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Patricia Coughlan

Banville, the Feminine, and the Scenes of Eros

> …on the surface, that's where there's depth.[1]

> I fell into a dream. There was a room, cool, marble, tiled, as in a Roman villa…a low table bearing unguents in porphyry pots and coloured glass phials… On the couch, of which I was permitted only a three-quarters view, a woman was lying back, young, ample, impossibly pale skinned, her naked arms lifted and hiding her face in abandonment and shame. Beside her sat a turbaned negress, naked also, a mountainous figure with polished melony thighs and big hard gleaming breasts and broad pink palms. The middle finger and thumb of her right hand were plunged to the knuckle and ball in the two holes of the woman's wantonly offered lap. I noted the angry-pink frilling of the vagina, dainty as the volutes of a cat's ear, and the taut oiled tea-coloured cincture of the anus. The slave turned her head and looked at me over her shoulder with a broad, jaunty grin and for my benefit joggled her mistress's gaping flesh, and the woman shuddered and made a mewling sound. In succubus sleep my face formed a rictus, and as the little seizure took me I arched my back and pressed the back of my head into the pillow and then went still and lay like that for a long moment, like a dead dictator lying in state sunk to his ears in the plush.[2]

> …Anna lifted her bruised, glistening mouth from between Daphne's legs and, glancing back at me with a complicitous, wry little smile, leaned aside so that I might see the sprawled girl's lap lying open there, intricate and innocent as a halved fruit.[3]

Banville's large philosophical themes have attracted most of the attention in the discussion of his work, along with the question of its modernist or post-modernist

character, and, lately, its ethics; there have recently begun to be feminist approaches also. What if, for a change, we were to consider a domain below the radar, so to speak, of most existing criticism, namely the erotics of his work? As the above passages show, these often achieve a remarkable, sometimes a disturbing, vividness of effect. This essay explores the character and fictional purposes of erotic representations in his middle and later work. I focus in particular on the insistent recurrence of threesomes, which the *Newton Letter* narrator calls 'bouts of ghostly troilism'.[4] Such threesomes, usually constituted, like the scenes above, of a male and two female characters, appear in one form or another throughout his writings. In the *Eclipse* passage the action is distanced by being played out in a dream, holding at bay the constitutively voyeuristic character of the spectacle, which has strong overtones of sadism and racism. This scene is only the most vivid item in a sequence of narrative imagery involving exotic eros: Orientalist motifs join Sadeian ones in a half-submerged pattern, which like so much in Banville is equivocally ironised by a narrator keenly aware of his own tinselled but tawdry fantasies.[5]

The simulacrum or conjuror effects, simultaneously vivid and insubstantial, whereby Banville endlessly instantiates, then teasingly withdraws, his scenes and settings, and the quasi-realist characterisations of his protagonists, nevertheless allow for a high degree of erotic investment in the scenes of sexual performance, but this has gone curiously unremarked. In this essay I shall explore the character and patterns of those performances rather than from the big categories – ideological, aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical – which the author, like the silkier of his protagonists, seems to invite his critics to grapple with.

These categories crowd back in, of course, once we try to ponder the significance of this collection of erotic and other triads, but they may wear a different guise when approached, as it were, from below. Once the presence of the erotic is explicitly acknowledged, it is difficult to contain it within a limited sphere or at one interpretative level, so pervasive is it within the human. So, when we grasp the Ariadne's thread offered by the troilist scenes, we quickly find that the threesome pattern cannot be confined to the sex scenes in the novels, strikingly frequent as these are. I therefore keep the triadic and

the erotic at the centre of my discussion, but attend to other strands in Banville's representations as these get drawn in.

In real life the erotic generates as-if scenarios with a character of virtuality or play, thereby resembling the actions and stories of art. But in its miming, it must retain the unsettling tendency to suggest, mirror and affect reality. Erotic fantasy already partakes, then, of the nature of fiction. In intimating such analogues between fantasy life and fictional action, Banville is somewhat less radical than another powerful postmodern erotic fabulist, Angela Carter, who experiments in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) with breaking the psyche-world barrier, using vampire, ghost, and so-called 'fairytale' narrative genres. He adopts different generic tactics, following the model of Beckett's and Nabokov's male 'seedy solipsists' who roll out whole fictional worlds within their all-controlling and all-naming inner monologues. But Banville's whole vision is characterised by a balancing act between programmatic disavowals of what Barthes called *l'effet du réel*, and the provision of fictional illusions sufficiently convincing to engage the reader. In his work, as in Carter's fables, all is psyche but all is also world, which disarms literalist critical approaches.

Despite being made of words, Banville's erotic is overwhelmingly visual – theatrical or painterly, but always a scene – and its typical dispositions are of a man watching and women watched. On rare occasions these polarities are reversed, as in A's *mise-en-scène* in *Athena* of her own and Freddie's copulation before the bored prostitute. But the voyeuristic position generally trumps countervailing, exhibitionist impulses in the psychology of Banville's protagonists, for whom surveillance is always an excitant, whether emotional or erotic or both. Visuality in various forms plays a central role in his imagination, particularly the seen and scenes of all kinds (including the erotic), drawing as they do both on popular theatre and on high art. This visuality may be the distinctive characteristic of his writing. Developing an analysis which would consider it as form rather than as content may prove more productive than following the carefully laid allusive trails of his protagonists' articulate reflections, poised as they are between self-serving, self-pitying, and moving. In one important form of that disavowal of realist characterisation, which deliberately induces scepticism about the fullness or roundness even of the main protagonists, Banville draws on old popular-drama traditions. He often

constructs his characters not only as splinters, avatars, prefigurings or alter egos, but often also as stock figures from puppet, circus, and *commedia dell' arte*, such as Punch, the sinister clown and Harlequin-Pierrot. The thinness of these characters is their point: in his frequent use of clown and puppet tropes, Banville recapitulates modernist gestures which drew on the expressivity of carnival and circus as what Benjamin Buchloh calls 'masquerades of alienation from present history'.[6] This idea is strikingly resonant in the context of Banville's appropriations from that history of such archetypal figures as murderer, spy, and discredited master-theorist, in his 1990s and 2000s work. Buchloh describes the related use of puppets by modernist artists as 'appear[ing] on the stage set of reification', but Lukács' term may serve to highlight the absence in Banville of questions of power, difference, or indeed mass-cultural reproduction. Perhaps such issues are refracted, or at least are meant to be, back onto a Subject no longer autonomous, but reconceived as, in equal measure, monstrously controlling and deluded. Banville's protagonists often seem, curiously, to struggle to retain or restore the Benjaminian aura of Art before mass culture.

In approaching postmodernist texts, an interpretative double-bind can arise from the argument that the whole is ironic, both in intention and effect, and that all the narrators, and therefore their stories, are radically unreliable. I have already mentioned the intentional pasteboard, silhouette, or puppet-like status of Banville's characters, and his fictions have self-consuming qualities, stylishly purporting to empty themselves of moral or ideological pronouncement. Yet, however often a narrative dismantles itself within its own very process, it springs up and solicits our willingness to be engaged just as often, like the field of armed men sown from dragon's teeth. However aware we are of Banville's multiple allusions to other texts and histories, ultimately his fictions cannot but posit their own sufficiency as free-standing objects, which do project, and in their own despite construct, worlds complete with moral systems. Also, the narrator-heroes solicit our sympathy for their predicaments, and ultimately the whole depends upon our capacity to be moved by the suffering even of such self-acknowledged reprobates. Max, Axel, Freddie and the others conduct their interior meditations always in an awareness of general principles of morality, and ceaselessly acknowledge their own basest acts and thoughts in the light of the higher aims of moral right, with however sardonic a tone. The

depth of their moral imaginations varies from novel to novel: they are not all the same character, but I group them together to allow the presence of their shared compunction to emerge.

Yet while their quarrels with themselves amply show the presence of conscience and of ethical sensibilities in regard to self and other in *general* human terms, let us examine the proposition that with regard to gender the framework of world-understanding, together with all the philosophical predicates of these characters, is irredeemably binarist, polarised and indeed Oedipal. Banville's clown figures, along with many of his (all male) protagonists, may seem to displace sexual difference from consideration, but only in intention or wishful fantasy: what Peter Brooks calls the 'sexual-linguistic constitution of the subject' is inescapable.[7] In fact, the genre of the heterosexual pornographic scene, on which Banville draws, and his (far more prestigious) epistemological project already form a continuum in western representations both visual and verbal. Brooks argues that the nexus of '[s]ight, knowledge, truth and woman's body', a typical, almost normative situation in our culture, involves 'man as knowing subject postulating woman's body as the object to be known, by way of an act of visual inspection which claims to reveal the truth – or else makes that object into the ultimate enigma'. He adds, in what almost seems to define the foundational premises of the Banvillian protagonist, that '[s]eeing woman as other is [in Western art traditions] necessary to truth about the self'.[8] Banville's complex and ironic heroes, each a pinchbeck Pygmalion, characteristically visualise the sexually attractive female characters of their milieux as objects of aesthetic representation, entire works of art or figures from such works, who are brought to life by the galvanising imaginative energies of these self-deluding heroes. In *Athena* Banville makes this process, the classic mode of representing the feminine throughout his work, into a structuring principle by the device of the seven paintings: in an elegant but chilling *mise-en-abime,* each of the scenes represented shows a beautiful woman *in extremis,* and deferred masculine desire.[9] In the last paragraph of his original Banville study (1991), McMinn observed that women play 'a silent role in the novels', while embodying 'a myth of intuitive wisdom and grace always lamented by the male '"great cold technicians"… of the ambitious mind'. He

suggested that 'the tragedy of this fiction is as much one of the masculine personality as of the intellect'.[10]

How do the pervasive erotic and triadic scenes and patterns of the subsequent work bear upon this question? The fiction is full of characters in threes whose emphasis may be erotic, or emotional, or both. The characteristic pattern involves a relation between the protagonist (always male) and two female characters. Often this relation takes the form of a scene which is rehearsed in the narrative. Sometimes it is presented in the mind of the protagonist (always a participant-narrator), as memory, or fantasy, or as an experience of emotional tension which this central character experiences as arising from two sets of claims, or offers of attachment, or demands upon him, by two female figures. These two may not even inhabit the same story-space, though they decidedly do at the level of the discourse (e.g. mother and spouse-figure or beautiful *ingénue;* wife and daughter or daughter-figure; girl-friend and her girl-friend, and so forth). They may even be figures with a different ontological status, as in the crucial instance of the seventeenth-century portrait-sitter and the housemaid in *The Book of Evidence*. The criticism has tended to perceive and represent these and other patterns as doppelgänger motifs, and indeed Banville is also strongly interested in doubles, but this focus has occluded narrative scenes and items which are equally interesting and whose study may be revealing.[11]

What one might call the cosy or acceptable face of troilism, the *ménage à trois*, does not figure in these fictions, perhaps because domestication involves a de-eroticisation and a stabilising of dynamic desires whose very force is in their disruptive potential. Sometimes there are two of these triangles which intersect, for example in *The Sea,* where the child Max Morden forms an unwitting triangle with the older woman Connie and the nanny Rose, while imagining that the configuration is himself, Connie and her husband Carlo. He never gets beyond mute arousal when in the company of the voluptuous Connie, but has passed some weeks deep in lust for her in the distant summer of his meeting with the Grace family, who in their offhand way are all slumming it by admitting him into their charmed circle. Only at the other end of his life does he discover that Connie was always looking past him to Rose, the real object of her sexual self-display: 'I thought… of the day of the picnic and of her [Rose] sitting behind me on the

grass and looking where I was avidly looking and seeing what was not meant for me at all'.[12] This revelation is made only on the book's penultimate page. His acute sense of displacement, even after so many decades have passed, shows the intensity of his need for emotional recognition and affirmation.

This Connie-Rose narrative nexus echoes many other Banville scenarios, in which the male figure feels himself to be an extra or a prop, or the instrument or channel of desires which pass over his essential self. These include two scenes in *The Book of Evidence*, one where Freddie discovers Joanne the stable-girl in bed with his mother, and the other where, in California, he is invited to have sex *à trois* with Daphne and Anna the second of my opening quotations comes from this). All such episodes are rendered in strongly visual terms, some almost theatrically staged as living tableaux, others painterly, with the female figures paused and posed for viewing. The most dominant subject-positions or roles enacted are exhibitionist on the women's part, and voyeuristic on the observing man's.[13] On the unusual occasions when the male protagonist is forced into being watched rather than watching, he is disconcerted. Thus in *Athena*, where A stages the brothel performance – directing that Freddie make love to her while a paid, naked and indifferent prostitute (called Rosie) looks on – physically he cannot rise to the occasion and is ordered instead to mime sexual penetration: 'I felt… perused'.[14] I shall return to the important interpretative questions which these patterns raise.

In *The Sea*, the Max-Connie-Rose triangle is echoed in that of the three children Max, Chloe and Chloe's mute brother Myles. The erotic life Banville elaborates for Max is a back-projection upon the boy just passing out of childhood sexual latency, but it too recapitulates several recurrent Banvillian ideas. These include erotic doubling and the idea it carries, disturbing and exciting in equal measure, of the possible interchangeability of sexual partners; a variation on this is the complementarity of different love-objects. The motif of a prior lesbian attachment which is devastatingly discovered to have preceded and thereby displaced the protagonist's own passions is, of course, one variant of the watching-women-having-sex item, a staple of men's pornography.[15] This is seen at its most obscene in the quotation with which we started. Such configurations can also serve to express frustrated Oedipal desire, where the child within the male adult re-experiences his inaugural exclusion from his fantasy possession of the mother. These

various strands are frequently interwoven in Banville's many glimpses, glancing hints, and full scenes of troilism. Thus the child-Max lusts mutely after the great adult genitalia of Mrs Grace, mother of his playmates, feeding upon the glimpses up her knickers which (he thinks) she artfully affords him at the picnic in the dunes.[16] But all the while, as he discovers only after forty years, she has, so to speak, been betraying him with Rose.

The succeeding barely pubertal threesome is narrated in a long flashback, intercut with the present-tense meditations of Max's old age and recent widowhood. The pre- or barely-adolescent boy is energetically wooed by the masterful Chloe, daughter of the Graces (I tick the box Banville offers and identify Connie, Rose, and Chloe as the three Graces from classical mythology, a realm which, in itself apart from its contents, his imagination so indissolubly identifies with the aesthetic). Chloe's forceful seduction moves are a welcome distraction from the exquisite passivity of his hopeless quasi-Oedipal longings for Connie, and he responds with alacrity. However, in the novel's climactic scene in the beach hut, when Chloe kisses Max and undoes her swimsuit, a third is again present: Chloe's silent twin Myles. Kissing Max, Chloe reaches for her brother's hand, and in the passionate tightening of her mouth on his, Max registers how her increased arousal.[17] The arrangement forms a variation on the more frequent Banville troilism, in offering two males and one female in lieu of the usual two women-one man set-up. I may be alone in finding the scene forced and as if designed to fulfil a schema, but its presence in Banville's design is not the less interesting for that. Rose discovers the trio *in flagrante delicto*, and Chloe and Myles swim out to their death, still holding hands. Ultimately, then, Max is forsaken by both of the pairs of lovers for whom he has been a fleeting third.[18]

Furthermore, also in *The Sea*, Mrs Grace, her daughter, and the semi-servant Rose are posed as a threesome, this time not sexually but aesthetically, 'the three central figures in that summer's salt-bleached triptych'.[19] The older Max develops an extended conceit in which he is their painter, or rather, he has 'done' Chloe and her mother, while 'Rose is by another, unknown hand', and he keeps going 'up close to them, the two Graces, now mother, now daughter, applying a dab of colour here, scumbling a detail there….'[20] Here Banville has Max *qua* narrator reach in over his protagonist's shoulder to say, postmodernly, that there are no originals, only representations; but at the same

time this is an objectifying gesture which, by insisting on the immemorial dichotomy of painter and subject, reinstates that of (masculine) agent and stilled, fixed (feminine) sign of beauty and sex.

This dichotomy is at the heart of *The Book of Evidence*, and generates the single most arresting triangle of all, composed of Freddie, the painted Dutchwoman, and the maid Josie Bell. In this central triad Banville shows Freddie using literal force to still the living ordinary girl – with her odour of metal polish and her country accent – by the blows of his hammer on her body, so he can take possession of the already silenced woman who has been perfected in paint. We may contain this unsettling scene a little by attributing psychosis to Freddie. But he merely carries to extreme but not illogical conclusions these familiar binaries: Nietzschean intellectual and base quotidian world, masculine transcendent aesthetic subject and feminine object (the latter itself split between the ideal woman on canvas, for ever harmoniously posed, and the clumsy maid inconveniently walking in on the scene).

Freddie is a would-be 'high, cold' hero who represents a culmination (or perhaps the *reductio ad absurdum*) of certain western ideals: he is so given to a project of transcendence that he ends by parting altogether from 'ordinary things'.[21] Obsessed with harmony, coherent structure, and intellectual order, he has never found a way adequately to inhabit the quotidian world or represent himself as a social being within it. He is first dazzled, then exploited, by the beautiful, poised, and manipulative Anna, who uses him in a lesbian game with her girl-friend, then with careless control marries them to each other. Like a jealous infant, he feels excluded from what the closed, quasi-hermetic converse of the two women, whose prior relationship he (like Max in *The Sea*) belatedly discovers.[22] He later finds his mother and the girl Joanne similarly turned to each other, to his further chagrin. His devotion to the perfectible realm, first of mathematics, then of art, is a substitution for life. It is this devotion, grown to obsession, which motivates the psychotic enactment of his desire to possess the Dutch masterpiece, a painted woman, by the bloody murder of an actual live woman whose savage destruction ordinary human sympathy should have caused him to abhor. Thus he effects a false transcendence (built upon his severance from the capacity for fellow-feeling) and a deformation of the aesthetic domain to purport the exclusion of humanity. In other words, he has substituted

his desire of the virtuality of the art object, categorically conceived as a non-reciprocal other, for the quintessentially reciprocal human interrelation with a living other. In his fantasy account of the painting of the portrait, he makes the sitter experience a kind of stillness and peace during the sessions, and say to herself '[n]ow I know how to die' when she sees the finished picture. Thus both the women who together with Freddie form this ghastly triangle seem to be death-bound. In a justly celebrated passage, Banville gives his murderer a breakthrough insight into the reality of Josie Bell's being, which he sees is 'somehow radiant', but this does not stay his hand and he bludgeons her to death.[23]

Some of the ethical questions raised by all this have been well discussed recently.[24] But other issues have been less considered, particularly the book's representations of femininity, which, all and only generated in the mind of Freddie, are distinctly and constitutively patriarchal and misogynist. The troubling aspect of the matter is: at a level beyond Freddie's individual moral and emotional pathology, is he not a culturally representative figure, whose attitudes towards both women and art are those which already implicitly underpin culture? His contempt of and repugnance towards women is closely related to an *unconscious* fear of their power; that power is almost magically contained in the visual object of the portrait, which he has a compulsion to own.[25] To have it would be to control that power, which, at a *conscious* level, he has reinscribed as beauty. It is no accident that this is the picture *of a woman*. To possess it would be for Freddie to have things quieted: no more exclusions, no more surprises (somewhat as in Browning's 'My Last Duchess'). Killing the maid expresses a rage which, after all, he well knew he felt; we may conclude that the only woman he can tolerate is one painted or dead, either way controlled, silenced. Surely this is the point of the preceding plotting of Freddie's experiences with women? But the aesthetic image is crucial to the story: this is not just, so to speak, an ordinary woman-hating murder, by an immature and dysfunctional son who has not negotiated his Oedipus complex, but a textbook expression of the unconscious allocation of women *by culture in general* to the realm of death and death to the realm of femininity. Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* both theorises this allocation and elaborates extensive examples from European literature and art to substantiate it.[26]

Many of the protagonists experience intense emotion and yearning towards slight, virginal, young-seeming female figures. In a much earlier work, Banville's Kepler gazes at the significantly silent beauty of the *ingénue* Regina his step-daughter, while enduring the volubility of his scolding wife. In these attachments, specifically erotic affect is often replaced or displaced by silent admiration and a sense of peace and stasis. The classic case is in *Ghosts*, where the young Flora has an extraordinary calming effect upon Freddie.

> …I found myself looking at her and seeing her as if for the first time, not as a gathering of details, but all of a piece… She was simply there, an incarnation of herself, no longer a nexus of adjectives but pure and present noun. I noticed the little fine hairs on her legs… No longer Our Lady of the Enigmas, but a girl, just a girl.

This apprehension of Flora makes Freddie feel that in her the world 'found its grounding and was realised': conceiving himself freed out of his solipsism, he thinks that everything is 'detaching themselves from me and my conception of them and changing themselves instead into what they were, no longer figment, no longer mystery, no longer a part of my imagining'.[27] When we read *Ghosts* as sequel to *Book of Evidence*, of course, we might try to make this epiphany work to counterbalance and redeem Freddie's terrible failure to apprehend the 'radiance' of Josie Bell until the very last seconds when he is already embarked upon murdering her. Seen in this context, the passage is moving, but it does not allay disquiet at the projection upon Flora of this redemptive role, not to speak of the stereotypical woman-earth-chthonic associations of 'grounding'. In the scene Flora is still a character who is acted upon: it is as if her role is to be blank, so as to be capable of bearing such projections as Freddie's.[28]

These latter are idealising and benign, but Flora has earlier been preyed upon sexually by the malign Felix. Banville fleetingly counterweighs Felix with Sophie, the older woman, who has a profession, or perhaps an art (she is a photographer) and is ironic, perceptive and intolerant of Felix's Sadeian projects of control. Banville sets a fleeting triad in motion between Felix, Sophie and Flora, allowing Felix to gloat at his conquest and hint strongly at a balked desire for Flora on Sophie's own part (another glimpsed lesbian scenario, perhaps only a flicker in Felix's lewd mind, reacting to

Sophie's concern for Flora).[29] In this novel, however, unusually, Banville does experiment with brief passages of narrative bringing us inside two female characters' minds. This used to anticipates the characterisation of A, from *Athena* (next novel in the trilogy) with a scene of masochistic fantasy where Flora 'pictured herself', dressed in white in a Mediterranean seafront café, still outwardly virginal – 'so cool and pale… demurely in her light, expensive frock', but 'basking in secret in the slow heat of her hidden bruises, waiting for him [Felix] to come sauntering along the front'.[30] So, in a novel which partly borrows the armature of *The Tempest*, Flora scarcely cuts a Miranda-figure. One effect of this characterisation would seem to be sharply to ironise Freddie's kitchen epiphany.

Banville gives Flora one more interesting and contrasting moment, which for once places a woman in an Everyman role. She dreams she is inside *Le monde d'or*, the picture by Banville's invented alter ego Vaublin, compound of Watteau and Lancret, which is the book's principal emblem. A Pierrot-figure hangs stiffly at the centre, surrounded by a cast of stock characters from the Comédie Française. In her feverish dream Flora, pursued by Felix, finds a way inside this figure: 'she reaches the hollow mask that is the figure's face and fits her own face to it and looks out through the eyeholes into the broad, calm distances of the waning day and understands that she is safe at last'.[31] This seems significant because a female figure is not the object of visual attention, but instead is the one looking, and in so doing feels secure. She does, of course, have to climb inside a Harlequin costume first; but this act would seem to align her momentarily with all the flawed and failed but representative *male* heroes who act out their lives as so many Pierrots, grief-stricken and in pain, throughout Banville's stories. The dream status of this scene to some degree distances it ontologically, but does not remove its significance as a counter-current in the more usual representation of female figures as objects rather than subjects.

Most commentary on the succeeding novel, *Athena*, has focused on the seven fictitious Ovidian-mythological (and, it turns out, fake) pictures. Their pretended catalogue descriptions punctuate the narrative, and are transcended by the eighth, genuine, picture of the birth of Athena. The book broaches grand questions about the instability of all identities and the difficulty of achieving authenticity, whether

aesthetically or ontologically; I shall approach it differently. Here Banville develops much more fully the female sexual masochism sketched in Flora's character (though this time it is not, as in *Ghosts*, shown from the woman's viewpoint). Triangular figurations are used again, in two ways: in scenes of specific sexual troilism, and in emotional terms, by placing Freddie between two very different female characters, A and his old Aunt Corky. Banville's handling of triadic character-grouping is especially interesting in this novel, where the contrast between the two main female characters is given an emotional and moral force.

Freddie – now calling himself Morrow – falls desperately in love with the mysterious woman 'A', who turns out to be the daughter of Dublin's master criminal and sister of the sinister Morden, a fence posing as a picture-collector. Living a shadowy life among copies and forgeries, Freddie imagines himself effectively disguised by his name-change and the ten years which have elapsed since his conviction, but in fact is being expertly manoeuvred by a team of far more effective masquers and villains. Furthermore, far from being Athena, Diana, or a fleeing nymph such as Syrinx or Daphne, A throughout orchestrates his emotions and erotic experiences, for her own pleasure and presumably also in the interest of her family's master-plot.[32] It is a paradox that these experiences have centrally involved 'maledom' (the term used in S/M circles for erotic domination of female by male sex-partner). Freddie, in emotional thrall to the slight, black-clad A, 'tethers' (a favourite term in Banville's lexicon) and whips her to order, but far from unwillingly and with an intense erotic drive of his own: neither is he blind to the paradox of the situation. Psychosexually, he is required simultaneously to inhabit two apparently contradictory subject-positions. On the one hand he is the plaything and slave of A's will, executing at command the array of paraphilic tasks, fetishist, voyeuristic and pain-inflicting, which she details him to carry out; on the other he has to perform as the dominating male to whom she extravagantly submits. In devising Freddie's A experience, Banville experiments with the merging in one character of two psychosexual scenarios. One is the Oedipal erotics of domination *by* the powerful woman (who reinscribes the mother's absolute sway over the thrillingly disempowered infantilised son); the other is the master-figure's sadist pleasures in overpowering, punishing and leaving his mark *upon* a woman who is imagined – and by A performed – as younger, smaller, and,

daughter-like, submissive.[33] Finally, quintessentially a role-player, the mysterious A seems almost to be postmodernly *citing*, rather than undergoing, the array of practices she sets up, fantasy self-degradations, all arresting surface and no depth. Yet the surface *is* 'where there's depth'.[34]

At the other extreme from these passionate sexual scenes, which Freddie wrongly imagines to be secret, is the relation between him and his aunt; she and A form an interesting experiment in polarisation. Aunt Corky is rendered as physically grotesque, a fantasist, and the forger of a fictitious Dutch identity. But she also provides the occasion for Freddie's disinterested acts of care and mercy, counterbalancing the corrupt and manipulative A. The whole Aunt Corky part of the plot has a comic atmosphere, in the sense not just of absurdist humour, but also of regenerative moral possibility. As with the one good deed of the Ancient Mariner –blessing the water-snakes – Freddie gains moral and emotional status by, to his own surprise and without knowing why, moving Aunt Corky from the nursing-home to his own flat and (more or less) looking after her. The scene where, finding her injured and unconscious on his bathroom floor, he rescues and tends her, offers a striking structural contrast to the murder scene in *Book of Evidence,* far more persuasive than the kitchen scene in *Ghosts*. When he washes her body clean of faeces and puts her to bed, he is acting not so much in empathy (we are not spared the ugly physical details of her body), but in a tacit but powerful moral acknowledgement of the just demands of the other. We recognize the familiar binary schema of mother *versus* wife/ spouse/partner or, especially in the later work, daughter-figure, and Aunt Corky does indeed connote the salving effects of the maternal embrace in which Freddie longs to be folded. But in this recapitulation Banville really does, so to speak, bring the statue to life, and infuse emotion into the schematic pattern as Freddie at last acts instead of looking and thinking, and gives the embrace instead of receiving it. He reflects on how, as he carried the old woman upstairs, 'for those few minutes you were my life and all I had left undone in it', and it was 'the first time in my life… that I had looked at a naked woman without desire'. While waiting for the doctor, he rests his forehead against the window, thinking of 'the myriad secret lives teeming' in the garden outside, and feels 'the soft throb of the world in the glass', experiencing a form of grace as embarrassment: 'this was a special manner of being alone'.[35]

Finally, one of the most interesting instances of a character triad is constructed *between* two novels, the *Eclipse-Shroud* diptych (2000 and 2002 respectively). This displaced threesome straddles the two novels, paralleling the father-figures Alex and Axel in their intense attachment to the daughter-figure Cass Cleave.

In *Eclipse* Banville makes his hero a professional actor, distinguished and famous, no mere wearer of guises. After 'drying' in performance – significantly on the identity line, 'Who if not I, then is Amphitryon?'– he has retreated to his family's house in a provincial town, leaving theatre, his marriage, and his Dublin life, deeply troubled and with his whole raison d'être eclipsed by an inexplicable sorrow.[36] *Eclipse*, taken alone, exhibits strong triadic patterns. The first is familial: Alex himself, his wife Lydia and daughter Cass, of whom Lydia is jealous, and whom she accuses Alex of unduly favouring.[37] The gross odalisque-and-'Negress'-sexual dream disturbingly rewrites this configuration. As the book unfolds another triad develops between the slightly louche local man Quirke who has secretly moved into Alex's childhood home, Alex, and Quirke's daughter Lily. This two-fathers-one-daughter group echoes and perhaps parodies the Axel/Alex/Cass one. Most striking of all is Alex's own intense emotional relation both with the fragile Cass (first absent, then dead by her own hand) and her counterpart Lily (again one man, two – much younger – women). Despite initial fastidious revulsion from the grubby and vacant-seeming teenage Lily, Alex develops a connection with her which shows definite erotic affect, as does his attachment to his own daughter.

Alex cannot see beyond his own needs or desires to encounter Cass as a full, separate and other human subject (nor, as we shall see, can Axel Vander). Himself a successful public figure, Alex knows he has not got to grips with the 'version of our daughter' as international scholar, and has never attended to her work, only winced at her referring to it as such and considered it 'an elaborate pastime, like thousand-piece jigsaw puzzles'.[38] We could explain this at the psychological level by saying he is transfixed by her mental illness and its frightening somatic expression in intermittent seizures. But the plot choice to represent the daughter-figure as thus mentally flawed and at risk certainly makes it easier to elaborate her character in line with a stereotype of the vulnerable ingénue, in need of paternal (and/or sexual?) protection, ultimately a form of domination.

Axel Vander, protagonist of *Shroud*, is an international master theorist, identity-forger and Jew-hating Jew; he has also secretly murdered his wife. Soon after meeting Cass in Turin the elderly Axel has sex with her. This is partly opportunism and partly pragmatically motivated: subliminally he hopes to disarm her implicit threat to unmask him. The attachment develops, however, into what he eventually thinks of as love: but retains a strong element of scornful dominance by him, and even fleetingly glimpsed violence when he twists her arm 'past the level of her shoulder blade' to try to force her to tell him all she knows of his hidden past.[39] Her real father Alex merges disquietingly with his darker double: she explicitly tells Axel she has been 'in love' with him (Alex) and there are other strong hints of incestuous feeling.[40] Even while Vander is 'busy goughing [*sic*] and grunting at her', she hallucinates 'Daddy' coming into the Turin hotel room, apparently in the middle of shaving, gesturing with a small razor as he talks 'in that way he had, always animated, always dominating, cutting and carving and moulding the world'.[41]

Cass herself is represented as complicit with this scenario. On meeting Axel she readily abandons her own projects to assume 'her task, which was to take care of him', whereupon, says the narrator, '[n]ever had she felt so free of herself'. She proceeds both to daughter and mother him, 'tending' him with 'an almost sanctified sense of purpose' like the nuns in the hospitals of her childhood. A martyr trope follows, with Cass as the saintly Christian and Vander as the 'big, ailing beast…'[42] So this central female figure of *Shroud* is far more object of the wills, aims and wishes of others than subject of her own. Her original intellectual engagement with Vander the thinker is resolved in the form of sexual rather than mental congress with him, and physical conception displaces conceptual work.[43] Banville does focalize the narrative intermittently through her, but those pages narrated from her perspective amount to less than one-fifth of the book, whose home key or default position is the mind of Vander, hero or hero-villain.

Axle's other clever woman, the academic Kristina Kovacs, a former lover, is dying of cancer. Nevertheless she and Cass are jointly deployed to provide another instance of the two-women-in-bed-together motif. Kristina lies down with the distraught Cass to soothe her, and Axel sniffs around this with a prurient interest plain from his very disavowal: asserting his unwillingness 'to speculate on how they spent [the night]… I am

prevented by a sort of prudishness, or pudency [*sic*]; the blaze that burns the jealous lover feels so like the heat of lust'.[44] Trapped in his own objectifying vision, he later sees Kristina's head, bald from the treatment, 'faintly trembling on the delicate, fleshless column of her neck', as 'stark and absolute, all line and plane and angled shadow'. The aestheticisation is disturbing. He strokes her head to comfort her, at which 'she nudges against my hand, with an almost forceful insistence, like a cat'.[45] Despite the gesture of affection, the passage as a whole yaws between the apprehension of Kristina's bodily being as animal-like, and the abstraction of it to an *objet d'art*, sculpture or drawing. It is as if the feminine must be lodged either wholly in transcendence (art) or wholly in immanence (nature): like Freddie, Axel seems incapable of accepting it in his own, human, range.

Despite the thematic intertwining of *Eclipse* and *Shroud*, their dénouements show important contrasts. In Alex's story, *Eclipse*, he wrests something from the catastrophe (for both these doppelgängers) of Cass's death, by means of the substitution of his virtual daughter Lily, her other. The powerful climactic scene, staging Alex's self-rescue from his personal crisis, depends on this paralleling or even merging of Cass and Lily. On the very day of the 2000 eclipse, which (unknown to him) is also the day of Cass's death, Alex takes Lily to the circus. She volunteers as a subject for the sleazy hypnotist-cum-clown, another obvious alter ego and also a splinter-figure of Felix in *Ghosts*, among others. During the performance Alex meditates on his terrifying loss or non-existence of selfhood, which caused in him so acute a panic that he froze on stage. Ever since it has seemed that in his life too (a little like Jane Austen's Fanny Price, though for altogether other reasons) he 'cannot act', being afflicted by so extreme 'a terror of the self, of letting the self go so far free that one night it might break away, detach entirely and become another, leaving behind it only a talking shell, an empty costume standing there aghast, topped by an eyeless mask'.[46] Such radical evanescence of selfhood is an increasingly important theme in the later Banville. He has called himself 'post-humanist', yet in practice his fictions play out a stubborn rearguard action of the humanist self, which is never quite overcome by post-modernity.[47] The self-forged Axel Vander professes to believe that 'there is no essential, singular self'. Still, he constantly debates the question with himself and finds that he has not escaped what he calls 'mere being, that

insupportable medley of affects, desires, fears, tics, twitches'; for him the actor becomes his mask, as he himself has become the self he long ago assumed.[48] Cass on her last night alive is scarcely post-humanist either, but reflects that '[e]verything she had ever done, her smallest acts, even in earliest infancy, had brought her to this moment, these unavoidable moments, the last'.[49]

Sitting at the circus, Alex sees that Lily is overcome and threatened by the hypnotist's malice ('how thin that smiling mouth, how red, a livid cicatrice'). He enters the ring, takes her hand, and resoundingly declares an identity for himself and for her: 'My name is Alexander Cleave, and this is my daughter'. In doing so he experiences, at the touch of the girl's 'chill, soft, damp hand', a pure epiphany of sorrow, both excruciating and ecstatic.[50] A pause ensues while Cleave and the hypnotist each holds one of Lily's hands, then the hypnotist relinquishes her. The scene suggests that by this deed and at this moment Alex makes real, even loving, human contact, saving another daughter though powerless to save his own, and in so doing reclaiming his life. However, this is yet another threesome, where the girl in the middle is not mentally, only physically, present: she is blank, as if dead on her feet, while the struggle is played out, between men, over her passive figure. It is a contest of masculine forces, paradoxically decided by the sustaining of actorly illusion. The parallel with *Shroud* is evident: the clown-hypnotist mesmerises Lily, just as, unknown to Alex, Axel his darker other has mesmerised Cass; and for Cass there is no rescue.

Eclipse and *Shroud* elicit complex responses from readers, as indeed does Banville's work as a whole. This complexity is designed: while the logic of fiction leads us to feel that Alex is somehow saved as Axel is not, and few readers could find the circus scene other than moving, the relentless ironising of the Banville protagonist partly undercuts that humanist moment where Alex finds how to play himself truly and overcome his false, malevolent Other, as figured in the clown. The paired but darker ending of *Shroud*, where Cass is lost to both of them, comes afterwards and shows this all-pervasive irony at work at plot level. Furthermore, the undertow which may draw us away from wholly assenting to Alex's epiphany is not so clearly the ironising one Banville has thus planned. It is the problem of both Lily's and Cass's construction as *tabulae rasae*, the 'over her dead body' arrangement whereby these tormented father-

figures inscribe both their desire and their pain upon the white sheet of the young women's being. In Banville's whole work, where female characters are endowed with agency it is predominantly figured as sexual and manipulative (the classic example is *Athena*'s A, slight, child-like impresario of the theatre of masochism). Even while being moved by the suffering of both male protagonists and by their belated discovery of love for the same daughter-beloved, realised as it is in enchanting language and with elegant patterning of narrative motifs, it is still possible to be disturbed and uneasy. This is not just the questioning which Banville certainly intends, such as that of the putative moral inauthenticity of his character Axel, with its background suggesting a new *trahison des clercs* in the scandals of Heidegger's and de Man's fascist sympathies and Althusser's wife-killing. The form of possible dissent perhaps not allowed for is the reader's from the apparent inescapability of projecting masculine self-realisation, and the attainment by male protagonists of some degree of moral coherence, upon inconscient female characters. The hypnotist looks at the entranced Lily 'as if she were some delicate figure he had just finished fashioning'.[51] We recognise the recurrence of the Pygmalion-Coppélius motif from *Ghosts* and elsewhere, but while Cleave saves Lily from the hypnotist's evil possession one may wonder how adequately he is himself differentiated from the controlling impulse of such figures. The young, virginal and morally innocent feminine is still that which is represented, that which is rescued, that which is ancillary, demented, drowned; that which is nominated to embody the lost ideal of emblematic simplicity, 'a girl, just a girl'. Banville works hard at realising Lily's ordinary teen sullenness and the sheer grubby materiality of her presence, and this goes a little way to counter such stereotyping, but the sheer force of the whole gendered system of roles and representations may be felt to overwhelm such small signs of actual otherness.[52]

That system is already discernible in the powerful canonical intertexts with which Banville deepens the diptych. *Ghosts*, with its equivocally enchanted island and its ironised pastoral, a forged 'golden world', had already inserted itself within *The Tempest* and gestured towards *As You Like It*.[53] The end of *Eclipse* explicitly invokes three innocent daughters from late Shakespeare '[m]y Marina, My Miranda, oh, my Perdita'. Near the start, Alex sees himself as Pericles, 'a man thronged up with cold', and Cass's drowning invokes the sea-music of those plays' imagery, with their shipwrecks and

miraculous rediscoveries. Earlier Alex quotes Eliot's 'Marina', a modernist lyric reworking of Shakespeare's desolate fathers.[54] The jealous, protective attachments of Prospero, Pericles, and Leontes are quintessentially controlling and patriarchal. Banville in due course concludes *Shroud* by having Axel – Cass's other perverse 'father' – echo Lear's heartbreaking speech when he holds that other innocent daughter, Cordelia, dead in his arms.[55] We might conceive of Axel as chastened and, in himself, morally reformed, like Leontes or Lear. But can we argue that these fictions of Banville's, while putting so much in question epistemologically, ideologically, even ontologically, do other than leave the gender system untouched? And if not, is this a flaw in his art? As Hal Foster has argued, 'Derridean deconstruction is pledged to the undoing of those binary oppositions which inform Western thought'. These oppositions also, as we have seen, characterise Banville's Alexes and Axels. Like the deconstructionists, Vander's colleagues, Banville's work constantly enacts the rejection of such foundations. But, as I have suggested earlier, these poststructuralisms may also be serving as what Foster calls 'ruses' whereby the cataclysmic events of postmodernity are 'sublimated, displaced, or otherwise defused.' Is Banville's posthumanism despite itself a ruse of containment, along these lines, which purports and maybe intends to put everything in question, but in practice leaves some foundations undisturbed? Despite the irony, satiric representation of solipsism, and postmodern de-substantiating, do these texts continue to 'project the [feminine] other as an outside, as a space of ideological escape from Western rationality'?[56]

The ending of *Eclipse* involves a visitation by the dead Cass's ghost, drawing on a muted but recurrent motif of classical pastoral beauty. On the final page of the book Alex sees her, clearer than ever before, Greek-nymph-like in loose green summer dress or 'like one of Botticelli's girls'. Coming in from the garden in sandals

> [S]he might have been striding out of Arcady to meet me… I reached out a faltering hand to touch her, and I spoke her name, and she seemed to pause, and shiver, as if she had indeed heard me, and then at once she was gone, leaving only the glistening chord of her passing, that faded, and fell...

Maybe we can believe that Alex is aware at last that he has always seen her thus, only from the outside, and cannot get beyond his own visualisation of her as a beautiful shadow. The other, living girl is really there. Perhaps at last she is an other truly

recognised as herself, and so for the duration of the diptych, we can imagine the triangles as all dissolved by Alex's and Axel's shared sorrow?

> I turned to the room again and there Lily was, leaning sideways on one leg and looking eagerly past me to the window… The living are too much for the dead. Lily was saying something. I could not hear her."[57]

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[1] John Banville, *The Book of Evidence* (London: Minerva, 1990), p. 72.
[2] Banville, *Eclipse* (London: Picador, 2000), pp. 25-6.
[3] Banville, *Book of Evidence*, p. 71.
[4] Banville, *The Newton Letter* (London: Minerva, 1982), p. 53.
[5] See for example *Eclipse* pp. 52, 95, 123, 154, passages whose wearily knowing tone does not dispel the frisson of retro-porn stereotype: 'pneumatic harem wives in a Turkish bath touching each other up','satrap', 'superfluous concubine', 'odalisque'; 'her flesh… appeals to the pasha in me, suggestive as it is of the seraglio and the veil', and p. 133: 'I could have dressed them up in knee-breeches and powdered wigs… my Justine and Juliette'.
[6] Benjamin Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Aggression', *October* 16 (Spring 1981). Quoted in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 272, n. 63.
[7] See Foster, p. 59.
[8] Peter Brooks, *Body Work. Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 97.
[9] The stories are Ovidian, but Banville, who often quotes or alludes to Marvell, may be alluding to Marvell's conceit in 'The Garden' that the gods were not seeking sex but art: 'Apollo hunted Daphne so /Only that she might laurel grow…' (i.e. to invent poetry). *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Longman, 2003), ll. 29-30.
[10] Joseph McMinn, *John Banville. A Critical Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), p.125.
[11] A related topic is the binarism of the texts' various pairs of female figures, which replicates the virgin-whore syndrome (see Elke D'hoker, *Visions of Alterity: Representation in the Works of John Banville* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), and Ruth Frehner, 'The Dark One and the Fair: John Banville's Historians of the Imagination and their Gender Stereotypes'. *BELLS: Barcelona English Language and Literature Series*, 11 (2000), 51-64.
[12] *The Sea* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 263.
[13] McMinn calls A's staged fantasies *both* voyeuristic and exhibitionist, but I believe the distinction is important both for Banville's whole imagining of gender, and for the characterisation of Freddie ((*The Supreme Fictions of John Banville* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), p.132.) McMinn's work has been ground-breaking, but I think his psychologically sensitive readings may take too little account of Banville's multiple shards and splinters of characterisation and plotting, and thus present a more realist writer than many readers discern.
[14] *Athena* (London: Picador, 1995), p. 164.
[15] This has, of course, nothing to do with women's mutual attachments or lesbian love in the real world.
[16] *The Sea*, pp. 116-7.
[17] *The Sea*, pp. 241-2: 'Blindly Chloe reached out sideways and found his hand… and clasped it, ad as she did so her mouth tightened against mine and I felt rather than heard the faint mewling moan that rose in her throat'.
[18] As usual, Banville's hares of allusion start up in numbers from the dunes. Is Chloe an avatar of Annabel Lee, as in Poe's lyric of early death by drowning which forms an important intertext in *Lolita*, one of Banville's most persistent influences? Chloe certainly has 'high-born kinsmen': not least among Max's attractions to the whole Grace ménage is their marked social superiority. But unfortunately for him, unlike Poe's protagonist he is not exclusively beloved: Poe's 'maiden' Annabel 'lived with no other thought/Than to love and be loved by me' (Edgar Allan Poe, 'Annabel Lee', in Lounsbury, Thomas R., ed. *Yale Book of American Verse.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912; Bartleby.com, 1999.

www.bartleby.com/102/htm. Accessed 07 November 2005. The siblings also seem to have overtones, blatantly signalled in Myles' name, of the enigmatic pair Myles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw*.
[19] *The Sea*, p. 223.
[20] *The Sea*, p. 224.
[21] As he drives with Josie's bloody corpse in the back, he feels momentarily consoled by finding himself crying, which he takes as the sign of a last link 'with the world of ordinary things' (*Book of Evidence*, p. 115).
[22] My third epigraph is from this scene. One might remark that Banville engineers a plot which allows Freddie to feel himself victimised even while availing of the stereotypical pornographic thrill of having sex with two women. The effect, with its surface fairly crepitating with arousal and its depth laying claim to moral judgement, is paradoxical but also indicative. Cf. John Berger's observation about Renaissance paintings that 'you painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting Vanity, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure'. *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p.51.
[23]
[24] See D'hoker, *Visions of Alterity*, especially pp. 145-160; Maria Proitsaki, 'Modes of Seeing: Consolidation of Hierarchies of Difference in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* and Rita Dove's "Agosta The Winged Man and Raha the Black Dove"', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 9.1 (2003), 43-52.
[25] See Anja Müller's very effective study of Banville's extensive use of the rhetorical figure of *ekphrasis*, i.e. describing a work of visual art in words: '"You Have Been Framed": The Function of Ekphrasis for the Representation of Women in John Banville's Trilogy', *Studies in the Novel*, 36.2 (Summer 2004), 185-205.
[26] *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[27] *Ghosts* (London: Minerva, 1994), p. 147.
[28] Here I agree with Müller's observation about both *Book of Evidence* and *Ghosts* that 'the idea of the elusive woman is revealed as basically a male fantasy, which says less about the existence of woman than about man's ability to invent her' (198). Nor does Freddie escape the prison of his own perceptions.
[29] *Ghosts*, pp. 60-1. Is Sophie a Wisdom-figure? (And Flora a Nature-one?)
[30] *Ghosts*, p. 49.
[31] *Ghosts*, pp. 63-4.
[32] A is named for, and, so to speak, against, the 'O' of the 1954 S/M *Story of O* (London: Corgi, 1972); McMinn (p. 174, n. 3) cites a Banville interview on this point. But his A is *not* a nought, empty last term, or *omega:* she is in a sense represented as the *alpha* dominatrix in the guise of submissive.
[33] The grace-notes in A's physical description, involving blemishes familiar from earlier and later characterisations (Flora, Lily) again vividly recall Nabokov (a trail the reader is, of course, fully intended to follow), and they only hide in plain view the pastiche of the paedophile fake-father.
[34] Banville inserts yet another vivid scene of sexual troilism in a dream of Freddie's after A has left, where a 'great pale naked woman, majestic and matronly' sprawls between them, 'unfettered and yet our prisoner... She was us and yet not us, our conduit and ourselves' (*Athena*, pp. 188-9).
[35] *Athena* (London: Minerva, 1996), pp. 193, 194, 196.
[36] In the classical story, King Amphitryon is made to doubt his own identity when Zeus visits his wife Alcmene disguised as Amphitryon himself, and also by the god Mercury in the guise of a servant. Banville made his version of Kleist's *Amphitryon*, *God's Gift* (Loughcrew: Gallery, 2000) this same year.
[37] Lydia has her recognisable avatars elsewhere in the work: dark, with plentiful Rubens-like bodies, tending to the languid, possessing psychological self-containment, and always in wife roles. These include Charlotte in *Newton Letter* and Daphne in *Book of Evidence.*
[38] *Eclipse*, p. 201.
[39] *Shroud* (London: Picador, 2002), pp. 338-9.
[40] *Shroud*, pp. 395-6, 132-4.
[41] *Shroud*, p. 130.
[42] *Eclipse*, pp. 299, 300.
[43] Perceiving her mental fragility at first meeting, Vander recalls the Midwestern university president who decades ago punningly warned him never to 'screw a nut' among the many female undergraduates who will most assuredly proposition him (a touch here of the sexual predation in Philip Roth's fictional worlds) but in this instance ignores the advice (*Shroud*, p. 316).

[44] *Shroud* pp. 363, 364, 383. The distastefulness of fantasising sex between Cass, pregnant and half-mad, and the terminally ill Kristina may be laid at crass Axel's door.
[45] *Shroud*, p. 364. Here as in countless other instances, Banville draws upon Nabokov's mid-century elaboration, in Humbert Humbert, of the definitive cold and predatory male, self-hating and self-absorbed.
[46] *Eclipse*, p. 186.
[47] He considers himself 'a post-humanist, not post-colonial writer'. Sinéad Gleeson, Banville interview for *Sigla* Magazine, June 2005. http://www.siglamag.com/arts/0506/John-Banville.php. Accessed 27 November 2005. Alex Davis observes about Vander that 'such deconstructed subjectivity constitutes a protective carapace rather than a Nietzschean self-overcoming' (review of *Shroud*, *Irish Review* 31 (2004)).
[48] *Shroud*, p. 286. Earlier he reflects that although he has taught that 'there is no self: no ego, no precious individual spark breathed into each one of us by a bearded patriarch in the sky, who does not exist either', nevertheless 'I admit that even I cannot entirely rid myself of the conviction of an enduring core of selfhood amid the welter of the world…' (p. 27).
[49] *Shroud*, p. 383.
[50] *Eclipse*, p. 187.
[51] *Eclipse*, p. 185.
[52] The characterisation still disconcertingly recalls the teenage Lolita, despite the Irish provincial tones.
[53] Set in the Forest of Arden, '…where they fleet the time carelessly, as they did in *the golden world*' (I.i.127; my emphasis).
[54] *Eclipse*, pp. 214, 23; *Pericles* II.i.78; *Eclipse*, p. 174 : 'What seas what shores what granite islands…' T.S. Eliot, 'Marina', l. 33, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 116. Shakespeare's Pericles opens the quoted speech with "What I have been I have forgot to know..." (II.1.76)
[55] 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, / And thou no breath at all?' (*King Lear* V.iii.308); 'Why should I have life and she have none? She. She.' *Shroud*, p. 405.
[56] Foster, *Return of the Real*, p. 217.
[57] *Eclipse* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 214.