectors during the country’s globalization. The government receives revenue from alcohol sales and “no managerial initiatives have been taken in relation to alcohol” [25]. The lack of regulation on alcohol sales across the governmental institutions provides a fertile ground for drinks industry to lobby. Moreover, post-colonial Ireland is affected by social polarization and inequality. In contrast to its rapid economic growth throughout the 1990s were the growth of relative poverty, inequality, and occupational stratification, as well as declining welfare effort. “Those falling below relative income thresholds are falling further and further behind the middle of the income distribution” [26]. As a result, the country’s economic growth at all costs led to high levels of drug and alcohol trafficking and abuse.

The verbal representations of prisoners and poor customers of the dirty pub represent victims marginalized in the country’s economic development and social transformation. Their sufferings from distribution inequality are testimonies to elite dominated patterns reminiscent of those in colonial domination. Colonialism is a well-developed system of domination and the post-colonial state itself is “thus a system of domination in which positions of power vacated by colonizers are occupied by the native elites” and thus “a post-colonial state would perpetuate the pattern of inequality and marginalization” [14]. The independent Ireland is such an increasingly industrialized and globalized country where its economic development co-occurs with social polarization and overall inequality. Children of middle-class parents “continue to enjoy a substantial advantage in access to the more privileged occupations” while “young people from working origins are increasingly expressed in the risk of becoming unemployed and make up the majority of crime and alcoholism” [27]. As Freddie confesses, when facing difficulties, drinking renders him “a kind of numbed euphoria” and a sense of “solace”. Those who are left behind in the social transformation are more likely to be heavy drinkers and less likely to achieve social mobility.

The speaking parlare of pub as a symbol of the colonial aftermath is *achieved* by projecting political paintings. After killing the maid, Freddie goes to a pub and observes that:

In a lighted place like a stage, some youths with shaven heads and outsize lace-up boots were playing a game of billiards. The balls whirred and clacked, the young men softly swore. It was like something out of Hogarth, a group of wigless surgeons, say, intent over the dissecting table. The barman, arms folded and mouth open, was watching a horse-race on the television set perched high up on a shelf in a corner above him. A tubercular young man in a black shortie overcoat came in and stood beside me,

breathing and fidgeting. [...] Blue horses galloped in silence over bright-green turf [11].

The scene where the blue horse race galloped in the bright-green turf again alludes to paintings depicting the England Civil War with tragic consequences for Ireland. The English Civil War (1642-1651) was a series of civil wars and political machinations between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists. According to Canon-Roger [21], the image of the horse and the turf is reminiscent of the painting *Blaue Reiter*, which depicts a horseman in blue cloak galloping across a meadow on a white horse with a forest in the background.

The repetition of the image of “horse” implies the wealthier Royalist supporters of King Charles I and Charles II of England. The Royalist is also called “Cavalier”, a term derived from the Latin word “cavaliere” and the French word “chevalier”, meaning “horseman” [28]. Descriptions such as “youth with shaven heads” and “a group of wigless surgeons” are also closely related to the Civil War in England. The Parliamentarians in support of the Parliament of England often wore their hair closely cropped round the head or flat and were thus known as the “Roundheads”. Both the “youth with shaven heads” and the “wigless surgeons” insinuated the Roundheads in the English Civil War. The English Civil War accelerated the British colonization of Ireland. The English Civil War was not restricted to England, but also involved wars with Scotland and Ireland. When the Cavaliers were defeated by the Roundheads, Cromwell landed at Dublin in 1649 with an army to quell the Royalist alliance and the last Irish Confederate and the Royalist troops did not surrender until 1653 when Ireland was completely under the control of Britain. Way as in a painting, the despise for colonialism is conveyed in the pregnant moment of the verbal representation of the pub. “Pregnant moment” of an action is the arrested point presented in paintings and “most implies what came before the moment and what is to follow it” [2]. In most cases, the verbal representation in ekphrasis aspires to present “the atemporal eternity of the stopped-action painting” [29]. The ekphrastic texts present the drinkers’ and youths’ frozen-actions as in a painting and the speaking parlare of the pregnant moment implies the tragic history of colonization.

The speaking speech of silent images is furthered established by alluding to the paintings by William Hogarth which ridicules the consequential alcohol-related social problems resulting from social inequality. As an English painter, William Hogarth’s works are known for satirical caricature. The artist is in support of policies towards reducing the consumption of wine and warns of the consequences of alcoholism in one of the foremost alcohol-related paintings entitled *Beer Street and Gin Lane* (1751), featuring two *real* places, (Beer Street and Gin Lane). Beer Street is portrayed as a happy and healthy dwelling where people drink much weaker English beer moderately. While those who live in Gin Lane, a notorious

slum district, are destroyed by their addiction to the foreign spirit of gin. Contrast to the thriving commerce in Beer Street, Gin Lane shows the shocking scenes of infanticide, starvation, madness, decay, and suicide. The theme of the work is “gin and the negative effects it has when consumed in high quantities” and is reflective of the real situation in the divided Irish society, people leading a miserable life in Gin Lane are also the victims of social inequality. Just as the critic comments, “contrasts between these two areas allude to the prosperity of Beer Street as the cause of the misery found in Gin Lane” [30]. The verbal representation of the pub brought to life an image of the object. Meanwhile, the novel’s theme is made more explicit by the political implications of the paintings. The images of “youth with shaven heads”, “wigless surgeons” “galloping horse” and the paintings of Hogarth are indexes referring to the same object—colonialism and its aftermath, which form an iconotext tempting readers to speculate on the paintings’ relation to the themes of the novel.

Freddie’s verbal representations of the visual images of the prison and the pub not only speak to the theme, but also throw light on his own psychology. His verbal descriptions of the pub convey Freddie’s acute awareness of the social problems, this keen perception into inequality and empathy for socially and economically disadvantaged people. Although he justifies his role of a colonialist as demonstrated in section two “Racism: semiotic other oh perceptual images” of this paper, he is too aware of his *sameness* to the upper-class Irish and even classes himself as inferior. Looking up at the big house with the golden salon, Freddie notes that “I wanted my share of this richness, this gilded ease”. Moreover, he often feels alienated by the post-colonial Irish society, “*I looked at the streets, the buildings, the people, as if for the last time. I, who is a countryman at heart—yes, yes, it’s true—and never really knew or cared for the city, even when I lived here, had come to love it now. Love? That is not a word I use very often*” [11]. The protagonist’s hybrid identity lies at the heart of his sense of marginalization and indignation for social inequality.

Freddie’s overlapping identities are also the product of colonization—a British and Protestant-controlled Ireland that was once part of a wider British world. For Freddie, the Catholic and Protestant identity interlock and he often gravitates toward a nostalgic feeling about the old good days of British colonization.

The world, the only worthwhile world, had ended with the last viceroy’s departure from the shores, after that had been taken away from us and our kind—our kind being Castle Catholics, as he [Freddie’s father] liked to say, yes, sir, Castle Catholics, and proud of it! But I think there was less pride than chagrin. I think he was secretly ashamed not to be a Protestant [11].

In this passage, Freddie admits that he and his father are both “Castle Catholics”, which is a derogatory term for an Irish who is perceived as Anglophilic in matters of

culture or politics. In the specific context, it means “the native Irishman or Irishwoman whose sympathies lie toward England” [31]. In other words, Freddie’s family is pro-Britain. On the one hand, Freddie, influenced by his father, affirms his Protestant religious distinctiveness, and was once privileged economically. On the other hand, there is also the recognition of an Irish national identity. Although he is not as poor as the unemployed, it is difficult for him to accept the family declining by the end of colonization. With the identity crisis and the past of the good old days, Freddie is overwhelmed by inferiority and marginalization.

The descriptive verbal representations of the pub and the prison by resorting to its symbolic meanings display problems of alcohol abuse and the character’s hybrid identity. The paintings and images, with representation of their pregnant moments, provide a kind of speech parlare that is closely related to a satiric interpretation of the colonial theme of the novel.

4. Violence: Envoicing of Iconic Pictures

The verbal representation of painting *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* is achieved through an imagined narrative account of the murder and the interpretation of the crime. Besides description-based ekphrastic passages, ekphrasis also involves narrative patterns where texts proceed in a temporal order, events narrated in sequence indicated using temporal adverbs. By converting verbal representation into a narrative, the narrator can extend “description over that which preceded and that which followed the single moment represented in the work of art”. As a result, the energy of narrative “permeates and aminates” the silent image and gives it voice [24]. In other words, narrative ekphrasis texts have the potential to provide more information compared with descriptive ekphrastic texts. Narrations about iconic portrait of the woman reveal the Ireland’s violence and alienation in the 20th century. Freddie cruelly kills the maid with a hammer when the servant prevents him from stealing the painting, which draws irresistibly the interest of the protagonist. Associating his first encounter with the painting, Freddie describes the woman as seeming to look at him “*with careful, cold attention*”. And he continues, “*It was not just the woman’s painted stare that watched me. Everything in that picture, that brooch, those gloves, the flocculent darkness at her back, every spot on the canvas was an eye fixed on me unblinkingly.*” Attempting to account for this insistent gaze, Freddie writes,

There is something in the way the woman regards me, the querulous, mute insistence of her eyes, which I can neither escape nor assuage. I squirm in the grasp of her gaze. She requires of me some great effort, some tremendous feat of scrutiny and attention, of which I do not think I am capable. It is as if she were

asking me to let her live [11].

The painted woman is an essentially mute icon which “exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject” [12], i.e., the real woman. However, it is “animated” by Freddie’s verbal narration. Rather than a mere replica of the visual art, ekphrasis “animates the fixed figures of visual art and turns the picture of a single moment into a narrative of successive action” [2]. The woman being painted couldn’t speak for herself, but verbal representation from the perspective of the narrator’s emotional response not only animates the freezing instant of the portrait but also moves beyond to provide pretexts for the novel’s plot of murder and the novel’s ethical concerns against the historical background of colonial violence.

Making commentaries and imaginary reconstruction of the life of the painted woman, Freddie narratively envoices the silent object. When the fixed forms of images are turned into a narrative, ekphrasis “entails prosopopeia, or the rhetorical technique of envoking a silent object” [2]. In other words, unlike the implication presented by the single moment of fixed paintings, narrations based on the single moment deliver from the pregnant moment and make explicit the story that visual art tells only by implications. Freddie empowers the painted woman with a voice by projecting his own images onto her. In his elaborate representation of painting, Freddie treats the painted woman as a human being with thoughts, feelings, and irresistible charm. Apart from the description of the woman’s appearance, Freddie also gives an elaborated narration of the woman’s life, social background and thoughts which echoes his own thoughts and feelings. Like Freddie, the woman is imagined to be a descendant of a declining family, despises servants, and is alienated by her surroundings, “*She is strict with the servants, and will permit no familiarities. Their dislike she takes for respect*”. Furthermore, she is overwhelmed with a sense of dividedness like Freddie. In Freddie’s imagination, the woman looks at her own portrayal and thinks “*it is someone she does not recognize*” [11], a monologue speech given by Freddie. By projecting his own thoughts and feelings on the painting, Freddie renders her power to speak and appropriates her as his own categories, values, and experiences imagination.

The imaginative envoking of the iconic painting is crucial to Freddie’s moral and ethical reasoning, influenced by values of colonization, which is perceived as constitutive of moral reasoning. According to moral sentiments theories, “moral judgements are based on shared feelings or sentiments, rather than on rationally derived moral laws” [32]. In other words, moral appraisals require that one put themselves imaginatively in the place of others and imagine how they are feeling in a given situation. As Murphy [33] puts it, the woman in the picture “reflects his desires and fears”. By projecting his own values and experiences onto the woman painted, Freddie tends to feel great sympathy for the woman to the degree of

falling for the mute painting. However, comparing the imagined life that Freddie conjures for the painted woman with the scene in which he ends the maid’s life, it is evident that Freddie is incapable of viewing the others with alterity and making moral judgement in real life.

Freddie fails to envoice and imagines the maid was murdered. The ekphrastic texts about the victim are characterized by description instead of narration. He fails to show the same sympathy for the maid as he does to the painted woman, although Freddie nonetheless feels the gaze of the maid the moment he stole the painting. As he carries the painting from the room, Freddie senses behind the stare of the woman in the painting, “*another presence, watching me*”. Later, he repeats, “*The maid was watching me*”. He even notices that “*her eyes were wide*” and that “*she had the most extraordinary pale, violet eyes*”. Freddie, however, responds to the maid’s gaze in a completely different way. He violently drags her into his car; when she struggles and screams, he kills her. Just before the fatal blow with the hammer, however, we read:

I could not speak. I was filled with a kind of wonder. I had never felt another’s presence so immediately and with such raw force. I saw her now, really saw her, for the first time, her mousy hair and bad skin, that bruised look around her eyes. She was quite ordinary, and yet, somehow, I don’t know—somehow radiant. She cleared her throat and sat up, and detached a strand of hair that had caught at the corner of her mouth. You must let me go, she said, or you will be in trouble [11].

Most critics claim that Freddie’s lack of imagination for the maid leads him to committing the crime. “Freddie’s sin is that he did not imagine Josie vividly enough. He could not imagine her sufficiently because of his imagination [...] is caged by art” [34]. It might be argued that Freddie does not show the same moral imagination because he once admitted that he does not sufficiently see her. “*This is the worst, the essential sin, I think, [...] that failure of imagination is my real crime, the one that made the others possible*” [11]. However, these arguments failed to stand when all the ekphrastic texts of the maid are taken into consideration. The descriptive representation of the perceptual image of the maid is conveyed in detail with adjectives such as “mousy hair”, “bad skin” and “bruised look”. But compared with the emphatical narrated story given to the painted woman, such an ekphrastic description is a failure of imagination for a real person.

Thus, what underlies the violence is not a lack of imagination but a failure of imagination for a real person with alterity due to long-term violent conflicts. As shown in the passage quoted above, Freddie clearly sees the maid and feels her presence at the moment before he kills her. He never lacks imagination in the superficial portrayal of the maid. But Freddie never envoices the victim sympathetically because he fails to appropriate a real person as he projects his own feeling into the painted

woman. On the first confronting the maid, Freddie furnishes the maid with a servant stereotype whom he is completely indifferent to:

A maid was standing in the open French window. She must have come in just then and seen me there and started back in alarm. Her eyes were wide, and one knee was flexed and one hand lifted, as if to ward off a blow. For a moment neither of us stirred. [...] then, slowly, with her hand raised, she stepped backwards carefully through the window, teetering a little as her heels blindly sought the level of the paved pathway outside [11].

In these ekphrastic texts, Freddie imagines Josie as a shy, discreet, obedient country girl who has gone to serve in the Big House. After pushing her into the car, without recognizing the maid's existence, Freddie still tries to reinforce the silent image of the maid within the mold of such a lower-class servant stereotype through imagination. "She stopped at once, and looked at me wide-eyed, like a rebuked child". However, Josie Bell breaks loose from and resists the images with which Freddie tries to contain her through imagination. In fact, Josie is rebellious and brave. After being pushed into the car, she "pounded on the glass with her fists", "pummeled" Freddie on his shoulder and "got a hand round in front of my [Freddie's] face and tried to claw my [Freddie's] eyes" [11]. Her resistance challenges Freddie's imaginative appropriation. "The maid asserts herself as a truly other, strange and threatening" [35]. When his sense of superiority is challenged, Freddie wields the hammer and smashes the woman's head. Imagination could make one feel "approval or disapproval toward acts and character traits" [32]. Freddie denies the alterity and singularity of the maid as a real human being and reduces her to the servant stereotype and is unable to show sympathy to her because of her alterity. As soon as he feels threatened and embarrassed by Josie Bell's difference from what he had imagined her to be, Freddie feels disapproval toward Josie Bell and kills her. Freddie's cruelty and inability to see others in real life are filled with references to the alienation and disorientation among people against a background of colonialism induced violence.

The iconic painting-related murder hints at the violence in contemporary Ireland. *The Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* is said to have been painted between 1655 and 1660 by a Dutch master, as the names of Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Vermeer are suggested. The painting lures Freddie into violent killing, and the period mentioned also indicates violent massacre. It is exactly when the Dutch and English Republics were closely dependent on one another. The Second Anglo-Dutch War broke out in 1665 resulting from Britain's colonial expansion. The tragic fate of Ireland under Cromwell's colonization and the massacres also took place at the time. During 1649-1653, Cromwell re-conquered Ireland by the forces of the English Parliament during the British Civil War. When

Cromwell's Parliamentary army defeated the Confederate and Royalist coalition in Ireland, Cromwell passed a series of laws against Roman Catholics and killed around 4,000 Royalist or Confederate soldiers and took 2,517 prisoners [36]. The acts of terrorism and the political situation in Ireland reflect the contemporary social reality.

The central events of the murder in the novel show Banville's concern for social reality—indifference and alienation among people in a violent-dominated period. Freddie's murder of the maid is based on the 1982 case of Malcolm Edward MacArthur, who killed a young nurse in Dublin when stealing her car. Furthermore, the fictional murder is situated in a broader social context. Banville does concede that the core subject of the novel, or Freddie's "failure of imagination" holds resonance for the Omagh Bombing (1998) and the general failure of imagination that accompanied the violence in Ireland between the 1960s and 1990s. The Omagh bombing was a car bombing on 15 August 1998 in the town of Omagh in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. It was carried out by a group who called themselves the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA), a Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) who opposed the IRA's ceasefire in Northern Ireland. What lies at the heart of the bomb is the issue about the status of Northern Ireland resulting from Britain's colonization. After the Independence War, Northern Ireland remained with the United Kingdom. But Irish nationalists and republicans wanted Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and to join a united Ireland. To achieve the goal, IRA resorts to terrorism by damaging the economy and causing severe disruption of Northern Ireland, aiming to pressure the British government to withdraw. The conflicts lasted about 30 years from the late 1960s to 1998, better known as *The Troubles*. When the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) signed agreements of ceasefire with Northern Ireland in 1998, the dissident members of the IRA, who considered this as a betrayal of the republican struggle for a united Ireland, left in October 1997 to form the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA) and made the car bombing. The constant violence confrontations caused great damage to both sides.

Freddie's inability to imagine real people and violent murder parodies those who can only envocate the silent non-human image with projection of their own experience but fail to recognize the real existence with different values due to violent social upheaval. Apart from the victim Josie Bell, Freddie never intimately engaged with people in real life. He has uneasy relationships with his mother and wife and has trouble making sense of the kindness among human beings, "how account for these small, unbidden gestures of kindness and of care [11]? Freddie's inability to accept others' alterity and difference is the epitome of social reality. As Banville admits in an interview:

I realized many years after I had written it that *The Book of Evidence* was, in many ways, about Ireland because it was about the failure of imagination and

the failure to imagine other people into existence. You can only plant a bomb in Omagh main street if the people walking around in the street are not really human. And what happened in Ireland in the last 30 years was a great failure of imagination [37].

Understanding others through what one assumes them to be imaginatively and the inability to accept the difference of others are the failure of imagination in the 20th century Ireland when goal was achieved at the cost of human lives. Commenting on the moral reasoning of post-colonial country, Moane [14] holds that one of the syndromes in the post-colonial country suffers from the “social irresponsibility” which is manifest most obviously “in disregard and disrespect for lives, laws, rules and regulations” and the roots of this pattern “may be traced to hostility towards the colonial regime, combined with the need to survive at all cost”. Freddie’s imaginative narrative about the painting and failed narrative of the maid are typical of the people of social irresponsibility who are influenced by the social moral values in the violence dominated society.

The narrative ekphrastic texts are not only the verbal equivalent of the painting itself or basic portrayal of the maid Josie Bell, but also give voice to the silent figures to speak. With contrast between narrative evoking of mute icon and superficial description of real people, the novel achieves the integrity of words and images and reveals social problems of the ethical reasoning and failure of imagination in the post-colonial country which is full of constant violent conflicts.

5. Conclusion

The Book of Evidence is typical of juxtaposition of visual images and literature. The co-presence of words and images and its intermedial venture are crucial to the understanding of the novel. The combination of images and words not only creates new novel forms where spatial stillness of visual art is incorporated into fiction, but also conveys the novel’s themes which are embedded into the symbolic language used in the verbal representation, the pregnant moment of the image represented and the narrative given to the mute visual art. Words applied to the portrayal of people on an underdeveloped Mediterranean island and women reveal the Anglo-Irish protagonist’s racism toward the economic and sexual subordinated objects. What lies behind the racist hostility is the displacement of colonial anger of those who have an economic edge or identity superiority over the inferior semiotic other. The ekphrastic texts reflect such a power relationship between the speaking superior subject and the mute inferior object. The descriptive ekphrastic texts about the pub and the drinkers are equivalent to the pregnant moment of alluded paintings. The vivid verbal portrayal of the instant moment of the pub evokes the power-dominated

colonial history and critiques its consequences of social inequality, identity hybridity and alcoholism in a new social order that is similar to that of a colonized one. By narratively reconstructing the life of the iconic picture, *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* and describing image of the maid, Freddie envoices the mute image of the painted woman yet fails to master the mute image of the maid. The murder scene that is based on the real case and the verbal representations of the painting are filled with references to the colonial violence in Ireland. The contrast between ekphrastic narrative and descriptive texts exposes Freddie’s failure of imagination and inability to accept the alterity and differences of others, which is a parody of the alienation of contemporary Ireland where political and religious goals are pursued through violence at the expense of innocent lives.

With the engagement with meaning and presence of art, Banville shows concern for Ireland and creates art forms that move beyond Irish realistic literary tradition of writers such as James Joyce. Meantime, ekphrasis, as verbal representation of visual images, displays a struggle for dominance between images and words as well as the complementary nature of two different signs. The combination of language and paintings enables Banville to convey meaning. For writers, reality is given meaning through language. However, language is an arbitrary symbolic system where an arbitrary set of signs define the concept of reality. Writers and artists cannot stand outside of the system to get meaning fully conveyed. But paintings, as different signs, lie beyond language. With verbal representation of visual images, narrations on the one hand give voice to the mute paintings as mute iconic sign, which directly represents thought, evaluates what it narrates and passes judgements on characters. On the other hand, descriptions of visual images show the traits of static referential signs and provide implied information which relies on readers to construct the meaning without language. Thus, the novel is an iconotext where meaning and truth are approached via a mingling of different signs.

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