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Beneath the Penumbral Glow:

John Banville and the Cinema

Mark Kirwan

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY TO THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK. RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK, UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF PROFESSOR GRAHAM ALLEN AND PROFESSOR ALEX DAVIS

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HEAD OF SCHOOL: PROFESSOR CLAIRE CONNOLLY

Abstract

This study focuses on the cinematic aspects of John Banville's work, aiming to answer how the overt cinematic interest in the cinema in his later work is to be understood in the context of his writing career as a whole. His writing plays on the difficulties inherent in the relationship between appearances and reality, raising questions about how words and images, accurately or otherwise, represent the world. The thesis here is that the cinema has become a significant feature and powerful symbolic image of these preoccupations in the later period of Banville's career, resonating with his earlier work while bringing a new frame through which to look at his novels and wider career. This cinematic interest continues the Banvillian tradition of appropriating other art forms in the construction of his novels and also is a deeply resonant form considering the predominant themes of surface, appearance and inability to penetrate reality in his work. Following this thread involves the consideration of many of Banville's novels, naturally, but also brings his scriptwriting credits for film into critical discussion of his writing, as well as the cinematically inflected work of his Benjamin Black writing persona. As such a further aim of the research is to expand the horizons of study around Banville's writing by looking at the more esoteric and marginal in his oeuvre and how they relate to his prominent, dominant, well-known works.

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Declaration

This thesis is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Signed, _____

Mark Kirwan

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"Above us the screen retained a throbbing grey penumbral glow that lasted a long moment before fading, and of which something seemed to remain even when it was gone, the ghost of a ghost. In the dark there were the usual hoots and whistles and a thunderous stamping of feet. As at a signal, under this canopy of noise, Chloe and I turned our heads simultaneously and, devout as holy drinkers, dipped our faces toward each other until our mouths met."

Max Morden, *The Sea*

Introduction:

Why Banville and Cinema?

John Banville's writing career now extends over almost fifty years. In this time he has produced sixteen novels under his own name; they were preceded by the collection of short stories *Long Lankin* and have been punctuated in recent years by a series of novels published under the name Benjamin Black. These are self-consciously defined and marketed as genre fiction without hiding the author's true identity.[1] His output as a novelist has seen him collect a number of prestigious awards throughout his career, and the frequency of these accolades has increased in recent years. The Franz Kafka Prize in 2011 and a Prince of Asturias award in 2014 have affirmed his place as a writer of international standing and suggest that Banville's canon will have a significant life beyond the lifetime of their author.

The range of his work and heightened attention it has received has produced an increased scholarly interest. The major volumes of criticism on his work now extend beyond research projects and the realms of the academy to widely available collections of general critical studies, such as those of Joseph McMinn, Elke D'hoker, John Kenny, Derek Hand, which, in the last fifteen years, have joined and challenged Rudiger Imhof's *Critical Introduction* to Banville as the essential texts of Banvillian studies. These works, covering distinct periods and individual novels in chronological

[1] Numerous versions of the Black books even feature Banville's name on their cover. See, for instance, the most recent Quirke mystery, *Even The Dead*, published in 2015, which announces its author with the introduction "John Banville writing as..." above "Benjamin Black" in larger print. Similarly, the television adaptation tie-in editions of the first three Quirke stories feature this curious supplement to the Black brand.

order, have been joined by more specific works by Ingo Berensmeyer and Mark O'Connell, as well as special editions of the *Irish University Studies* and *Nordic Irish Studies Journal* dedicated solely to critical essays on Banville. There is also a burgeoning collection of theses and papers by researchers from across Europe and further afield, providing further evidence of the wide appeal and significance of Banville's work.

With this increased interest in Banvillian studies comes increased specificity, where different theoretical approaches and thematic analyses are deployed to consider his work in a more general sense, leaping across texts, comparing and contrasting based on general themes and critical frameworks. The interests of various conference sessions and papers on Banville range across questions considering Banville's relationship to modernism and postmodernism, to philosophical and psychoanalytical readings of his texts, to questions of how his works relate to other Irish writers, and so on. It is not surprising and, indeed, it is fitting that a writer whose work revolves around questions of identity and decentred narrators should give rise to so many diverse and differing interpretations and readings.

These opening comments on the growing diversity of the Banville studies field are made with a view to justifying the central focus of this study. The intention here is to extend the boundaries of Banville studies further by considering the later part of Banville's career and, in particular, the recurring image of the cinema in his novels, and his work in the film industry. Not only does the thematic content of his later novels prompt a question as to why Banville returns to the cinema again and again in his late period novels, it also forces us to consider the formal influence of the cinema on novel-writing and Banville's novels in particular. The thesis here is that the cinema

is of formal and thematic significance in Banville's late period, resonating with similar preoccupations of science and painting in the earlier stages of his career. Through close reading of his work since 1997's *The Untouchable* this study will show that the cinema acts as a significant image throughout these works and that the world of the movies informs Banville's aesthetic in the late period of his career, stretching across his different writing modes and personae.

Banville's novels, however, will not be sole focus here. His work in the movie business during the later part of his career coincides with the evident cinematic interest in these later novels. He has adapted his own work for the cinema, both *The Newton Letter* and *The Sea*, as well as the work of others for the cinema and, under the pseudonym Benjamin Black, he repurposed several scripts initially intended for television into crime fiction novels. Further to these pursuits, Banville's writing as a reviewer and screenwriter has seen him in recent years dwell upon the cinema as a physical space and a creative form. While connecting the statements of reviewer or interviewee Banville with novelist Banville can be a questionable enterprise, the clear resonance of much of this material with his novel writing bears consideration when read side by side, shedding fresh light on these later novels.

In "Signature, Event, Context", his classic text on difference, Jacques Derrida states that "every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion" (320). In the following chapters the aim is to deploy quotation marks in just such a fashion, to reconsider aspects of Banville's novel-writing career by introducing the contexts suggested by other forms

of “cinematic” writing. This means exploring the different contexts of his writing in different forms, specifically the contexts suggested by his work in the film industry as a screenwriter, and his foray into genre fiction as Benjamin Black. The intent here is also to suggest a further frame of reference in Banville studies based on the esoteric writing interests Banville has developed over the last decade and a half of his career.

In this regard, this research project began by looking at Banvillian marginalia, ranging from his journalistic work and reviews to his stage work, radio plays, and screenplays. A full treatment of this work remains to be conducted, as only parts pertaining to the cinema and related thematic elements of the works to be discussed will be drawn upon here. This has not been at the expense of the “subordinate” modes of writing, as his cinematic adaptations and his crime fiction will be discussed in depth in addition to the Banville novels of his late period.

The argument for considering a wider range of his work is based on the following observations. First, because of Banville’s increasingly imposing reputation as a writer of international standing, the absence of a substantial consideration of many of these works as a whole should be addressed. While Banville in interviews protests that the Banville who writes his novels is not the same person who writes reviews, or who gives interviews, or who meets readers at book signings, the radical personhood of multiple Banvilles should not and cannot seal off one Banville from another. The assumption here is of a degree of overlap between the different writing modes of these different personalities.

Second, because of the obvious interest in these other modes of writing evident in his novels, especially in the later period of his career, a question cannot but arise as to the relationship between these different works and his more celebrated work. In the

Benjamin Black case, for instance, Banville attempts to head off questions of this sort through the fiction of an alter ego, but given the openness with which Black was created and marketed as a Banvillian fiction, some suspicion about the potential for confusion and overlap has to arise. The question here is not only how do these marginal works relate to the "central" works of his career, but does our understanding of his major works change in light of these new modes of writing?

Third, the thematic and formal features of his novels find a significant and substantial, metaphorically resonant and textually allusive image in the physical space and technology of the cinema. In saying this I mean that the recurring use of the cinema as a space of significance for the central characters of Banville's novels is not a whim or accident, but is embedded within the design of these works. The fact that the cinema repeatedly features as both a physical space of great significance for Banville's narrators and is loaded symbolically with mnemonic and psychological import is worth considering in greater depth in his late works. That Banville emphasises another visual mode of imaginative work, the cinema, after the Frames Trilogy, where the narrating voice is obsessed with painting, indicates that he is working over the themes and ideas of his previous works, but looking at them through a different lens.

A brief survey of Banville's work in the film business shows the gradual build up of first-hand experience of the movie business. Since the late nineties Banville has seen his screenwriting credits swell, where he is credited for three screenplays of major motion picture productions that have been given theatrical releases. These three high profile productions are added to his adaptation of the novella *The Newton Letter* for Channel Four in the United Kingdom in 1984, titled *Reflections* and given a

theatrical release after being broadcast by the television network. Banville has also seen several plays for stage, television and radio produced. *Seachange,* a play, was filmed for television by Ireland's state broadcaster RTE in 1994. This presents, in a condensed, Beckettian form, many of the themes and threads that are to be explored in the following chapters. [2] His most well-known and published scripts for the stage are a trio of "versions" of Heinrich von Kleist plays, not translations but adaptations, taking the skeleton of Kleist's story and putting the flesh of an Irish text and setting on the bones in both *The Broken Jug* and *God's Gift* (based on Kleist's *Amphitryon*). The final version of a Kleist work, *Love in the Wars,* is based on *Penthesilea,* and remains true to the original in that its events take place in classical antiquity and the Irish phrases and rhythms are toned down in favour of a more formal, neutral language. In addition to these scripts, there are the screenplays he frequently references in interviews that have not been produced, such as a biopic of Roger Casement, the working relationship he has enjoyed with Neil Jordan, and the television scripts he has discussed that formed the basis of the early Quirke novels, written under the Benjamin Black alias.

The following study of Banville's cinematic works will draw on these analyses. The first chapter will expand on the broad trends discussed here, offering a general discussion of Banville's career, how his development of cinematic images and themes in his later work relates to his earlier work, and will discuss two of Banville's late period novels, *The Untouchable* and *The Infinities,* in light of those considerations.

The second chapter will look at the late trilogy, named here the Cleave Trilogy

[2] See the final chapter of Joseph McMinn's *The Supreme Fictions of John Banville* for a discussion of *Seachange*.

because it revolves around the life and death of Cass Cleave, told from the perspective of her father, Alex, and her lover, the man whose reputation she can destroy, Axel Vander. Not only is the cinema a recurring symbol in these novels, but significantly, these novels reference and extensively allude to two novels by Vladimir Nabokov that are overwhelmingly cinematic in several relevant respects, *Lolita* and *Laughter in the Dark*. Through a reading of the intertextual links between these texts, the formal influence of the cinema in the Cleave trilogy will become clear.

The third chapter is a consideration of Banville's work in the film industry over the last decade and a half. As such, it focuses on the three adaptations he has written or co-written screenplays for, concentrating primarily on his solo credits for 1999's *The Last September*, an adaptation of Elizabeth Bowen's novel, and 2013's *The Sea*, an adaptation of his own work in depth, but also drawing upon *Albert Nobbs*, for which he received a co-writing credit, in order to explore the thematic resonances and disparities with his novels and the source material. In particular this chapter focuses on the gender issues at play across the various texts examined, and also considers these works within the critical context of adaptation studies.

The final chapter will consider his writing as Benjamin Black. The focus here will be on 2008's *The Lemur* and his 2014 resurrection of Raymond Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe in *The Black-Eyed Blonde*. These two works stand out from the rest because Banville's cinephilia is so clear in them, the cinematic quality as much about Banville's interest in America, particularly from an Irish perspective, as it is the film industry as such.

Chapter 1

Gone to the Pictures: Images and Banville's Fiction

In considering the Banville works outside his more traditionally esteemed modes of writing (what Banville calls his "Banville novels"), the more marginal material not only merits reading in terms of the "Banville novels" and their critical, artistic and philosophical concerns, but also begins to reflect back upon those novels. The late period of Banville's novel writing career features frequent cinematic interludes, references and diversions that become more striking and interesting because they coincide with a period where the cinema comes to greater prominence for Banville as a working writer. The intention here is to focus on Banville's later period, but the cinematic features of this section of his work resonate with many of the themes and formal features of Banville's earlier career. Indeed, by considering the earlier works, the significance of the cinematic motifs and the cinema's repeated interjections become clearer. Implicit in the discussion of existing critical work around Banville is a periodisation of his career which needs to be discussed before the terms of this study can be understood.

Throughout his novels Banville has returned to various other imaginative modes to explore the questions of language, self, identity and memory that preoccupy his narrators. As such, the discussion of cinema in relation to Banville's recent novels must be placed within the context of existing scholarly work, where philosophical and

aesthetic threads around this magpie-like interest in the language of science and painting are teased out. This chapter will discuss several frames through which the Banvillian oeuvre is understood, and will establish the connection between regular Banvillian tropes, ideas and stylistic conventions, and the emergence of the cinema in his later work. There are four different critical threads from Banville studies that are of immediate interest because they traverse his work, ebbing and flowing with time, but always seemingly ready to reach across different eras of his writing.

Firstly, there is the philosophical interest, and in particular the epistemological concerns of his narrators that define the Banvillian voice. The cinema in this instance seems an appropriate, allusive, and intriguing analogue, given the relative positioning of the spectator as the subject and screen as the object. In this respect it is worth examining the representational paradigm discussed by Elke D'hoker in *Visions of Alterity*. In D'hoker's account of Banville's novels, the overarching question of mimesis, with its implied division between what we see and "true reality", is read as fundamentally informing not just the narrators of Banville's stories, but also the form of each Banville novel. The world as mediated by language is interrogated relentlessly and repeatedly by the author through his narrators, and the cinema becomes another means to this end.

The second relevant frame overlaps with the philosophical, while also tracking the movement from the overtly scientific content of the early novels to the aesthetic and psychological concerns of Banville's middle period and specifically the Frames Trilogy. Here, painting takes on the role of science in the earlier works, where fine art becomes the alternative discourse by which Banville surreptitiously engages with the questions of his own art. Although Banville is writing prose, the poetic mode of

ekphrasis, densely descriptive writing on art objects, springs to mind here, and has been used in Banvillian criticism (Kenny 147). In his ekphrastic mode, Banville betrays some of the more realist tendencies that Kenny describes, albeit in a highly stylised, idiosyncratic manner, where art subsumes the idea of truth as simply a matter of correspondence between things. The general effort of his narrators to thoroughly and vividly describe things in the world, albeit fleetingly amid their confused stories and bemusement at the world in general, is exemplified by the role of painting in *Frames*. The suggestion here is not that the cinema is merely a copy or replacement of painting in the these novels, the difference in forms being so radical as to make any claim of the sort absurd, but rather that the cinema, as a form that is so visual, invites contrast and comparison when it appears in Banville's later novels. These ekphrastic novels feature intense, detailed descriptions of paintings (mostly fictitious, but drawing upon the works of several different artists), and these are crucial to the themes, plotting, characters, and form of the novels in which they appear. The question is, when the cinema appears in the later works, how does it function within the text? Certainly the cinema is not as central to these works as painting is in the Frames Trilogy, but nonetheless it is a common, recurring image in the later period of Banville's writing, playing a significant role in the memories and experiences of the narrators.

In the Frames Trilogy and beyond, Banville's writing aspires to a sensuousness that is poetic in its density and painterly in its detail. The individual narrators of his works have a prose style that allows their different characters and preoccupations to come through like a signature brushstroke. As such, it seems appropriate to see his work as ekphrastic, both in terms of the richness of imagery, where often the world

itself is described in such terms as to seem like a piece of sculpture or painting being described by a perceptive and engaged viewer, and also in the technical sense, where the references to art works, and the intense focus on specific paintings that, while often invented, draw upon the history of art and specific works and artists, are ekphrastic in the sense that they describe in detail works of art. Also, in *The Infinities*, for instance, there are recurring features of his writing that suggest that he is not just a describing an event, but that episodes or moments are to be read as painting-like in their composition. Hermes, the narrator of the text, leaps from "scenes", freezing time at opportune moments in such a manner as to make clear that this is self-consciously painting-like in his description.

The third critical frame for his works is that of performance, which emerges in the later trilogy more explicitly, but again, is a recurring metaphor throughout his novels and informs much of doubt and angst that characterise his protagonists in general. Alex Cleave is an actor who has forgotten his lines and himself, meaning he has forgotten how to act in the everyday world now that his identity has been thrown into radical doubt. Stage metaphors abound in Banville's work generally, and the imagery of the mask in earlier works also invokes the notion of performance and classical theatre, and the similarly stylised *commedia dell'arte* theatre referenced in *Ghosts*. Freddie Montgomery constantly frames himself as an actor, and his fundamental detachment from the world is as much about his lack of a sense of true self as anything else. And again, the overlap between the artifice of performance and of language is a resonant theme given the preoccupation with knowledge, appearances, reality and images already referenced.

Finally, the most significant recurring issue in the world of Banvillian

protagonists is their relationships with the women in their lives and, more ominously, their relationship to "the feminine" in general. The fixation on knowledge and epistemology of the early novels finds a strange counterpart in the relationship between the male protagonist and women throughout Banville's work. For the intellectual men depicted in Banville's novels, the feminine is another mystery to be understood and accounted for; mapping the universe becomes mapping the "dark continent" of women for these narrators. In terms of the cinema, it is a place of significance in terms of the later narrators and their relationships with women, and cinema itself, as a visual medium, has been interpreted in terms of gendered vision and the portrayal of men and women on screen in ways that overlap with the Banvillian themes discussed here. Further, Banville's work in the cinema contains significant threads that relate to his fiction in interesting ways as regards gender. In particular, his script for *The Last September* engages in a self-reflexive way with the form of the cinema and the gendering of the cinematic gaze in a way that merits exploration.

What unites all four of these critical threads, and where they overlap with the cinema, is in the image. Ultimately, knowledge in these novels is concerned with coming up with a picture that accurately describes the world, and painting, in a different sense, is an attempt to perform a similar feat. Performance is adapting a manner for the perception of others, projecting an image of a type or an individual, and women for Banville's narrators largely exist as objects to be known, with all the weighty connotations a term like that suggests. What we find with the cinema in the late novels of Banville is another place where the self finds a mirror by which to reflect and refract its desires and anxieties. A deeper examination of Banville's career

to this point will help to draw out these connections.

Epistemology and the Periodisation of Banville's Career

Given he is still producing new works (and at a greater rate than any time in his career), it is difficult to talk in terms of early, middle and late periods of Banville's career, and as such there is an open question about the terms by which we are able to divide up his work. The "late period" is complicated further by the break between Alex Cleave's first appearance in *Eclipse* (2000), his daughter Cass's central role in *Shroud* (2002), and then his return as the narrating voice in *Ancient Light* (2012), published some ten years later. Interrupting this trilogy are *The Sea* (2005), *The Infinites* (2008), and four Benjamin Black novels. This is unlike Banville's other novel sequences, the Science Tetralogy and the Frames Trilogy, where the design and structure of the works, if not entirely clear when the first novel was written, was still not left to chance or interrupted by different characters. While Mark O'Connell is correct in describing it as a "loose trilogy", the aim here is, in a sense, to tighten the loose strands of the trilogy, with cinema as a significant connecting element.

These chronological complications notwithstanding, the broad terms of his output are defined by the several series' of novels he has published over the decades. The lines are necessarily porous between different periods, but the early section of his career can be drawn from his first short stories and a collection of them in *Long Lankin* (1970) through to *The Newton Letter* (1981) which was followed five years later by *Mefisto*. These two novels mark something of the artistic break Banville often describes in interview, where he describes the preceding novels based on the lives of

astronomers Copernicus and Kepler as his attempt to write “Great European Novels of Ideas”. This phrase is used with an ironic import in interviews, but it is hard to imagine weightier, more grandiose subject matter than the Copernican revolution and its consequences for the intellectual understanding of the individual and their relationship to the world.

Banville’s original plan was to transpose the form of classic tetralogy from theatrical antiquity to his novel-writing. This structuring device demands a sequence of three tragedies, with the second and third of these split by a shorter tragicomic interlude. Banville’s tetralogy was to be based on the lives of great modern scientists, running through Copernicus, Kepler, Newton and finally Einstein. The first two entries were completed, and *The Newton Letter*, subtitled “an interlude” and, in contrast to the preceding two novels, is novella length, but the life of Newton is a tangential concern compared to the first two “tragedies”. *The Newton Letter*, the comedic episode of the planned sequence, differs greatly from the two preceding biographical fictions, taking the form of a confession where the Roquentin-like narrator cannot bring himself to complete the Isaac Newton biography he is writing. The third “tragedy” in the planned sequence was to draw on the life of Albert Einstein, but became the story of Gabriel Swan, a mathematical savant who is severely burned in the destruction of his family home and finds himself using his talents to aide gangsters in their shady dealings. This final entry in Banville's tetralogy, in its form and content, continues with the internal monologue and narrator prone to misreading established in the novella length *Newton Letter*. These two works provide a schema by which Banville’s middle and more recent work is defined, that being, the solitary voice of a masculine narrator attempting and largely failing to understand the world

and events around him.

That *Mefisto* is something of a semi-detached novel of Banville's "science" period is underlined by its publication history, where Picador released in 2001 a compiled version of *Doctor Copernicus*, *Kepler* and *The Newton Letter* titled *The Revolutions Trilogy*. That the fourth novel in this planned sequence was omitted serves to underline the break in formal and stylistic terms of the later novel and the vision of subsequent novels that it projects. This indicates one of the difficulties involved in talking about Banville's career in terms of periods or stages. Though there are distinct periods in terms of form and content, thematically there is a relatively consistent preoccupation with the divide between the self and world, and differences largely consist in emphasis and style over the underlying "story" of a Banville work. A further mark of this comes from John Kenny, who argues that the emergence of painting as a dominant art form by which to explore the imagination following the somewhat adumbrated tetralogy is not some sudden alteration to the Banvillian world, but rather a move that brings to the fore a motif that can be traced back to his earliest work. As Kenny puts it, early in his career "Banville often seemed to deploy pictorialism to decorative ends", but as he developed his style and themes these early references are clearly seen to be "foundational", building blocks of a larger, substantive and substantial aesthetic (149). This allows for the "intensity" of Banville middle period, where obsessive fixation on painting by the narrator of *The Book of Evidence*, *Ghosts* and *Athena* (later published in a single volume titled *Frames* and referred to here as the Frames Trilogy) is transmuted into a reflection on writing itself and the nature of self (149). Joseph McMinn concurs, noting how, from *Birchwood* on, "paintings retain [an] idealized aesthetic value throughout Banville, a kind of

enviable composure and self-sufficiency utterly lacking in the chaotic world of those who gaze upon them" (138). Here, Gabriel Godkin remembers as a child assembling a jigsaw depicting "a glorious gold and blue painting of a Renaissance Madonna" only to see it broken up by his brother Michael. Gabriel explicitly frames this moment in terms of a loss of innocence for him, a moment where the "fragility" of beauty becomes clear to him (McMinn 138).

This focus on the beauty of artworks is not central to these earlier works, but is nonetheless a significant leitmotif in the wider story of scientific, religious and philosophical discovery dramatised in Banville's tetralogy. It is also germane to the wider metafictional interest of the early novels, and the literary criticism and philosophical aspect of these is where the postmodern appellation is attached to Banville's work. Some critics, John Kenny for instance, have questioned Imhof and McMinn's use of the term in relation to Banville, but the usage is, at the very least, reasonable in the context of his early work. Melding fiction and historical figures sees his work read by Linda Hutcheon as an exemplar of "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 184), a form of fiction that parodies historical narratives. The lines between modernism and postmodernism are, however, necessarily ambiguous and some of the tensions seem evident in the closing paragraph of *Birchwood*, a novel that parodies the conventions of Victorian "big house" novels:

> Spring has come again, St Brigid's day, right on time. The harmony of the seasons mocks me. I spend hours watching the sky, the lake, the enormous sea. This world. I feel that if I could understand it I might then begin to understand the creatures who inhabit it. But I do not understand it. I find the world always odd, but odder still, I suppose, is the fact that I find it so, for what are the

> eternal verities by which I measure these temporal aberrations? Intimations abound, but they are felt only, and words fail to transfix them. Anyway, some secrets are not to be disclosed under pain of who knows what retribution, and whereof I cannot speak, thereof I must be silent. (172)

The closing line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* ends this passage and is an intriguing reference point in a literary context because it draws attention to the limits of language and the mystery of the world it is used to negotiate. Gabriel Godkin has seen his family home destroyed, a symbolic destruction that mirrors the collapse of the fiction that was his family history, losing his home, his family as he understood it, and his place within the version of Irish society he has grown up and lived in all his life. Words were used to build these stories he believed in, but they didn't, and can't ever, do justice to the mystery of the world and its persistence.

Indeed, his first two novels, *Nightspawn* and *Birchwood,* engage in a playful game with generic convention through the dissection and subversion of thriller tropes and the Irish "big house" Victorian novel respectively, so are clearly engaged in meta-literary games from their opening pages. Since *Doctor Copernicus*, the metaliterary interest has been more subtly and cunningly deployed and the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as it relates to Banville's work becomes more problematic. In this, his third novel, Banville draws on Arthur Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers,* the source material for his fictional telling of the life of Copernicus. This "fictionalisation" of his life involves a repositioning of his work as well, where Copernicus's efforts to map the heavens are seen as another imaginative process, just like writing or painting, or, to use the phrase Banville puts in Copernicus's mouth, "exalted naming" (219). However, as McMinn observes, to read these works as

postmodern parodies, while showing how “attuned Banville is to the theoretical world”, does seem to miss “the deep sense of critical sympathy in Banville for those, like Copernicus and Kepler, who dreamed of metanarratives and unifying visions” (7). In this the connection between Banville’s interest as an artist in these men of science becomes clearer. The tetralogy uses science, and the subsequent Frames Trilogy uses painting, as an analogue for the work of the writer, forcing these subjects through the mesh of language in a way that suggests an affinity between the work of the early modern astronomers, classical artists, and the writer in their efforts to fix upon something solid, reliable, true about the world.

The questions of epistemology and language emerge most clearly in the first two novels of the sequence, *Doctor Copernicus* and *Kepler*. These are markedly different from *Nightspawn* and *Birchwood* before and all of his novels after (excluding the dubious Hermes/Adam of *The Infinities*) because they largely rely on the third person voice for most or all of their narrative. This is not an impediment on the exploration of the individual subject and the relation to the world, between the intellect and life, but serves to demonstrate, as McMinn puts it, that “the search for knowledge of the universe is also a search for a language appropriate to its mystery” (138 2002). Copernicus’s life is one that disdains the earthly and pursues the heavenly, both literally and figuratively, where his work on the planetary movements aspires to a Platonic ideal of truth about the nature of things that the world he lives in and sees every day gradually undermines.

Elke D’hoker discusses the trajectory of Copernicus’s intellectual life as portrayed by Banville in considerable depth, challenging aspects of the received critical consensus in a way that emphasises the tension between modernity and

postmodernity in his works. Of particular significance here, she notes how Banville's inversion of the Cartesian cogito, from "I think therefore I am" to "I am therefore I think" (11) in the opening line of *Birchwood* is not (or not *just* anyway) a flashy, pretentious, too-clever-by-half first line, but actually cuts to the essential philosophical drama that animates all of his subsequent fiction.[3] This is because the central preoccupation of Banville's fiction from the opening line of *Birchwood* is the question of the relationship between words and the world. The inversion of the cogito also reverses the implicit scepticism of Descartes, the starting point of modern scientific theory. Rather than looking at thought as the basis of the self, Gabriel implies the world is self-evidently there, and thought follows from the fact of existence.

Copernicus's story makes the significance of this clearer. The third-person narration allows for a description of his childhood that Banville's later narrators do not enjoy, instead relying on their memories of youth rather than a contemporaneous account of it "as it happened". The privileged position of omniscient narration is, however, immediately problematised in *Doctor Copernicus*, where Banville, in opening passages reminiscent of the opening sections of Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, imagines the developing consciousness of the world of the infant Copernicus which touches on the epistemological concerns that define his oeuvre. "At first it had no name. It was the thing itself, the vivid thing" (8) the narrator declares, as the baby Nicolas ponders the mystery of the world around him, and in particular, a tree outside his window. D'hoker notes the usage of "the thing itself" here as a highly suggestive term, drawing to mind the Kantian "Ding-an-sich" and the noumenal world

[3] In the 2009 *Arts Lives* documentary "Being John Banville", made by RTE, he discusses some of the opening lines from his novels. The reading of *Birchwood's* first line causes him to shudder, saying "Oh that's really pretentious, that's really dreadful... I should never have written that. Shaw is right, 'youth is wasted on the young.'"

supposedly beyond the reach of human reason. This makes clear that we are in the realm of epistemological concerns from the opening, just as in *Birchwood* the Cartesian allusion immediately announces and problematises philosophical assumptions and tradition. Soon, someone explains that "the thing itself" here, swaying and stirring outside the window is called a,

> Tree. That was its name. And also: the linden. They were nice words. He had known them a long time before he knew what they meant. They did not mean themselves, they were nothing in themselves, they meant the dancing singing thing outside. In wind, in silence, at night, in the changing air, it changed and yet was changelessly the tree, the linden tree. (8)

In just these opening lines the question of language and its mediating role between things and the human mind is brought to our attention. Just because we are being given privileged access to Copernicus's life in Banville's novel, we are still not getting a world the reality of which is guaranteed. Instead, words are seen to be contingent within a wider structure of language, where Copernicus's "friend", an entity of much greater interest to Copernicus than the people who bustle around his childhood cot, is a large, swaying tree outside his window, but the words used to name these things mean nothing in themselves. The tree also provides a useful contrast in subsequent passages to objects that do not have an external existence. Just as there are trees that shake and stir against the window outside, there are things in the world that are not visible, that do not present themselves to the senses as easily, but are nonetheless felt by the young Copernicus:

> His mother asked him who did he love the best. Love did not dance, nor tap the window with frantic fingers, love had no leafy arms to shake, yet when she

spoke that name that named nothing, some impalpable but real thing within him responded as if to a summons, as if it had heard its name spoken" (8-9).

What is worth noting here is the sense of harmonious unity between the world and the words used to describe it, that Copernicus's "childhood depicts a romanticized version of the premodern faith in a basic unity of self and world, of mind and matter, or of words and things" (55), as D'hoker puts it. This sense of order survives the death of Copernicus's mother while he is still a child, but is broken when his father dies as he sits on the cusp of adolescence. As such, Copernicus's childhood presents an image of language and world in harmony, and the conflict between things and how they are described emerges later.

D'hoker places this fall into language in terms of the Heideggerian critique of the Judaeo-Christian philosophical tradition, outlining how representation became the predominant model for philosophy, which essentially means epistemology. Put in simple terms, the philosophical tension of Banville's novels can be described in terms of epistemology, where the question of how we know the world has trumped ontology, the question of what it means for things to exist at all. On Heidegger's account, the ascendant position of epistemology as the philosophical issue is sealed with the break between the pre-Socratics and Plato. Here, the representational theory of knowledge is written into history, whereby knowledge of an object is only realised by virtue of the ideal form of that object impressing itself on the mind of the subject.

The terms of the representational understanding of the world emerge more clearly when contrasted with Heidegger's critique of logocentric reason. In Heidegger's interpretation of philosophical history, the pre-Socratic understanding of truth as *alethia,* often translated as "unconcealedness", is, through etymological

analysis, contrasted with the representational understanding of knowledge. This representational paradigm encompasses both Plato's theory of forms and Kant's transcendental idealism. Whereas representation is synonymous with epistemology with truth residing in the correspondence between things, Heideggerain *alethia* is primarily concerned with the being of things in the first place, the ontological basis upon which things exist. One implication of this effort to focus on ontology as the first question of philosophy is to radically diminish, if not entirely obliterate, the dualism of subject and object. The Heideggerian project from his earliest works is avowedly focused on undermining the stark lines drawn between the objective world and subjective experience in philosophy, where Heidegger sets out to undermine Cartesian duality through a radical analysis of human existence without positing knowledge as the fundamental question of existence, but by simply assuming that the world exists and is knowable.

By contrast, the classical vision of representation sets the terms of most philosophical discourse for the following two centuries of thought. The crucial point in the mimetic scheme initiated by Plato is that which is represented is meant to correlate to some object that exists externally to the subject perceiving it. The Kantian revolution in philosophy maintains the representational paradigm, but turns from objects impressing themselves on the mind to the mind actively playing a role in knowledge of the object outside it. What's significant under the Kantian conception of the world is that knowledge of the subject, and the categories that the subject understand the world through, is the basis of knowledge about the world.

The duality implied by representation is maintained under the Kantian system, but is subverted, where the objective reality of Plato's realm of forms is pushed out of

reach by Kant. The human mind can only know the phenomenal world by virtue of its in-built categories that leave things in themselves forever beyond the bounds of human understanding. Philosophy since Kant's "Copernican Revolution" has, even in most stridently realist forms, been forced to grapple with the implications of Kant's transcendental idealism. Others have sought to radically revise notions of truth by taking the Kantian paradigm and extending it so that there is no lingering sense of loss regarding the thing-in-itself. Instead, they drag the supposedly objective realm of truth into the subject, leading to multiple perspectives of truth.

As such, the importance of the subject-object divide should hopefully be clearer, and that there is an alternative to this understanding of existence seems important given the kind of tension built up in the relationships between Banville's narrators and their worlds. In Banville's fiction it is through the representational paradigm's inherent tension between subject and object that the question of representation and its value as a theory of truth informs the dynamic of his fiction. D'hoker explores this relation to several themes and formal features in his novels. The scientific subject matter provides the initial hints as to this tension in his early novels. These works necessarily grapple with the grand questions of truth and scientific inquiry, but do so informed by the modern perspective, where Kant's revolution has brought about a radical crisis in knowledge and humankind's relation to its world, implying a human centred universe. The subsequent novels of the art trilogy increase the heightened subjectivity of later science novels (*Mefisto* and *The Newton Letter*). Here, the aesthetic sensibility of the narrator and his radically subjective experience of the world through painting conflicts with the bodily reality of his victim in *The Book of Evidence*, shattering his image of himself while he also destroys his victim's life. In

the subsequent sequels he attempts to reconstruct a self through art and writing, but it is the flaw of over-intellectualising his persona that ultimate undermines these efforts.

The image of the cinema is just one of a multitude of forms that Banville has used in his novels to explore this recurrent preoccupation, but it is a suggestive one, because the cinema dramatises fantasies of order and coherence in an extremely powerful, persuasive way, and this brings into focus fundamental questions around the nature of being, memory, and truth itself because these questions are defined by the drive towards creating order from chaos. Many of his previous novels have drawn upon historical narratives for their inspiration, telling the stories of individuals who propose new images by which to understand our world. This is most prominent in his Science Tetralogy, which draws upon the lives and works of Copernicus, Kepler and Newton, but is also evident in the subsequent *Frames Trilogy*, which takes its inspiration from the crimes of Malcolm MacArthur and the "GUBU" period to which these belong, [4] and later novels *The Untouchable* and *Shroud* also used biographical details of famous and infamous individuals to explore Banville's recurrent themes.

These sequences of novels revolve around other historical and cultural narratives in their consideration of story-telling and art in general. The scientific novels, from *Doctor Copernicus* and *Kepler* to *The Newton Letter* and *Mefisto*, draw on historical stories of earth-changing revolutions in the conceptual understanding of the universe. These novels take "Grand Narratives", stories told about the nature of things, as a starting point for consideration of memory, selfhood, and story-telling. The conflict of scientific endeavour and religious authority provides an ironic

[4] GUBU is an acronym, standing for "grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented". It was coined by Conor Cruise-O'Brien in relation to Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey's comments that the discovery MacArthur had been living in the home of the Attorney General while suspected of the murders of Bridie Gargan and Donal Dunne was "a bizarre happening, an unprecedented situation, a grotesque situation, an almost unbelievable mischance".

backdrop to the more fundamental modern and postmodern doubts about the human story of free, self-determining individuals acting in accordance with their own, transparent judgement. This theme of profound ambiguity and self-doubt is largely implied in the science novels. Interviewed by Ronan Sheehan in 1979, between the publication of *Copernicus* and *Kepler*, Banville said, "Since I've started writing novels based in historical fact I've realised that the past does not exist in terms of fact. It only exists in terms of the way we look at it, in the way historians have looked at it" (84). This discovery accounts for the development in later novels, from *The Newton Letter* and *Mefisto* to the late period that is to be covered in these chapters, away from what Banville calls his "European Novel of Ideas" mode and towards the Frames Trilogy. In these novels a first-person narrator loses himself in paintings and other images, those he has of himself, people around him, and his world. As science did in the Tetralogy, pictures become an analogue for story-telling here.

Given this tendency to reflect on story-telling through other modes of expression, it is interesting to consider the emergence of screen and stage in the later Banville novels as images through which the personality of the narrators and their worlds announce themselves. While the performing arts do not become the focus of as intense a treatment as painting and scientific theorising, they nonetheless act as crucial figurative and allusive frames for interpreting Banville's late work. The cinematic image and narrative indulges in the desire for order inherent within the pursuit of truth, knowledge and story-telling. The epistemological concerns of Banville's narrators overlap with the cinematic threads in his work insofar as the cinema becomes a place of consoling stories and useful material the comprehension of which allows them to create new personae or develop their personality, as well as informing

their general understanding of the world and their behaviour within it. Within these narrators the coherence of the cinematic image doubles as the possibility of a true self, an authentic, coherent and whole personality and place within the world. The kind of doubt expressed by Copernicus about his theories, and the turbulence his revolution renders on the universe as understood to that point echoes in the dislocation these characters feel in their personal lives and place in the world. The questions of authenticity they engage with and their relationships with women are two of the clearest expressions of this desire for a cinematic order, for coherence and autonomy.

Authenticity and Women in Banville's Fiction

The Untouchable is the novel that immediately follows *Athena*, the final novel in the Frames Trilogy, and is told from the point of view of disgraced art historian Victor Maskell, whose biography is an amalgam of scholar and spy Antony Blunt and Northern Irish poet Louis MacNeice. The novel reads like a bridge between the art novels of the preceding trilogy and the performance theme of the later period novels. In this they mirror the late entries in the Science Tetralogy, where their concerns overlap with the novels of the Frames Trilogy, with questions of authenticity emerging and coming to dominate the narrative voice of the protagonist in *Frames*. For instance, *Athena* sees Morrow, an alias for the former Freddie Montgomery of *The Book of Evidence*, in the employ of a criminal known as "the Da", tasked with verifying the authenticity of several stolen paintings. "The Da" is a caricature of Martin "The General" Cahill, a flamboyant Dublin gangster whose gang was responsible for the theft of several paintings from Russborough House's Beit Collection in 1986. In a typically elliptical move by Banville, the Beit family who donated to these pictures to

Irish state prefigure the Behrens family in *The Book of Evidence*, from whose estate Freddie attempts to steal the paintings that lead to his greater crime. These obvious references to art history and popular historical representations of art in the recent past are allied with the intense aesthetic and psychological import of painting in *The Book of Evidence* and *Ghosts*, where paintings assume a significance in the life of Freddie Montgomery that disrupts his sense of self and acts as a reflection on the nature of words, truth and fiction on Banville's part. For Freddie, his ability to tell fake from real pictures is the ultimate test of his new identity and that he fails in this task suggests something about the way in which he views himself and the world.

Freddie is given to thinking of himself as an actor, imagining himself with movie star looks setting young hearts aflutter, and generally viewing and talking about himself in terms of a performer. What is interesting to note in the current discussion is how the questions of authenticity and reality overlap with the performance and stage metaphors that are present in the earlier works, but are pushed "centre stage" in the later works. *The Untouchable* continues to explore the territory of the Frames Trilogy, and preceding the first Cleave novel, *Eclipse*, where the wizened performer has forgotten how to act, but the overlap between the themes of authenticity and performing gestures both to the preceding trilogy and the work to come. Victor Maskell, as an art historian, has spent his life performing. He has pretended to be heterosexual, been ashamed of his Irish roots in Northern Ireland as an academic in the rarefied atmosphere of Cambridge (and the relatively recent conversion of his ancestors from Catholic to Protestant), and most significantly of all, has been a double agent for the Soviet Union within the British intelligence services. Banville's Nabokovian pleasure in naming people is nowhere more evident than in the motif of

the mask announced in Maskell's name. It recurs throughout the work, and has a double significance with regard to the development of Banville's aesthetic, where it has connotations of not just concealing identity but of constituting identity too. For Banville's narrators, masks aren't just for hiding one's "true" self, but a means towards forging a self.

Maskell makes the connection explicit as he discusses the sneaking paranoia that begins to envelop him in the later stages of the war:

> My life had become a kind of hectic play-acting in which I took all the parts. It might have been more tolerable had I been allowed to see my predicament in a tragic, or at least a serious, light, if I could have been Hamlet, driven by torn loyalties to tricks and disguises and feigned madness; but no, I was more like one of the clowns, scampering in and out of the wings and desperately doing quick-changes, putting on one mask only to whip it off immediately and replace it with another, while all the time, out beyond the footlights, the phantom audience of my worst imaginings hugged itself in ghastly glee. (315)

Maskell frames his duplicity as comic rather than tragic, seeing it as not born of sincere, passionate political commitment, but rather that his aiding the Soviet Union is itself a performance. When he visits the Soviet Union he sees the theoretical understanding of communism is at odds with the society to which he has tied his future, but nonetheless he continues to shuttle information back to Moscow and finds ways to assuage his disillusion. As with his artistic criticism, his Marxism retreats to, or never ventures from, the refuge of a formalistic detachment from "reality". This political self-deception amounts to a performance as well, but the comic aspect of this lies in the fundamentally inauthentic character of his actions from the earliest. Though

this may appear worthy of condemnation to a reader, to Maskell writing his confession the adoption of masks and invention of fictions is a necessary and natural way to living. In striking this Nietzschean pose of protean creator of the self Victor Maskell is simply a more competent version of Freddie, though no less prone to delusion. His final act is to mimic the scene depicted in his most treasured possession, the invented painting on Banville's part, *The Death of Seneca* by Poussin, where the moments before Seneca the Younger's suicide are depicted. This death, ordered by the emperor Nero, is a truly stoic act, the accused conspirator accepting his fate; however, the closing moments of Maskell's life and the novel, the prelude to his own suicide, seems willed, unnecessary, and an act aiming for profundity, aesthetic resonance and some form of painting-like permanence.

McMinn calls this a "bathetic" performance, Maskell's craven desire for a symbolic permanence and meaning, ironically, suggesting something of his "true self" beneath all these masks (2002 143). It also raises a wider issue relating to performance that cuts across the artistic and philosophical concerns already discussed. This is self-consciousness itself, the way awareness of oneself as a thing being viewed is, in essence, the main problem these narrators have with the world. Banville's previous work adapting Heinrich von Kleist and his references to Kleist's works in several novels signals the idea of self-consciousness as important in the understanding of his fiction. Kleist's curious, fragmentary piece "The Puppet Theatre" describes a meeting between the narrator and his friend,[5] a director of a dance company, where they discuss the friend's recent attendance of puppet shows. His friend explains that "the puppet's silent acting gave him a great deal of pleasure" and "hinted that a dancer wishing to improve his art could learn a lot from them" (411). The friend here admires

[5] Often translated as "On the Marionette Theatre".

the grace and balance of the puppets because their "dancing" is not affected by self-consciousness or thoughts about how they are being perceived. Alex Cleave, performing Kleist's *Amphitryon* in *Eclipse*, breaks down when he utters the line "Who if not I, then, is Amphitryon?" (20), the question of identity, and sudden awareness both of himself and of the character he is playing, as a thing, one more thing in a world of things, bringing on a nervous collapse from which he struggles to recover.

Mark O'Connell's reading of Banville's stories as "narcissistic fictions" precisely identifies this underlying anxiety and how it animates the action and behaviour of Banvillian narrators. A common understanding of narcissism, that it is an excess of self-love and ego aggrandisement, misses the obverse side of it, where it is defined by intense anxiety about the self. As O'Connell puts it, "Narcissism [...] is not nearly so much about self-love – about complacency or egotism – as it is about self-absorption" (ch. 2). This deep fascination with oneself cuts (figuratively, though sometimes leading to literal cuts) both ways, where the intensity of self-consciousness both raises up the self to mountainous altitudes of importance, but equally increases the scale of failures, accidents, errors, and flaws that assail a narcissistic personality. Ultimately, as O'Connell notes, narcissism is "entropic" (ch. 2), tending towards degeneration, because it amounts to a rejection of reality, and by extension, new experiences, the absorption in the self and obsession with protecting and projecting the supposedly perfect image leading to destruction.

Nowhere is the anxiety of performance greater than in the relationships between Banvillian narrators and the women who populate their worlds. Woman as a concept and women generally seem to form the apex at which the philosophical, aesthetic and performance images cross. Most of Banville's intellectualised narrators

are portrayed as obsessive to a highly destructive degree where the women in their lives are concerned. Ruth Frehner in her analysis of the gender stereotyping of female characters in Banville's fiction points out how "the women figures are mediated through the mind of a male protagonist, a narrator, and, more than anything else, they reflect his desires and fears" (53).

Banville often quotes Baudelaire as saying "Genius consists of being able to summon up childhood at will" (Banville *Guardian* Sep 2000). One image Banville frequently draws upon in his efforts to summon up childhood is the cinema of his youth. It is a symbol of childhood and dawning adolescence both in his novels and in his writing as a reviewer. For Cleave and Morden in particular the cinema is a site of formative youthful experiences, for good and ill, where they first begin to express and experience moments of intimacy that seem especially significant in the context of Banville's protagonists and their troubled relation to the great other-object, women. Even using a term like "the feminine" raises difficult questions about the way gender is represented in Banville's work. John Kenny makes the important point that, though the "literary pictorialism" of Banville's fiction involves a "stark male/female opposition", the aesthetic of Banville's work relies on a "highly mannered set of themes and procedures" (Kenny *John Banville* 150). Given the reference to Greek classical and *commedia dell'arte* styles of theatre above, and, indeed, Banville's body of work, which is deeply intertextual and engaged with questions of art *qua* art, this is a point well made in the context of Banville's fiction and its relation to the wider world. Certainly there are degrees of ambiguity and complexity to Banville's novels in general, and to the gender dynamic in particular, so it is easy to agree when Kenny stresses the heightened artifice and unreality of Banville's fiction and the "predatory,

lustful, idealizing" (150) concept of the male gaze as it applies to visuality in Banville. In saying this, my hope is that this study of Banville's work does not join what Kenny calls "simplistic and moralizing investigations" (150) of this gender dynamic by drawing attention to some of the features of the divide between the masculine and feminine in his work.

For instance, while acknowledging the heightened artifice and relation to traditional literary tropes in Banville work, the masculine/feminine binary seems to echo in and reflect on the philosophical issues raised in so many ways that, as a critic, it seems worth reflecting upon without wishing to dwell on "moral" questions. In her reading of women in Banville's fiction, Ruth Frehner points out how Banville's narrators divide women into two types, "the dark one and the fair one", the paradigmatic instance being Ottilie, blonde, bumptious, awkward, bodily, and sexually available, and Charlotte, brunette, mysterious, measured, otherworldly, and romantically elusive in *The Newton Letter*. Elke D'Hoker suggests these types correspond roughly to a traditional literary dichotomy between the virgin and the whore, "the angel and femme fatale" (137). The psychology of the masculine protagonist here is founded on a dichotomy discussed by Freud, in "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men", in terms of their perception of a woman's sexual availability: "a woman who is chaste and whose reputation is irreproachable never exercises an attraction that might raise her to the status of a love-object," and "only a woman who is in some way or other of bad repute sexually, whose fidelity and reliability are open to some doubt" will suffice (165). For Banville's narrators, the alleged desire they feel for "the dark one" they meet is cast into doubt by their disdain in actual sexual encounters, and in general, for the bodily "fair one" in their lives.

Subsequent novels work over these types in differing forms, and Frehner traces their lineage to the mother figure in several of Banville's works, where traits overlap and combine. D'hoker notes intriguingly how psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, in her reading of aspects of masculine development and sexuality, suggests that the mother figure represents both sides of this split in "the breast", in that she possesses both a "good breast", connoting love and gratification, and a "bad breast", representing persecution (D'hoker 141). *Birchwood*, the psychodrama of Gabriel Godkin's matrilineal origins, makes a mockery of these notions about grace and ethereality. Gabriel believes his mother to have been Beatrice Godkin, whom he remembers as being "neither young or old, but thirtyish, you might say, awkward and yet graceful [...] I think she had a beautiful face, long and narrow, as pale as paper, with big dark eyes" (26-7), but this is all transposed through his memory, and as such: "His mother is primarily a spiritual figure, graceful, pale and perfect" (D'hoker 142). His mother here is Madonna-like, making him the child of an immaculate conception, and, naturally, this is shown to be fiction by the end of the novel. Martha, his aunt, through an incestuous union with his father, is revealed as his biological mother, and is framed in significantly more physical, worldly terms than Beatrice. She is a "small intense young woman, quick as a bird with short red hair and a pale, pointed face" (38).

In this reversal is to be traced the comedic, critical aspect of Banville's fiction. *Birchwood's* upending of Gabriel's family history is mirrored in the conclusions of several Banville narrators' stories. Indeed, Frehner points out how *The Newton Letter*, playing with the Big House genre of the Anglo-Irish novel, makes a fool of its narrator, who too readily reads into the circumstances of the Lawless household a history and relationships that, as a historian, he ought to be sensitive to and aware of

to a greater degree, pointing out how, “the narrator's preconceived and, as it turns out, utterly misconceived idea about the people at the big house is also symptomatic of his perception of the world, and in particular of his perception of women” (61). In the reversals the narrators endure there is a suggestion of the world impinging on closed visions. This is the obverse side of narcissism, where self-absorption is so total it prevents difference from ever impinging on the world of these narrators. The narrators over-intellectualise their lives and surroundings, resulting in their misreading of the world. The relationships with women is where the drama of philosophical, aesthetic and performance questions overlap, and the cinema is a place and a creative form that further connects these diverse elements in his later fiction.

Narcissism and Alterity in *The Infinities*

The novel *The Infinities*, published in 2009, provides a significant example from the late period of the way in which these multiple concerns overlap. The weighty scientific material and revised plan of the tetralogy is referenced through Adam Godley, the ailing patriarch of the Godley family, whose life’s work as a mathematician has revolutionised understanding of physics and (apparently) confirmed the existence of parallel universes, which stretch out infinitely in innumerable variations. However, the framing of this as an alternative history is important in understanding the connection between this text and the wider context being explored in this study. *The Infinities* is a light and playful piece, taking place in a world where the Greek gods interfere in human affairs, a parallel universe where Sweden is a warmongering superpower and Queen Elizabeth I was executed, Mary Queen of Scots reigning instead. As such, we see here Banville returning to the

content of his earlier works, the preoccupations with delineation of the laws of the universe and an explicitly epistemological mindset, albeit in a comic mode. Adam is one of his "high, cold heroes", a mind that has revolutionised science we're told, but the novel is about his regrets and weaknesses. Further, by the novel's end, the whole world created here has been undermined by the disruption of this framing device.

Godley adopts the guise of Hermes, son of Zeus, to tell the story of events around his home as he lies in bed following a stroke which has rendered him mute. The overlap between Adam and Hermes emerges gradually. In describing the sick man in his stricken state, Hermes observes how, regarding his revolutionary works, "He cares nothing for their so-called immortality if he is not to be here to savour its vaunted consolations" (30-31), before sardonically following this statement of egotistic desire to transcend death with an apparent admonishment: "Me. Me. *Me*" (31). Banville's italicised emphasis here is a sign that all is not as it seems, and as the novel progresses the boundary between the narrator Hermes and old Adam, discoverer of multiple universes, breaks down. For instance, while Adam is reminiscing about his younger days and how he met his second wife, he suddenly breaks into an apparently contemporaneous moment occurring downstairs in the house, where his son and wife are talking (235). Much like Hermes, this suggests he is capable of slowing time and space in order to get a fuller picture of events going on around him, or perhaps he is just making all this up himself? As the story reaches its conclusion these breaks become more frequent, with old Adam eventually dropping the mask of Hermes completely.

Though the novel starts with the scientific, mathematics and multiple universes, it is really about the personal mistakes, regrets and guilt of Adam Godley

senior. The title *The Infinities*, while referring to the multiple universes of Godley's research, also points to the central thought underpinning Emmanuel Levinas ethical writings, that being the idea of the infinite and how this can help orientate philosophy in a new direction, away from epistemology, and towards ethics as the first philosophy. Elke D'hoker invokes Levinas in her reading of Banville's novels, and the philosophical implications of his work, based on a re-evaluation of philosophy as primarily and fundamentally motivated by ethics, are wide-ranging. What is of interest in this discussion is the way in which Levinas's ethical thought is based on the simple insight from Descartes that the infinite is an insurmountable challenge to the dominance of thought because it can never be reduced to a concept, it always exceeds the limit of thought. In light of this Levinas interprets the infinite to be radically other to the self because it will always defy any attempts to limit it. The ethical import of this thought lies in the defiantly infinite possibilities that inhere in the other, insofar as the self can try to dominate or even destroy the other physically, but cannot escape the challenge to the self presented by the other. In this way, this perspective is partly a question of visuality, insofar as the visual is an aspect of the relationship between the self and the other. Levinas's defining concept for this reorientation of philosophy to ethical ends is the Face. Though this isn't meant to be taken solely and literally as a physical, visual phenomenon, it, again, implies a significant degree of visuality in the Levinasian scheme. Banville's novels have always featured struggles of the individual self against both the difference and indifference of the wider world, and the Banvillian protagonist's inability to understand the world around him lends itself to a Levinasian interpretation because these characters struggle so much to deal with the other outside of their narcissistic world views. The problem is that the world gives up too much context, and the Banvillian narrator can only read so much of it, and often misreads it.

The primary thematic connection in terms of this difficulty with alterity between *The Infinities* and The Frames Trilogy is shown through the central characters' relationship with women. As discussed above, the Frames Trilogy marks a high point of internalised epistemological doubt in Banville's work. The pivotal moment of the first of these novels, *The Book of Evidence*, is the theft of a painting by Freddie Montgomery, the narrator. He has developed an obsession with this picture of a woman, but the attempted robbery is a farce and while escaping he is interrupted by a maid in the stately home where the picture is housed. He kills her in a moment of panic, is eventually arrested and tells his story from his cell as he awaits trial. All three novels are narrated from Freddie's point of view as he wrestles with guilt, remorse and regret, attempting to somehow compensate for the great mistakes he has made.

In *The Book of Evidence*, Freddie believes he murdered Josie Bell because, as he puts it, "I did not imagine her vividly enough, that I did not make her live. Yes, that failure of imagination is my real crime" (215). By contrast, he managed to dream up a whole life for a woman in the painting he steals just from looking at it. This self-interpretation on the part of Montgomery is often taken as being the self-evident message of the novel. Imagination is the means by which empathy comes into being, it would seem. Elke D'hoker, however, challenges this contention because it seems something of a contradiction in itself, as Freddie is clearly a very imaginative person. More substantially, Freddie doesn't just kill her, but insists he had to kill her. Why? The answer is that she was a threat to him.

Rather than impeding him, his imagination aides the murder. This may seem like a matter of semantics, but it is crucially important in understanding the episode because it challenges the idea that imagination is necessarily an ethical good in itself.

As D'hoker points out, both Freddie's imaginative interaction with the painting and physical interactions with the servant Josie Bell are defined by Freddie's imaginative capacity. It is not that he fails to imagine Josie Bell, it is that he imagines her all too well in his own terms, and when she defies these, it drives him to kill her. Both Josie and the woman in the painting are seen through Freddie and his "knowledge" of the world. So Josie is interpreted through the prism of the Irish literary stereotype of "the shy, discreet obedient country girl gone to serve in the Big House" (155) with his description of her timidity and seemingly child-like manner. Similarly, the woman in the painting is loaded with ideas from Montgomery, but these ones aren't based on stereotypes of other people, but rather reflect Freddie's own self image. He imagines this seventeenth-century woman sharing the same kind of disdainful disaffection for her surroundings that he feels towards his own world. The painting of the woman is a mirror, and Josie Bell is a canvas on which he paints his own ideas.

The problem for Josie Bell is that she soon shows that she does not conform to the shy, child-like girl he imagines her to be. She kicks, fights, lunges at him as he attempts to make his escape with her captive. Tellingly, in the instant before he hits her across the head with a hammer, Freddie has an epiphanic moment of insight into the "reality" of Josie as she struggles with him (113). She breaks through the stereotypes and clichéd imagery, shattering his illusions and challenging his understanding of himself. In order to protect his self-image, he kills her.

At the ethical level, the pattern is repeated in *The Infinities*, but in a more mundane manner. There is no murder, and rather than seeing a troubled criminal mind trying to rationalise his crimes from a cell, we get the peaceful musings of an ill old man at the end of what seems to have been a contented life. However, through his

deathbed reminiscences we see a similar pattern emerge in old Adam's relationships. His two wives are shown to have suffered because of him. His first wife, Dorothy, eventually kills herself due to his inability to communicate and neglect of her. He says as he reflects on her death that "it is as if she had not been sufficiently present, when alive, for her memory to flourish after death" (128). That "as if" is a crucial qualifier. This is not about her, but his perception of her. Later in the same chapter she is described in similarly insubstantial terms. She was "secretive", seemingly hiding around their home, and when he would happen upon her she would "start and turn towards him quickly, whipping her hands back and widening her eyes in a panicked show of innocence, like a naughty child caught in the act" (129). After her death, his mother blames him, "his neglect of her had driven Dottie to her death" she says, but this neglect is a lacunae the narrator does not explicitly elaborate on. It is hinted that he has failed to give her a child, as he details different "projects – gardening, exotic cooking, carpentry, even," (129) that she took up to fill some void only to quickly lose interest. The final image he provides to illustrate this is him collecting the ball of wool and knitting needles she has abandoned, another lost interest. In terms of symbolism, the end of her life, the end of her story, her yarn-spinning, and him, the narrator of this story, being the one to tidy up after her, is highly suggestive in terms of this ethical discussion. Damningly, these reflections come to him as he remembers himself in a Venetian brothel two weeks after her suicide. In a similar vein, his second wife drinks to cope with a profound melancholia, and there are hints of marital misbehaviour on his part, but again the same opacity about how this relationship has devolved to this point. And she is also repeatedly seen in child-like terms by this narrator pretending to be a god.

The connection on the level of ethical misrepresentation between *The Infinities* and *Frames* is further supported on a textual level by frequent references to doorways and people being "enframed" by them in the texts. For instance, in the second novel of the trilogy, *Ghosts*, Elke D'hoker points to numerous images of characters being framed: "Licht 'hovered in the dimness of the doorway (15),' Flora 'shimmered in the doorway (43),' Mrs Vanden 'rising up suddenly in the dim doorway'" (75), and so on. The Flora character here is the most relevant one in the current discussion because in *Ghosts* she is the person who Freddie now tries to imagine into existence to atone for killing Josie Bell. Here is their first meeting:

> I had spotted her straight away, with my gimlet eye, the moment I had walked into the kitchen and seen them standing there barefoot with their mugs of tea. She sprang out from their midst like the Virgin in a busy Annunciation, calm as Mary and nimbed with that unmistakeable aura of the chosen. (69)

The door frames serve as an illustrative metaphor for the delimiting of the other involved in this imaginative attempt to ethically engage with others, and also gestures towards the "mirroring" Freddie perpetrates as he attempts to read the portrait of the woman in *The Book of Evidence*. Flora is represented as the figure of the Virgin Mary as though she were appearing in some Christian iconographic painting, emphasising the apparent link between her and the painted woman of *The Book of Evidence*. As D'hoker puts it, speculating on broader textual features of *Ghosts*, it seems that Freddie may have "reinterpreted his visitors [in *Ghosts*] along the lines of painting, as it were caging them in art" (161).

Similarly in *The Infinities*, there are countless references to doorways, which often function to present those "enframed" by them in a tableau-like image. Young

Adam's wife, Helen, "veers... through a doorway and into a room where she comes upon Roddy Wagstaff" (189), a would-be biographer of the ill Adam. The text continues: "Roddy is sitting on a straight-backed chair beside a pair of French doors, all alone, one knee crossed on the other, an elbow cupped in a palm and a lighted cigarette cocked at a quizzical angle in his lifted fingers; he looks at her as if he were sitting for his portrait" (189). When old Adam talks about his first wife Dorothy, her ethereal, haunting presence even when alive is illustrated by the way he would often assume she was out but then "suddenly, padding from his study to the kitchen or the lavatory, he would chance upon her lurking in a passageway, or a doorway, or in the recesses of a room mysteriously made deeper and dimmer by her presence in it" (129). It is not coincidental that this image manages to combine the framing metaphor along with the sense old Adam has of his first wife's essential lack of being. Another example, the mysterious visitor to the Godley home, Benny Grace, stumbles upon young Adam comforting his cowering mother as a thunderstorm rages:

> The rain rattles furiously against the unseen window, booms upon the glazed roof above. Benny presses himself to the wall, all eyes and ears. Is it not a quaint scene? A moment out of Watteau, it might be, these figures about their ambiguous business, in uncertain light, as the day wanes. Let us leave them there, the three of them, for now, the languishing lady and attendant man, and the listener by the doorway, a meddling jester. (264)

Again, the combination of painting references and the lurking figure in the doorway ties *The Infinities* back to *Frames*. Also, the Watteau references explicitly links *Ghosts* and this novel because a fictional painting by Watteau acts as a structural device in *Ghosts*, where the series of characters that make up that story are represented

in *Le Monde D'or*, a painting Freddie meditates upon at different points in the narrative. And the "uncertain light" echoes the "dimness" frequently referenced in the *Ghosts* doorway scenes.

The framing also lends itself to the cinematic reading that will be advanced here. While *The Infinities* does not enjoy the kind of deep resonant connection with cinema other novels of this period do, nonetheless there are some features of the novel that gesture towards this late preoccupation (Hermes, as narrator, self-consciously takes on a cinematic aspect in his leaping from narrative point to narrative point, for instance). In particular this centres on Petra, Adam Godley's troubled daughter, and Helen, his daughter-in-law. Both of these women are presented, in different ways, as actresses, and they roughly conform to the dichotomy discussed above, as different sides of the feminine in the eyes of Banville's narrators.

Both Petra and Helen are framed as actresses in Banville's text. Petra is a hypochondriac, obsessive and seemingly afflicted by numerous maladies. Young Adam, her older brother, sees her as his "loony sister, hearing voices, seeing things" (11), and her issues are a source of torment for their mother, Ursula. In her appearance she calls to mind the angelic figures, those beyond the realm of bodily sexuality: "She is tiny and thin with a heart-shaped face and haunted eyes. For a long time she had her head shaved bare but now the hair is beginning to grow back, a bulrush-brown nap that covers her skull evenly all over" (10). With the visit of Benny Grace, her father's mysterious friend, she begins to think of herself as an actress, having to play a role for this guest.

> She still does not know who he is or what he is doing here, except what he said, that he has come to see her father. She follows Ivy down the stairway,

> hearing the hollow knocking her own feet make on the wooden steps; she feels like an actress who has forgotten her lines making a mortified exit through a trapdoor down from the stage. She thinks of her brother's wife and scowls inwardly. (149-150)

Petra's inadequacy as an actress is underlined by her desperate attempts to woo the caddish Roddy Wagstaff. Again, Banville's naming of a character gestures towards their personality and role within the narrative, where Roddy adopts the style and manner of a playboy, though whether he quite pulls off the act is open to question.

Roddy is first introduced when young Adam meets him at the train station. Hermes is in situ to see his arrival, and is immediately struck by the sense that Roddy is stepping from the screen into their lives: "Tall and slender and slightly stooped, Roddy has the aspect of a film heart-throb of a former time" (96). Later, young Adam observes how Roddy's manner of speaking has "as if they had been written down on prompt-cards and practised many times" (104), and this serves only to underline the performance Roddy is affecting in his appearance. He aims for an air of caddish exoticism and adventure from a bygone age of cinema. Hermes notes his clothes as he steps from the train; fawn slacks, pale-tan shoes, white linen jacket over his arm, and white shirt with the collar open and a yellow cravat decorating his chest, as though he were some minor character in some desert or jungle-set romp, or Errol Flynn aboard a pirate vessel. His blonde hair is side parted and "carefully arranged in a casual sweep across his brow", furthering the foppish, waggish image, and even his "slim pigskin suitcase" takes on a "sinister" air according to our narrator as he steps onto the platform (96).

As they depart the station Roddy begins to get into his role, an antique

advertisement for tobacco prompting him to light up. The brand, Player's Navy Cut, hints at the kind of adventurous air that Roddy brings with him off the train, the advert depicting a "lifebuoy with rope, stout Jack Tar, and distantly behind him on the rolling main a pair of three-masters under full sail" (96). Playing the part of this image from swashbuckling cinematic adventures, he produces a "flat silver cigarette case" and lights a cigarette from it with "a petrol lighter of the same vintage" as the case (96-97), and "a waft of rich, exotic smoke reaches Adam's nostrils". It's as though Adam is getting a brief experience of some far off place or way of life, a vision of some alternative world, a tiny motion picture of a different time and place. As they leave the train station the vision becomes blurred, Roddy seeming to disappear in the shadow of a tree. Once they arrive at the house, Petra is there to meet her supposed beau, standing in the doorway her arm grasping the frame, and something of Roddy's swagger has dissipated. The more we learn of him, the more the sheen of confident, worldly exoticism begins to wear off.

He is supposedly a suitor for Petra, but he cannot bring himself to deliver the performance required, as young Adam, knowing that his real interest is in their father's life story, asks him pointedly to "be nice" to Petra once they arrive at the house. Banville describes his reaction, the barely concealed unease it arouses: "'Nice?' he says, seeming to dangle the word aloft by one corner" (106), before "queasily smiling" (107) as he greets the supposed object of his affection at the front of the house.

Where Petra's life is marked by struggle with performance, Helen is an actress by profession. The divide of these two on the angel/whore schema is underpinned by the blood relation Petra enjoys with old Adam, the ultimate author of these images. As

his daughter, she cannot be the bodily woman, and must, at least in his eyes, be the tortured, too-good-for-this-world angel. Helen, no blood relation but the partner of old Adam's son, does not present the same degree of difficulty. Throughout much of the story Helen is a cipher for young Adam's anxieties and desires, and old Adam's lustful fantasies under the Hermes/Zeus artifice. However, eventually she does become a figure independent of young Adam, if not old Adam/Hermes' narration.

Her name and the classical references throughout already suggest a regal aspect to her character, and this is only emphasised by Hermes' description of her, as he admires her "Attic blue and gold" (188) sleeveless dress, and begins to fill in the details of her appearance and background. He notes how her training as an actress has given her two different kinds of walk, her natural one and a learned one. "In the learned one she moves with what seems a stately languor, each foot at each step placed carefully heel to toe in front of the other and the hips loosely swaying" (188), the mannered comportment suggesting a royal authority and degree of control which, nonetheless, Hermes, and his father Zeus, finds less appealing than the more animated and clumsy ski-like walk that is her natural state.

This is a clear gesture to the Kleistian trope discussed above, where the affect of self-consciousness is seen as inherently less graceful and beautiful than the natural or instinctive (189). Helen's ungainly walk when not "performing" further signals her status as the "earthy", bodily woman in contrast to Petra's ethereal mystery. Further, Hermes recounts Zeus' besotted state at the sight of Helen, the irrepressible desire he feels for this earthly woman and his sighs at her "vertically straight" nose and the slight droop of one of her eyes. It is in the opening scenes of the novel where Zeus, after young Adam has risen early, slips into his bed with Helen and cuckolds the

unsuspecting husband with his equally unsuspecting wife. This act is significant on two fronts. Firstly, it confirms Helen's role as the "fair" one in relation to the otherworldly Petra. Part of the attraction in the Freudian schema of these bodily women in Banville is that they are available to men, any men, for sex, and that they also already "belong" to other men, that they are married, betrothed or sought after by other men. Zeus' attraction to Helen in old Adam's fantasy of a narrative conforms and confirms the gendered positions of these characters.

Secondly, Zeus' act points to the true performance aspect of *The Infinites*, because the framing device is another intertextual Kleistian touch, where Banville draws on the story of *Amphitryon* in his fiction. In *Eclipse,* the actor Alex Cleave loses his sense of self as he plays the title role in Kleist's play, and here, Helen, on meeting Roddy as she wanders through the rooms of the house, begins to discuss her upcoming role as the wife of Amphitryon, Alcmene, in Banville's version of the script (she references the change of setting from ancient Greece to Wexford in 1798). The play, furthermore, is the intertextual basis for the framing device of *The Infinities*, where Zeus pretends to be Amphitryon to enjoy a night with his wife.

These Kleistian references to performance are more concretely tied to the stage rather than the screen, but the point here is to emphasise the way the consistent themes in Banville's work overlap, the acting references fitting into the wider scheme of his self-reflexivity and mournfully comic attitude towards language in general and its mediational role. *The Infinities* provides a brief glimpse in the overlapping themes and tropes of Banville's writing, linking the scientific and epistemological with the ekphrastic and ethical, and on to the performance references and metaphors that punctuate his other works. These images and ideas play out at a personal level in the

relationships old Adam enjoys and inflicts upon those around him, most notably the women in his life. The novel is an anomaly among the later period novels published under the Banville name in that it does not explicitly involve the cinema as a physical setting of import to the characters, but in the figures of Roddy, Helen, and Petra there are hints of the cinematic element that is to be explored in great depth in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Picturing Theory:

Scopophilia, Althusser, and Nabokov's Cinema in the Cleave Trilogy

John Banville's fiction is about surfaces. In his self-reflexive writing, Banville has probed the limits of linguistic construction, displaying more than a hint of sorrow for their limits. Their seeming solidity and permanence, the way in which an image, a phrase, a sentence can seemingly offer stability and solace in turbulent times holds an enduring appeal to the protagonists of his works, who, "to the extent that they are attentive to [the world] at all, [...] are focused not on its depths but on the specular sheen of its surfaces" (O'Connell Ch. 2). This reflexivity on the part of his narrator protagonists foregrounds the disruptive thematic thread around misreading signs, misunderstanding signals, mistaking words for reality, and appearances for knowledge discussed in the previous chapter. Their negotiation of the world, where symbols function only insofar as they provide *potential* meaning and ambiguity is the norm, is problematised by their weakness in the face of images. The cinema functions in the Cleave Trilogy of the late period to provide images that seduce and confuse these narrators, and this chapter will explore the ways in which the cinema does this, drawing on the references in the trilogy to cinematic theory, cinematic conventions, and Vladimir Nabokov's cinematic endeavours to explore the significance of cinema to the Cleave Trilogy. The ultimate aim is to show the depth of cinema's importance in the trilogy and how it acts as another mode by which Banville's central characters experience the contingency of language and the ambiguity of the world.

Banville's fiction has always traded on these issues of uncertainty; his works, if they were purely reduced to their plot structure, could, with some exceptions, be reduced to a broadly similar archetypal story of a man misreading his world and the consequences thereof. This theme comes to the fore in Banville's middle period, moving from the later novels in the Science Tetralogy based on scientific themes through to the Frames Trilogy, where different areas of cultural knowledge (astronomy and painting) become the dominant images by which Banville explores language and creative work in general.

The three novels to be discussed here, *Eclipse* (2000), *Shroud* (2002) and *Ancient Light* (2012), are linked by the character Alex Cleave and his relationship with his daughter Cass. He is an aging thespian who, it emerges in the course of *Eclipse*, is estranged from his troubled daughter. During the novel he endures a bout of profound anxiety that affords him some insight into his daughter's life, albeit too late to reconcile with her. *Shroud* shifts from Cleave's perspective to that of Axel Vander, a professor and theorist of literature, elements of whose life are drawn from the biographical details of Paul de Man and Louis Althusser. Vander knows a lot more about the final days of Cass's life than her father, and Alex and Axel briefly feature in one another's narratives as they piece together the final days of their mutual acquaintance Cass. Published some ten years after *Shroud*, *Ancient Light* marks a return to Cleave, who now is set to portray Vander in a movie based on his duplicitous life story. Though Cleave's story revolves around his reminiscences of an affair he enjoyed as a fifteen-year-old with the mother of his best friend, large sections of the text take place with the preparations for this movie adaptation in the background.

In this set-up it is possible to discern the complicating power of the cinema in

Banville's late period. Mark O'Connell reads the instances of *mise-en-abyme* in Banville's fiction as reflections on the narcissism of his fictions, Lucien Dallenbach defining this feature of artistic works as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (O'Connell Ch. 6). There is no more striking instance of this in Banville's work than in *Ancient Light*, where "JB", the screenwriter of Alex Cleave's movie and biographer of Axel Vander, appears. This is a barely veiled version of Banville himself. On reading the Vander biography which JB authored, *The Invention of a Past,* and is now charged with adapting to the screen, Cleave notes how "our author is widely but unsystematically read, and uses the rich titbits that he gathered from all those books to cover up for the lack of an education—little Latin, less Greek, ha ha—although the effect is quite the opposite, for in every gorgeous image and convoluted metaphor, every instance of cod learning and mock scholarship, he unmistakably shows himself up for the avid autodidact he indubitably is" (80-81). As O'Connell points out, Banville's well rehearsed public persona is as a somewhat regretful "autodidact" (ch.6); he frequently discusses his decision to work rather than attend university on leaving school. Also, Banville's texts are peppered with classical references. In *Ancient Light*, given the subject matter of the plot, it is unsurprising to see oedipal references throughout, though the gods of the ancient world are a regular source of inspiration too for Banville's narrators, and an ungenerous critic might read these references in the way Cleave does here, as an insistent tic of the academically insecure. Cleave's description of JB's prose style - "Is it an affectation, or a stance deliberately taken? Is it a general and sustained irony? Rhetorical in the extreme, dramatically elaborated, wholly unnatural, synthetic and clotted" (80) - is similarly self-referential, and Banville's self-ironising humour informs Cleave's psychological speculations on the author's mind: "Behind the gloss,

the studied elegance, the dandified swagger, this is a man racked by fears, anxieties, sour resentments, yet possessed, too, of an occasional mordant wit and an eye for what one might call the under-belly of beauty. No wonder he was drawn to Axel Vander for a subject" (81).In this it is easy to see how the mirror of the cinema adds to the already complex picture of references in this late sequence.

And mirroring is a suggestive term to use in relation to Banville and the cinema as well because it hints at the kind of gender critique advanced by Laura Mulvey in her scopophilic reading of the cinema, based as it is on the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, in particular the Mirror stage of psychological development. In his 1905 work *Three Essays on Sexuality,* Freud discusses what he terms "sexual aberrations". Among these is scopophilia, which he defines in relation to touching as part of human sexuality. Similar to his discussion of touch as a component of sex, the "pleasure in looking" that forms part of sexuality generally turns into a "perversion" when it becomes a sexual end itself, supplanting "the normal sexual aim" (156-157). Looking at bodies, luxuriating in these "forbidden" images, becomes a means of sexual gratification to an excessive degree for the scopophilic. Lacan places this idea within the concept of the mirror stage, where a child's ego is formed through the experience of seeing its body reflected in some shiny surface as a complete, ordered whole. This image of the self as complete masks the fundamental element of the unconscious, but also acts as a template or aspirational image by which the ego comes to identify with others. Mulvey takes this insight and applies it to cinema, where the guilt of scopophilia is displaced because the people on screen do not "know" they are being watched, and so will not catch the audience in their voyeurism.

In this chapter the argument is that Banville, through his engagement with the cinema, is engaging with film theory, specifically Mulvey's essay on scopophilia, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", originally published in 1975. This text uses the theories of Freud and Lacan discussed above to argue that the cinema of a patriarchal culture uses woman as a "signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (834). This arrangement, the consequence of various contextual factors regarding the development of the mainstream film industry according to Mulvey, results in an alternating balance in classic Hollywood cinema between active scopophilia, that being voyeurism, a taking pleasure in viewing the actors on screen as objects, and narcissistic scopophilia, that being identification with those onscreen by looking at them and their circumstance.

This scopophilic aspect also connects to the second aspect of the cinematic Banville to be explored here. Banville's admiration for Vladimir Nabokov's work is clear in his criticism, and his indebtedness to him as an artist is evident throughout his novels and book reviews. Banville's morally dubious protagonists bear more than a passing resemblance to their Nabokovian brothers (or fathers, perhaps). Banville's interest in Nabokov is evident from his criticism and reviews of work on the Russian author. Significantly, Banville's introduction to a 2006 translation of one of Nabokov's Russian novels, *Laughter in the Dark*, also makes clear that not only does Banville admire Nabokov as a novelist and artist, but that he appreciates Nabokov as a *cinematic* novelist. Banville opens by saying "*Laughter in the Dark* is one of the finest works of Vladimir Nabokov's early, Russian-language period, a dazzling, cinematic

masterpiece, beautiful, cruel, and horribly funny," before going on to say,

> Has there ever been another writer who could conjure up the physical world with such limpid intensity? The strong visual element was deliberate, for Nabokov adored cinema, and had high hopes that his glittering fable would catch the attention of a Hollywood producer. (v)

As such, we can say that when Banville references Nabokov's texts, he is doing so knowing of Nabokov's cinematic sensibility and style, and this reflects back on Banville's own text, like the flickering light of the projector bounces from silver screen on to faces of the watching audience.

The Nabokov texts to be discussed here are *Lolita*, both the novel and aspects of the first film adaptation from 1962, and *Laughter in the Dark* (originally titled *Kamera Obscura* in its original Russian version, which was substantially revised by Nabokov for its English translation).[6] *Lolita*, in its depiction of American kitsch and pop culture, as well as its formal shape as "road movie" narrative, and scopophilic tendencies, overlaps with many of the features of *Eclipse* and *Ancient Light*, the first and third books of the Cleave trilogy, while *Laughter in the Dark* not only presages the later *Lolita* on many of these issues, but also connects with *Shroud*, the middle book in the Cleave trilogy, through Axel Vander. The argument here is that, through their specific references to cinema as scopophilic, as well as a multitude of references to cinema in general and the cinematic novels of Vladimir Nabokov, the Cleave trilogy is a series of deeply cinematic novels on several levels.

[6] For a detailed discussion of the differences between the Russian and English versions of the text see William J. Connolly's entry on *Laughter in the Dark* in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (214-226).

Alex Cleave's Scopophilia and Marilyn Monroe

If cinema functions such that narrative progression and visual pleasure splits between the masculine act of looking and the feminine as passive object to be looked at, Banville's fictions immediately suggest themselves as cinematic texts, such is the intense focus of the protagonists on their own looking and their problems with the women they look at. The essence of the Banvillian protagonist is difficulty with the world, where language fails to adequately bridge the gap between perception and reality, save for occasional, vaguely epiphanic moments, and these difficulties overlap with the narrator's difficulties with women and relationships. Women are often seen by these narrators as objects to be demystified, decoded, untangled and explained. Axel Vander, the narrator of *Shroud*, for instance, describes an initial meeting with Cass Cleave, Alex's daughter, in this graphic but illustrative manner:

> Yet as we climbed the stairs I saw myself in my imagination stop and turn and take her in my irresistible grasp and rip apart her clothes to press the length of myself against her. Even her nakedness would not be enough, I would open up her flesh itself like a coat, unzip her from instep to sternum and climb bodily into her, feel her shocked heart gulp and skip, her lungs shuddering, clasp her blood-wet bones in my hands. (107)

This is the desire to demystify the feminine taken to its most extreme. In Vander's imagination, the violent sexual assault that fleetingly trips across his mind will not satisfy his disturbed desires. What he seems to be craving is a level of "knowledge" that will break through or transcend physical limits. The female here has been fetishised to such an extent that becoming her, wearing her as suit, seeing the world almost literally through her eyes (or, more accurately, eye sockets), is seen by

Vander as a way to satiate the desire for control and mastery of the other of masculine dominance. In other words, annihilation is what these domineering protagonists desire.

It should be added at this point that the argument here is not that Banville and his writing serve to propagate the image of women as passive agents in either narrative terms or as subjects capable of acting and feeling independent of their relationships with men. While it would be extremely dubious to characterise Banville's texts as feminist, there is a repeated, sustained, consistent (often very dark) comedy in his work based on the kind of pathologically scopophilic imaginations of his narrators. There is also a large degree of self-conscious ironising to these portrayals of male narrators by the characters. For instance, Freddie Montgomery in *Ghosts,* while discussing the woman he has fixated upon in this novel, begins a Humbert Humbert-like meditation on the state of his sexual desires:

> I used to be as red-blooded, or red-eyed, at least, as the next man, but for me that side of things was always secondary to something else for which I cannot find an exact name. Curiosity? No, that is too weak. A sort of lust for knowledge, the passionate desire to delve my way into womanhood and taste the very temper of its being. Dangerous talk, I know. Well, go ahead, misunderstand me, I don't care. Perhaps I have always wanted to be a woman, perhaps that's it. If so, I have reached the halfway stage, unsexed poor androgyne that I am become by now. But the girl had nothing to do with any of this... It was innocence I was after, I suppose, the innocent, pure clay awaiting a grizzled Pygmalion to inspire it with life. It is as simple as that. Not love or passion, not even the notion of the radiant self rising up like flame in the mirror of the other, but the hunger only to have her live and to live in her, to

conjugate in her the verb of being. (70)

As well as combining Axel Vander's wish to, in a certain sense, *become* the woman he's attracted to, his comments directly addressed to the reader ("go ahead, misunderstand me, I don't care") show an awareness on Freddie's part regarding how such comments may be interpreted. Similarly in *The Book of Evidence*, when discussing his mother for the first time, Freddie again addresses the reader:

> I must go carefully, this is perilous ground. Of course, I know that whatever I say will be smirked at knowingly by the amateur psychologists packing the court. When it comes to the subject of mothers, simplicity is not permitted. All the same, I shall try to be honest and clear. (41)

And there are countless other instances illustrating the self-conscious narration of these characters and the efforts they make to efface the inevitable readings their confessions will suffer. Banville can also lapse in his criticism and interviews into an eroticised poetic mysticism (see Marilyn Monroe examples below) regarding women that Mulvey's critique actively challenges in its cinematic form. As such, the deployment of scopophilic imagery and referencing of its ideas represents an ambiguous space in Banville's novels, where the comic potential of these narrative voices in their relationships with women is played with while also being indulged.

Banville's texts would be worth considering in relation to scopophilia in general purely based on their thematic content, where solipsistic narrators become overly preoccupied with the otherness of femininity, but Mulvey's text specifically suggests itself here, and thus signifies a cinematic import to Banville's writing, because it cites Marilyn Monroe in *River Of No Return* as a prime example of how

women are portrayed in cinema:

> A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space. Thus Marilyn Monroe's first appearance in *The River of No Return* and Lauren Bacall's songs in *To Have or Have Not*. (838)

This is noteworthy because, in a review of *Marilyn: The Passion and the Paradox* by Lois Banner for *The Guardian* in 2012, Banville opens by declaring "I first fell in love with her in *River of No Return*," ("John Banville on Marilyn Monroe 50 years after her death") before recalling how the images of her in ostentatious, revealing dresses were to stay with him long after the film itself had faded in his memory. Given Banville's Nabokovian tendencies, the pleasure he takes in linking across and throughout his texts and into other intertextual material, and his not-entirely-trustworthy utterances in interviews and public performances, it is at least worth noting this apparent coincidence in the context of his general interest in theoretical and critical trends. Certainly, the coincidence is a striking one given the content of his recent novels (*Ancient Light*, published in the same year as the review above) and tendencies of his narrators that both Mulvey and Banville should choose the initial appearance of Monroe in this film as illustrative of a particular function of cinema.

Further, given the subject matter under discussion here, it is intriguing to note the figurative relationship drawn by Banville in this review between Monroe, her dress in this opening scene of the movie, and the cinema itself. He describes the Capitol

cinema and Wexford as it was when he first saw Monroe in this movie; it was:

> a rather gaunt, barn-like picture palace, with a wooden floor and seats covered with balding plush that gave off a curiously doggy smell. But the glory of the place, at least in my memory of it, was the great scarlet curtain, fluted and fringed, that would open with a deeply suggestive swish as the house lights dimmed and the dark screen came to flickering life. (Banville "Marilyn Monroe...")

Expanding on this theme of the "deeply suggestive swish" he records how "for many years that curtain was associated in my mind with Kay Weston, the saloon-bar singer Marilyn played in the movie – no doubt the shade of rich red and the sumptuous, silken folds seemed the very essence of sexiness, for a boy who as yet knew nothing about sex" (Banville "Marilyn Monroe"). The opening scene of the film begins with Robert Mitchum making his way into a raucous encampment of tents just in time to catch a performance by Monroe's Weston. She swaggers on stage with a guitar, dressed in an ornate gown completely at odds with the wild, rough surroundings, a picture of feminine allure. She perches on a stool on the makeshift stage, a leg thrust out through the slit in her dress and running all the way up to the top of her thigh.

This is the image Mulvey references and Banville's cinematic imagination records as a moment of great import for him as a boy. Marilyn Monroe here, for Banville, becomes the cinema, the sensuality of her character in the film and persona within the Hollywood system capturing his imagination and becoming entwined with the experience of going to the movies. As if to emphasise this point further, Banville notes the way she dresses in these opening scenes: "Monroe wore some extraordinary

belle epoch gowns that might, indeed, have been run up from surplus cinema-screen curtains" (Banville "Marilyn Monroe"). Monroe here has merged with the physical surroundings and peculiar ambience of "the picture house" in Banville's youthful imagination, and it is very much Marilyn, the "blonde bombshell" film persona that Banville is referring to here in his reminiscences,[7] the assiduously curated image of female coquettish allure she traded on, rather than the complex Norma-Jeane Baker (née Mortenson). The equivalence drawn here between Monroe-as-blonde-bombshell and the setting of the cinema confirms the scopophilic aspect of Banville's understanding of cinema, as Monroe exists in this setting purely as an object to be looked at.

This depiction of the cinema of his youth also shows it to have been a place of transformation and transitions, figuring as the scene of a moment in Banville's early life and the transition from boy to man. This is a story repeated by Alex Cleave, though with a more disturbing edge. Cleave is introduced as a stage actor in *Eclipse*, and the Axel Vander role in *Ancient Light* is to be his first performance for film, so it is interesting to note that the cinema is where Cleave traces his nervous collapse to, as he develops what he characterises as a shameful, secretive habit of visiting the cinema during the day, often missing matinees he was due to perform in to satisfy his obscure, mysterious urge to vent. However, this is not, at least on the face of it, a pleasurable experience. Far from being the site of joyful memories and embarrassing, prepubescent fantasies, the movie house for Cleave is a place of loneliness, isolation and tears in the dark.

Cleave's description of the development of this habit comes as he tours around

[7] See Annette Kuhn's *The Women's Companion to International Film* for a discussion of this figure.

his family home led by the supposed caretaker, Quirke, who hasn't carried out his duties, instead becoming a squatter in the empty premises. He has, however, looked into the building's history, collating file upon file pertaining to its past. This is of no interest to Cleave, who drifts off into his own thoughts and memories as Quirke begins to bore him. It is worth quoting at length the thoughts that come to Cleave, apropos of nothing other than Quirke's dull drone regarding documents relating to the house:

> I meanwhile was recalling the first time I had found myself weeping in the cinema, soundlessly, unstoppably. It was the ache in my constricted throat that I registered first, then the salt tears that were seeping in at the corners of my mouth. It was deep winter, the middle of a sleety afternoon. I had ducked out of a matinee performance... and sloped off on my own to the pictures, feeling foolish and elated. Then when the film started there were these inexplicable tears, hiccups, stifled wails, as I sat shuddering with fists clenched in my lap, the hot drops plop-ping off my chin and wetting my shirt-front. I was baffled, and mortified, too, of course, afraid the afternoon's other shadowy voyeurs around me would notice my shameful collapse, yet there was something glorious too in such abandon, such childish transgression. When the picture ended and I skulked out red-eyed into the cold and the early dark I felt emptied, invigorated, rinsed. It became a shameful habit then, twice, three times a week I would do it, in different picture-houses, the dingier the better, with still no notion of what I was weeping for, what loss I might be mourning. Somewhere inside me there must be a secret well of grief from which these springs were pouring. Sprawled there in the phantasmally peopled darkness I would sob myself dry, while some extravaganza of violence and

> impossible passions played itself out on the vast screen tilted above me. (22-23)

The (barely) subtextual content of this passage ought to be clear to even the most inattentive reader. Cleave's ostensible bouts of inexplicable crying are described as a shameful habit that leaves Cleave "seeping", stifling wails, and shuddering with his fist clenched in his lap while "hot drops" dampen his shirt-front. The lack of interest in his family home, and an all too consuming interest in the images on the screen, say a lot about Cleave's relationship to himself and his past. The seemingly bottomless well of grief that leads to this cinema habit is suggestive insofar as it hints at some deep trauma or absence in Cleave's life. This suddenly manifests itself in Cleave's public life one night as he performs on stage, his lack of a sense of self seeming to align with the dislocated sense of belonging evident in this passage. Becoming a voyeur in the cinema, where personal identity is elided as the viewer is never at risk of being identified by those he views, Cleave further underlines the questions of authenticity and identity that define the Banvillian narrator.

To emphasise this point, Cleave's memories of weeping in the darkness of the cinema stalls immediately precedes a graphic dream of two women involved in a pornographic performance for his enjoyment. Cleave's mind, once Quirke leaves, conjures up a Roman villa where "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" (25). Note the "three quarters view"; what does this suggest other than the "peeping Tom", his view obscured by the edge of a door, the corner of a window, the peephole through which he peers? Cleave's mind continues, imagining "a turbaned negress [...] 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" (25). Moving from the active voyeurism of this stage, he crosses over the proscenium arch of his fantasy, as "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" (25-26). And then the natural conclusion: "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" (26). The dream takes the form of a pornographic film, the scenario entirely devoid of context as a "production", other than to satisfy the onanistic yearnings of Alex Cleave; the woman "wantonly offers" her lap, the "broad, jaunty grin" taking him into their erotic conspiracy, and not denoting any pleasure in the act itself on the part of "the slave", but rather pointing to the pleasure she feels in the pleasing of Cleave. These are the acts of Cleave's own imagined marionettes.

The significance of this moment is deepened and complicated by the closing passage of the chapter, where Cleave wakes from this intense fantasy in the dark of the old house, and is suddenly assailed by the sense of being watched himself. And maybe not just a sense, but *is* perhaps being watched (he later learns of Quirke's squatting in the house with his daughter Lily), saying, "I turned my head on the pillow and it was then that I saw the figure in the room, standing motionless a little way from the side of the bed" (26). Languishing in the nebulous state between sleep and waking, he cannot be sure if he is imagining this presence, nor can he tell if it is "a woman, or

womanish old man, or even a child, of indeterminate gender" (26), just that he senses this featureless figure intently observing him with "an attitude of beseeching, or of anguished prayer, or some other extreme of passionate striving" (26). In this moment Cleave has become the observed, an object of intense scrutiny, just as the figures on screen are for him in his moments of "venting" and the women in his fantasy were in his dream. The religious language of this episode gives way to cinematic overtones in the final line as he recalls drifting back to sleep once the figure disappears, waking, "no more than a moment later, so it seemed, [when] a streaming blade of sunlight had already made a deep slash through the parting in the curtains" (27). The shaft of light from between the curtains, shining in on him in this darkened room, emphasises the dual nature of Cleave's intense self-consciousness, suggesting as it does the space of the cinema, both in terms of Cleave as viewer, the curtains closed on the screen, but also, more suggestively, with Cleave as that which is being observed on screen, the shaft of light being the projector firing its beam down onto the thin layer of material and placing Cleave "up there" in glorious Technicolor to be observed by all.

This self-reflexive moment regarding Cleave and the cinema is relevant because it shows Banville's awareness of the tropes and ideas he is engaging with. The kind of slim, tentative erotic thrill Banville describes in his own reminiscences of Marilyn Monroe in the cinema for his ten-year-old self plays upon the frisson of the dark dream space that the cinema opens up, and the kind of titillation Mulvey attempts to critique. Patricia Coughlan, in her discussion of the erotic (as against the philosophical and ethical approaches often adopted with Banville's work) references the tendency of the voyeuristic aspects of these works to be "equivocally ironized by a narrator keenly aware of his own tinselled but tawdry fantasies" (82). Coughlan goes

on to acknowledge how "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" (83). Within this context of an excessively visual prose style, applying Mulvey's cinematic critique to the protagonists in Banville's work is clearly justified.

Though there are references to the physical space of the cinema, and some references to cinematic works, one question that does stand out is how cinematic Banville's novels are? As novels based on a first-person narrator, this would superficially suggest they are uncinematic because they will lack the great scale and sumptuous imagery that more conventional third-person narration can provide. However, though Banville's novels are often structured as confessions, memoirs, and reflections upon the past by a first-person narrator, cinema is ideally suited to this role because these characters are in a sense scripting their own stories and able to dictate the framing and images a reader draws upon. They are also uncannily talented writers, which helps forge both strong imagery and a depth of character that aides the construction of a world from one person's perspective. Writing cinematically takes a vivid imagination and a formidable sense of stylistic judgement and depth.

Stanley Kubrick, when discussing his adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (a text we will return to later), recognises the cinematic potential of a novel with such formal constraints:

> The perfect novel from which to make a movie is, I think, not the novel of action but, on the contrary, the novel which is mainly concerned with the inner life of its characters. It will give the adaptor an absolute compass bearing, as it were, on what the character is thinking or feeling at any given moment of the

> story. And from this he can invent action which will be an objective correlative of the book's psychological content. (14)

Banville's recurrent fascination with memories, the past and self is thoroughly cinematic in the sense that it is concerned with images, fragmented moments and imprecise impressions pieced together like scenes in a movie. Similarly, Banville's repeated use of dreams can't help but evoke the both the formal logic of cinematic works, as well as the physical setting of the cinema itself.

For instance, when Alex Cleave first appears in *Eclipse* it is only through him and the regular interruption of memories of his daughter that we get to know his daughter Cass. This is Banville's first published novel of the new century and one marked, as its title suggests, by a preoccupation with time, and a moment of significant transition in the lives of Cleave and his family. Throughout the text the initially marginal presence of Cass comes to dominate both Cleave's perception of his surroundings as well as his perception of himself as a father, husband, and person in general. His daughter is due to visit him and his wife at some undetermined point in the summer in which the novel's events take place. Cleave's recollections of her early in the novel are marked by an air of frustration. She has endured a troubled childhood because of a condition, a fictional affliction called Mandelbaum's syndrome, that has impeded her social development while also giving her gifts that make her an excellent scholar, and she makes a career, in spite of her difficulties, as a literary researcher.

Her father is mystified by this aspect of her character and is generally dismissive of her achievements and career. Cleave has just suffered a breakdown of a sort himself. He is an actor who has cracked during a performance on stage, the line "Who if not I, then, is Amphitryon?" (*Eclipse* 20) from Kleist's play of the same name

freezing on the end of tongue, and this gestures towards the personal doubts and philosophical tone of the text. Cleave has returned to his childhood home which has been empty since his mother's death, moving away from the city to his home town for a summer to recuperate from this episode and to attempt to answer the existential doubts this breakdown has raised.

However, it is in *Ancient Light* that the cinematic aspect of the Cleave novels most clearly emerges. The interjection of "JB" the screenwriter and author discussed above also marks *Ancient Light* as already concerned with the cinema. Though the term "ancient light" itself has a legal significance, the nostalgic flavour of this title and the novel itself is suggestive purely in terms of image, that being, the flickering light of the projector and its now antique status in a time of digital projection. The image itself, the photographs from which the moving picture is made, is, of course, also shining a light on a past moment, and is made through the exposure of film to light through a camera lens. Yet it is another ancient light, or perhaps flame, that shines through on one level, that being a nostalgic riff by Banville on his teenage crush on Marilyn Monroe mentioned above.

Mrs Celia Gray, the married woman who Cleave enjoys a love affair with at the age of fifteen, is initially introduced by Cleave's memory in a description that conflates what Cleave believes to be, but cannot be certain is, his first encounter with the woman who is to become his lover with an iconic image from Hollywood history. The imprecise nature of this recollection is itself a regular, recurrent thread in Banville's work in general and in the cinematic moments of his work in particular, suggesting that the cinema and memory are analogous and also in tension with one another, as memories merge with movies and vice versa. Indeed, this moment of

Cleave's possible first sighting of Celia Gray neatly encapsulates the kind of passive, eye-candy role the scopophilic critique of classic Hollywood cinema takes aim at, that being Marilyn Monroe's subway scene in *The Seven Year Itch*.

This scene features Monroe's character, known only as "The Girl" in George Axelrod and Billy Wilder's script, and Tom Ewell as Richard Sherman, a hitherto faithful husband who is tempted to break his marriage vows over a weekend spent by chance in the presence of Monroe's model-turned-actress temptress. As they leave a cinema where they've just watched *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, "The Girl" muses on the film they've just watched: "I just felt so sorry for the creature at the end... He was scary-looking but he wasn't really all bad. He just craved a little affection. A sense of being loved and needed and wanted." Sherman, confused by this, asks "What, did you want him to marry the girl?" This self-referential discussion marks the end of Sherman's crisis of fidelity, prefiguring the imminent conclusion of the movie, where, naturally, Sherman returns to his wife and son. Just at this moment, the climax of their brief flirtation, "The Girl" steps onto a ventilation grill over the subway and coos enthusiastically, "do you feel the breeze from the subway? lsn't it delicious?" as bursts of air from the underground surging underneath her pleat halter neck dress, exposing her legs from thigh to ankle. She writhes with pleasure as the air "cools her ankles", and Sherman hardly knows what to say or where to look.

Rather than marking the end of a flirtation, Cleave's first putative memory of Mrs Gray evokes this scene, marking a starting point of Cleave's adult life with women. The subway scene is transferred to an Irish town in mid-twentieth-century Ireland, and mashed with a temporally appropriate religious symbolism that points not only to the time and place in which the scene and subsequent story transpire, but

announces the narrative significance of the cinema in Cleave's story. Cinema and its stories, its escapist tales, adventures and fantasies, are set on a par with the religious imagery and stories of the foreboding, severe Irish Catholicism of the period in the mind of the young Cleave.[8]

Cleave casts doubt on whether his memory is right picturing Mrs Gray, speculating instead that it may only have been "an annunciation" of her, but it "pleases him" nonetheless to believe this was his first sighting of her (4). This image of annunciation is telling on several levels; as he is passing the Church of Mary Our Mother Immaculate and imagining himself as "a penitent" with his head bowed, he hears the "fizzing" of bicycle tyres on the wet road:

> The church stood on a rise, and when I looked up and saw her approaching with the steeple beetling at her back it seemed thrillingly that she had come swooping down out of the sky at just that moment, and that what I had heard was not the sound of tyres on the tarmac but of rapid wings beating the air. She was almost upon me, freewheeling, leaning back relaxedly and steering with one hand. She wore a gaberdine raincoat, the tails of it flapping behind to right and left of her like, yes, like wings, and a blue jumper over a blouse with a

[8] In this regard it is worth noting a paratextual element of *Ancient Light.* There are several versions of Banville's text published with different cover designs decorating them. Perhaps because of Banville's highly visual style, it seems worth noting the designs used in his texts. Two of the versions of *Ancient Light* provide a neat contrast between the religious and cinematic content of this episode.
One version features on its back page a portrait of Jesus the like of which will be familiar to many Irish readers. It shows Jesus, eyes to the heavens, gaunt and suffering in his crown of thorns as he exposes his burning red sacred heart, flashing vibrantly against the brown, musty seeming wall on which it hangs. In contrast, another version of the text features, on its front page, a dress seemingly hanging on a brown coloured wall, though there is no obvious explanation as to how it is holding its position; it is as though the dress is being worn by a ghost. The dress is noteworthy because, in its shape, it echoes the white halter neck Monroe wears in the scene described. It hangs loosely at about knee height, the folds in it suggesting it would billow as uncontrollably as that of Monroe's in her scene or the bicycle woman in Cleave's memory. The breasts of the ghostly presence protrude from the gown, seemingly pointed, while the rest of it seems flat against wall. Finally, the straps on it, while not a halter neck, are very thin, exposing more flesh than the white dress of Monroe's scene.

> white collar. How clearly I see her! I must be making her up, I mean I must be making up these details. Her skirt was wide and loose, and now all at once the spring wind caught it and lifted it, laying her bare all the way up to her waist. Ah, yes. (4)

Cleave then launches into a disquisition on male excitement at the unexpected exposure of women's underwear in public before returning to the scene, calling this cycling woman "My Lady of the Bicycle" and remembering, or at least claiming to remember, how "She looked down at herself and then at me and raised her eyebrows and made an O of her mouth, and gave a gurgling laugh and smoothed the skirt over her knees with a careless sweep of the back of her free hand and sailed blithely past" (5). Quite how she manages such a manoeuvre while freewheeling down a hill as though from the heavens is perhaps another manifestation of the divine at work in this episode, but what is worth focusing on with regard to the cinematic is the bellowing of her skirt, the cheeky, playful reaction on her part, not one of embarrassment, the "O" of her mouth, raised eyebrow and coy laughter. While, on one level, this apparent vision or foreshadowing of Mrs Gray for eleven year old Alex is smattered with religious connotation, clearly there is another imaginative language at play here too, that of his image of Marilyn Monroe, her lips puckered in the coy play-acting of flirtatious shock, the casual confidence in the face of exposure, the laughter rather than shame.

The Monroe connection is built up more overtly as the novel progresses. If this childhood image is an annunciation of sorts, it is not just announcing the arrival of Celia Gray, but also signals the departure from childhood "innocence" into the world of adult relations and sexuality. The ambiguity of Cleave's memory and the overtones

of both a Marian, angelic, divine female figure and an obverse version of this in Monroe's "The Girl" archetype suggest that this moment represents an introduction of feminine archetypes or forms of femininity in general into Cleave's life as he moves from childhood to the adult world. As if to emphasise this as a marker of Cleave's imminent development from boy to man, this episode, at least according to Cleave's hazy memory, happened in April, a month that Banville frequently uses as the starting point for his stories, or the site of rebirth, of moving on from the past.[9] As Cleave says, concluding his recollection of the episode,

> I thought her a vision of the goddess herself, but when I turned to look after her she was just a woman rattling along on a big black bike, a woman with those flaps or epaulettes on the shoulders of her coat that were fashionable then, and crooked seams in her nylons, and boxy hair just like my mother's. (5)

He has had a glimpse of this unknown aspect of life. When he looks back to get another eyeful, he merely sees a side of the feminine that is he altogether more familiar with: his mother.[10]

Cleave delves further into his past as he recalls his other significant experiences with the opposite sex prior to his affair with Mrs Gray:

> At the seaside for a summer when I was ten or eleven there had been an auburn beauty of my own age whom I had adored at a distance—but then, who in the honeyed haze of childhood has not adored an auburn beauty by the seaside?—and a redhead in town one winter, called Hettie Hickey, who despite her less

[9] For example, in *Eclipse*, the first Cleave novel, his story begins in April as he considers a return to childhood home following a breakdown in his mental health (*Eclipse* 5).

[10] The discussion of the D'hoker and Frehner's related discussion of women and the mother figure in Banville's fiction bears some consideration here.

> than lovely name was as delicate as a Meissen figurine, who wore multiple layers of lace petticoats and showed off her legs when she danced the jive, and who on three consecutive and never to be forgotten Saturday nights consented to sit with me in the back row of the Alhambra cinema and let me put a hand down the front of her dress and cup in my palm one of her surprisingly chilly but excitingly pliable, soft little breast. (36)

Besides the obvious reference to the cinema once again as a space for nascent sexuality, it is tempting to read the description of these girls through the Monroe prism discussed above. The references to red hair, auburn for the first girl and just "redhead" for the second, call to mind the girl Monroe was before her transformation into the image of hyper-sexualised feminine allure on the movie screen. Photographs of her as Norma Jean Baker show Monroe to have been naturally red-haired, the platinum blonde look being the marker of her transformation. Also, there is also the alliterative name, Hettie Hickey, which echoes Monroe's double "M" initials, and also points towards Cleave's co-star in the film he is to star in, Dawn Devonport.

Devonport is presented as a modern day version of Monroe. She has changed her name, dyed her hair, even the alliteration of her name calls to mind not only the MM of Monroe, but the DD of Diana Dors, and Britain's ersatz version of Hollywood's blonde bombshell archetype, of which Monroe was just the most famous example. Devonport's personal problems, again mimicking the real-life traumas of Monroe, elicit sympathy on Cleave's part. However, rather than following Monroe's path towards self-destruction, Devonport benefits from the eventual intervention of Cleave and his wife as surrogate parents for this actress who was slated to portray his daughter on screen. Life and art reverse in this arrangement, where Devonport

absconds from the film set with Cleave, portraying a character based on Cass Cleave now, but not in front of the camera.

Monroe and the various ciphers for the image of feminine sexuality she represents in the Banvillian imagination constitutes just one aspect of the scopophilic content of this text, her almost synonymous connection for the young Banville with the sensual thrill of the cinema itself and the act of watching is clear evidence of the voyeuristic attraction of the cinema for Banville. However, there is a further dimension to this scopophilic material; it is not just the voyeuristic pleasure of watching others that is in evidence here, it is the narcissistic mode of watching, where the watcher comes to identify with, or feel like, an involved party in the action that is also a crucial part of Cleave's story.

Cleave recalls, again, visits to the cinema during the course of his affair with Mrs Gray. "On almost every Friday night the Gray family would get dressed up and proceed, parents in front and the children two paces behind, to the Alhambra Kino, a barn-like converted music-hall that stood on a blind corner halfway along the Main Street" (121). Along with the Cleave of *Eclipse,* whose quasi-masturbatory crying is all the better for occurring in "dingier" cinemas, the Cleave of *Ancient Light* shares the pleasure of sleazier, nastier auditoria, saying "The Alhambra, despite the spits on the wooden floor and the fug of fag smoke in the dirty air, was for me a place of deep erotic suggestion" (121), before going on to invoke the same sensuous image of the curtain that Banville recalls from his own visits to cinema quoted previously. Cleave, however, does not just recall the cinema because of his visits to watch movies, rather he remembers regularly visiting the cinema to watch Mrs Gray and her family, and doing so in a furtive manner, having to time his arrival so as not to be spotted by Mrs

Gray. His surreptitious attendance was crucial in order to see the affectless behaviour of Mrs Gray watching the movie:

> How terrible it was to witness Mrs. Gray caught up in such innocent enjoyment—the innocence more than the enjoyment was what was terrible, to me. She sat there, canted backwards a little, her face lifted in dreamy ecstasy to the screen and her lips parted in a smile that kept trying to achieve itself but never quite succeeded, lost as she was in blissful forgetfulness, of self, of surroundings, and, most piercingly, of *me*. The twitchy light from the screen sliding over her face made it seem that she was being slapped, repeatedly, lasciviously, with a grey silk glove. (122-123)

Again, there is an undertone of masturbatory pleasure and even a hint of sadism in the closing image to this description of watching the screen, but what makes it different from Cleave's previous description of his own fumbling in the stalls is that he is excluded from the enjoyment here. Mrs Gray is taking pleasure in the cinema screen, her ecstasy is without him, and his will to reassert control over her manifests itself in this pity he feels for himself as she enjoys the "blissful forgetfulness" of the screen. More troubling, he begins to wonder whether she has seen him and chosen to ignore him. "Did she know I was there and had decided to ignore me and not let me spoil her fun? If so she gave no sign of it, and afterwards I was too ashamed to ask, for how could I admit to such despicable peeping-tommery?" (123) The irony of his spying on her in the cinema, where the purpose is voyeurism of a different order, is hard to miss, and gestures back towards the ultimate, formal significance of the cinema in these texts, where the scopophilic form of cinema informs the character and concerns of the narrators.

The cinema also becomes a currency between the two lovers with which they negotiate their liaisons. A tone of condescension creeps into Cleave's recollection of Mrs Gray, her taste in movies is "broad", she confuses motives, muddles her reports of plotlines and in general isn't the discerning movie-goer Cleave considers himself to be, but this is not a problem for him, as he is "happy to listen, or pretend to, so long as she consented to lie in my embrace in the back seat of the station wagon or on the mattress in Cotter's place" (123-124). He cannot help but wonder if, in part, these rambling accounts of movie storylines were a "ruse by which she secured some respite from my urgent requirement that she lie down and let me do to her what I never tired of doing. She was Scheherazade and Penelope rolled into one, weaving and unweaving endlessly her tales from the movies," (124) and he finds himself wondering whether she enjoyed his physical exertions as much as she claimed. These questions ultimately represent the limit Banville's narrators come up against, where their cinematically informed fantasies of control can never be fully realised in their lives.

Cass Cleave, Dawn Devonport, and the Shadow of *Lolita*

The preceding section has focused on the voyeuristic aspect of Alex Cleave's personality. The consequences of this are distorted and damaged relationships between him and the women in his life. In *Eclipse* we see the troubled relationship between father and daughter. Cass is a child beset by an affliction invented by Banville called Mandelbaum's syndrome that exhibits characteristics symptoms similar to autism, epilepsy and Asperger's syndrome. Her childhood is marked by bouts of anxiety and obsessive behaviour. She is a social outsider and a source of mystery, consternation

and confusion for her father. She has grown up and become a literary scholar, but Cleave, the actor rather than creator, expresses only bewilderment at her life and her work. It is difficult not to speak in the past tense about Cass's role in the novel because all we learn about her comes from her father's reflections on her childhood, and the effect this has is to presage her eventual death towards the end of the novel in a way that plays on the nostalgic photographic tropes Banville employs more overtly in the later novel *Ancient Light*. Here, we are given images and impressions of Cass from Alex Cleave that render her a ghost before her tragic death. For instance, in one of the final reminiscences, Cleave recalls how she had cropped her hair brutally when a teenager, describing the image of her hair as more shocking than a streak of blood had it been splattered across her following this assault on her childish locks. "Do you like my new haircut?" (170) she asks from out of her profound cocoon of detachment from the "normal" world. These images are not especially cinematic in the sense of providing staggering imagery or grand scenes that call for big screen treatment. However they do depend on a kind of cinematic or photographic logic, where moments and episodes are captured by the mind's recording mechanism and played back in some form of order much like an editor or director chooses his shots when piecing together a film.

Cleave talks about her intermittently as he records his summer return to his home town following his personal collapse. He talks of the various ghosts he finds around the now empty home where he grew up. Some of these ghosts turn out in fact to be real, still existing people as it emerges that Quirke and his daughter Lily are the squatters in Cleave's family home, but more often than not they are figurative. When he first arrives he talks about the books burnt in the fireplace, apparently the trace of

some vagrant's past presence here. There is also his memory of his father, who died when Cleave was still a boy, and how he once saw an apparition of his deceased father in the doorway of an upstairs room, and the woman and child he sees occasionally in the garden of the old house. But the "real ghost", or at least most significant figure in Cleave's reminiscences, is his daughter, Cass, who is due to return to Ireland during the course of this summer to visit her parents, her life now set on the continent and distanced both geographically and metaphorically from that of her parents. As Cleave intermittently returns to the problems of his daughter and her suffering during the course of the novel, the ominous tone around her failure to appear as scheduled points towards a grim conclusion, and the novel ends with news of her death off the Ligurian coast of north western Italy. She is found to have been three months pregnant, and questions swirl around Alex's mind as we leave his story.

In *Ancient Light* Cleave's escape from the film set with Devonport finds him and his co-star travelling to the site of Cass's suicide. This attempt to save the troubled Devonport represents an attempt to undo the errors Cleave made with the daughter he failed to understand. Devonport's assumption of the Cass role also functions on a thematic level to emphasise the broad themes of Banville's fiction: that being an epistemological doubt that ranges from our understanding of the universe in his science novels to the being of other people in these introspective narrators. The cinema is a perfect analogue for these doubts because of the seductive logic and flow of images, the way that reality and the image blur in the cinema. The transformation of Devonport into Cass Cleave is allusive in this regard as well. In terms of character, Devonport represents an opportunity for Alex Cleave to exorcise the demons of his past. He is to portray Axel Vander in the movie with Devonport, the man who Cass

has spent her final days with before her suicide. Cleave is unaware of this connection, but in the aftermath of a suicide attempt by Devonport, decides to escape from the film set and the paparazzi and the malign director and everything surrounding this movie production. Devonport needs to be rescued and Cleave needs to reconcile himself with the tortured images he has of his daughter's last days. The blending of identities, where Cleave becomes Vander, his daughter's lover and the father of his unborn grandchild, and Devonport becomes "Cora", a thinly veiled version of Cass, who was christened Catherine, points to the ultimate ambiguity of identity in the world Banville has created, as well as the malleability of identity on the cinema screen.

This theme is the defining concern of Banville's oeuvre because it implicitly calls into question language and our relationship to the world. Banville's fiction has always been preoccupied with this story of language, hence Copernicus's discomfort at publishing his findings in *Doctor Copernicus.* He understands the significance of his discoveries, what they will mean in terms of the challenge they represent to "the phenomena" that those who examined the heavens were always supposed to "save". However, it is not just the political and personal risks such theories raise that influence Copernicus here. He sees also that his calculations are replacing one story with another.

In *The Newton Letter* this is made clear through the narrator's fascination with the story of Newton's dog destroying his work, knocking over a candle and setting his papers alight. The event, the narrator tells us, is often claimed to be the source of Newton's later "degeneration" into less scientifically respectable concerns in later life, like alchemy and theology. But what fascinates the writer of *The Newton Letter* is why

this (apocryphal) event would have driven Newton to despair? It is not that the thought of losing his work drives him over the edge, but rather that it could be destroyed in such a fashion, that it meant nothing. As the narrator imagines it, "Someone beats out the flames. Someone else asks what has been lost. Newton's mouth opens and a word like a stone falls out: *Nothing*... It had needed no candle flame, it was already ashes" (30).

Linda Hutcheon places the science novels under the general category of historiographic metafiction because they overtly make use of historical events or figures while also displaying a self-reflexive tendency toward their putative subject, their time period and the notion of history in general, and this tendency distinguishes them from other historical fictions on her reading. Banville's engagement with the cinema functions in a similarly self-reflexive way. There are extensive allusions to cinema, in specific genres and images from certain movies, and also an overlap between the world of "Hollywood" as cinema, and Hollywood as a place that is mimicked (and mimics) the kind of genre narratives it presents on screen.

Cleave's journey with Dawn Devonport can thus be read as Banville's running away with the cinema. The running away in *Ancient Light* also plays on other allusive connections. In the preceding Cleave novel *Eclipse*, one of the ghosts he takes to be haunting his childhood home turns out to be a real person, Lily, the teenage daughter of the caretaker of the property who has also been squatting in the building having lost his home after some business failing. The discovery that Lily is a physical human being and not a spectre results in a dubious, uncomfortable relationship between the actor, a man in his mid-fifties, and the fifteen year old school girl. Cleave ogles her, describing the "milk bottle-blue" of the back of her knees as she bends over delivering

a tray of tea and biscuits for Cleave and his visiting wife, the seemingly (at least to him) collusive connection between the two of them against her bumbling, feeble father, and so on.

This image of the middle-aged man leering and lusting after a young girl calls to mind Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, a profoundly suggestive text with regard to several relevant themes here. Nabokov's story is, at a basic level, the story of a pederast who falls in love with a young girl, kidnaps her following the death of her mother, and goes on a road trip, abusing her along the way. Cleave in *Eclipse* also recalls the first stirrings of his sexuality in a scene that evokes Humbert's first sighting of Dolores Haze in Nabokov's *Lolita* as well as the image that was used for promotional material of the Kubrick directed 1962 film version of the text. Cleave is meditating on his love of the sea and beach as a child:

> When I was young I had no fear of the sea, and loved the beach. Disporting myself on that narrow strip of not-quite-land wedged between sky and water, I would feel all down the imperceptibly declining curve of the afternoon a sense of the great world's glamour. Some girl in cheap sunglasses and crimpled swimsuit would catch my attention and seem a glimmering naiad. (68)

There are four notable features to this evocative passage. Most strikingly in terms of the movie image and its promotional material is the reference to "cheap sunglasses" (68), as the paratextual imagery around Kubrick's *Lolita* is defined, somewhat misleading given the source material, by the image of a pair of female eyes staring out over a set of red, plastic, heart-shaped sunglasses. This image is intriguing for numerous reasons, not least because it is tempting to read it as something like a Rorschach test, revealing one's own assumptions and thoughts rather than

representing anything meaningful in itself. However, it seems reasonable to suggest there is something troubling about this picture, and indeed, by extension, the film it represents. For one, the sunglasses suggest a degree of "coolness" and detachment on the part of this female figure. This is only amplified by the use of red lipstick to decorate the face of this figure. Her ruby red lips merge with a lollipop of the same colour, her mouth forming the kind of suggestive "oh" shape mentioned earlier regarding Marilyn Monroe and emblematic of a form of popular glamour model photography, and it also seems to combine an intimation of oral sex with childish innocence. The Lolita character's age is increased in the film, which may account for the decision to so strongly imply a degree of collusion in this imagery. The cool, putatively-worldly gaze of this figure from out of the poster seems to speak of a mature personality behind the cartoonishly garish spectacle frames. The implication is that this young girl wants to be taken by Humbert Humbert.

Secondly, the "crimped swimsuit" (68) is present in various forms in both movie and novel versions of the Lolita story. Nabokov's Humbert recalls how he is just considering the train timetable and his escape from the Haze household as he continues his search for lodgings when he spies:

> a sudden burst of greenery – "the piazza," sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses. It was the same child - the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not the gaze of young memory, the juvenile

breasts I had fondled one immortal day. (41-42)

Thus Humbert recalls the affair he enjoyed as a fourteen year old with a girl he calls Annabel, to which he ascribes his predilection for young girls and the reawakening of that passion he felt when he lays eyes on Dolores Haze for the first time. Similarly, the image is recreated in Kubrick's *Lolita*, though here we see the censor's influence. Dolores Haze appears in a pair of shorts and a halter neck top, a relatively conservative bathing costume, and it would be difficult to construe it as the "kerchief" Humbert recalls. However, it is tempting to elide the influence of taste and decency on this point for a further deepening of the relationship between these texts, as the disjuncture between Humbert's recollection of his initial sighting of his Lolita and the "actual" appearance of her, at least as represented by Kubrick in order to satisfy any censors or the Catholic League of Decency, neatly encapsulates something of the tension inherent in the novel itself, that being, the question of truth and trustworthiness in Humbert Humbert.

Thirdly, and as is also referenced in the quotation above, these references to Humbert's "Riviera love", the sea and water chime with the setting of Cleave's reminiscence of his childhood romances. Indeed, going further, as is often the case with Banville's work, there is an allusive play here that does not just leap from *Eclipse* to *Ancient Light* to *Lolita*, but also calls to mind the larger body of his work. Most immediately this section of *Eclipse* seems to gesture forwards towards *The Sea* and Max Morden's memoir of his summer holidays, as well as back to Freddie Montgomery and his memories of his father, leaving him to amuse himself at the seaside while he disappeared, Freddie speculating that it was most likely to spend some time with a girlfriend. Freddie's playboy lifestyle prior to the events of *Book of*

Evidence on a Mediterranean island, and his "incarceration" on the island off the Irish coast in *Ghosts* also springs to mind in this regard.

Finally, also related to these references to the sea and most tellingly with regard to the textual connection between this section in *Eclipse* and Nabokov's *Lolita,* the use of the word *naiad* makes clear the deep connection Banville is developing between these texts. Banville frequently makes reference to mythological figures throughout his novels. His narrators are typically aesthetically sensitive, well-read and culturally discerning, and at one level the textual references of this kind could be read as purely acting as signifiers of this developed sensibility. However, they also function in a deeper way to foreground some of the more general themes in Banville's writing, such as the questions around knowledge, truth and story-telling previously discussed. In this instance it also works to connect the text of *Lolita*, *Eclipse*, and the Cleave trilogy.

In Greek mythology, the naiads were water nymphs, usually associated with fresh water areas, though these distinctions are ambiguous, and the significance is that they are referenced at all in this passage. Throughout *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert frequently refers to Dolores Haze as his "nymphet". In one of the most well-known passages from the novel, he philosophises on this conception of the "nymphet" as he has come to understand it:

> Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as "nymphets". (15)

Expanding on this theme, he invokes, again, this image of the coastline, saying: “It will be marked that I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see ‘nine’ and ‘fourteen’ as the boundaries - the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks - of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea.” (15) A temporal period is transfigured into a desert island as Humbert meditates on his deviancy from sexual norms.

There are further textual connections in between Cleave’s story and Nabokov’s novel. Quoted previously, Cleave’s reminiscences about his youthful escapades at the beach and in the cinema hint at further connections between the texts. Again, there is waterside connection with this girl with auburn hair. Childhood is described as a “honeyed haze”, a pun on Lolita’s surname in a suggestive context. Further, Cleave’s memories in *Ancient Light* of his affair with Mrs Gray invert the gender roles of *Lolita’s* tale.

Through Humbert’s kidnapping road trip we get a vision of the United States, and the United States Nabokov describes is one of indistinct gas stations, parking lots and motels, a vast sea of infinitely plentiful homogeneity, with Humbert’s nymphet island an outpost for him amidst the cultural banality. The ubiquity of Quilty, in Humbert’s words both his “brother” and “nemesis” at different times, represents the obverse relation to popular culture to Humbert’s sniffily, sneering delusion. John Haegert, in his discussion of Humbert’s Americanisation notes how:

> As the incarnation of [Humbert’s] émigré dreams, Lolita is nothing less – and ultimately nothing more – than his adored enchantress, an “ultraviolet darling” made miraculously manifest to his unworthy and unsuspecting eye; this Lolita must be carefully preserved and protected. But, as a flesh-and-blood child, she

> is little more than the wayward daughter of Charlotte Haze, an all-American brat of dubious taste and even more dubious virtue; this Lolita must be carefully suppressed and controlled. (790)

Humbert decries this earthly version of his idealised nymphet: “to the wonderland I had to offer my fool preferred the corniest movies, the most cloying fudge” (187). The irony here is that movies, a medium based on projection of fantasies and idealised images, become a marker of the reality Humbert’s image of the nymphet attempts to mask. They can be read throughout the novel as marking the uneasy relationship between Humbert’s vision of the world and the reality it masks. Indeed, it is not purely coincidental that, despite his refined persona and educated, stately, European airs, Humbert cannot help but imagine himself as Dolores sees him, interjecting the image of star of the screen to stand in for himself in her idealised version of him. Following their first meeting in the piazza of the Haze home in Ramsdale, Humbert muses on what he imagines Dolores’s first impression of him must have been, referring to himself as “a great big handsome hulk of movieland manhood” (42) as he remembers how he judged Dolores against his lost Annabel during this moment in the garden.

These overtones in *Eclipse* re-emerge in *Ancient Light*, where several scenes recall not only Nabokov’s book, but the film versions of his text as well. Most strikingly there is a mysterious meeting in a hotel while the aged Cleave and his movie star companion make their way to the Italian coast. Cleave encounters a man he feels he has met before, but does not know where. This stranger gives the novel its title, as Cleave recalls how this man begins to ramble on about “the depths of space... of quasars and pulsars, of red giants and brown dwarfs and black holes, of heat death and

the Hubble constant, of quarks and quirks and multiple infinities. And of dark matter...” (172) He goes on for some time on these astronomical themes, finally coming to “the ancient light of galaxies that travels for a million—a billion—a trillion!—miles to reach us. ‘Even here,’ he said, ‘at this table, the light that is the image of my eyes takes time, a tiny time, infinitesimal, yet time, to reach your eyes, and so it is that everywhere we look, everywhere, we are looking into the past’” (172).

This stranger, soon introducing himself as Rodrigo Sorran, also feels he recognises Cleave. Cleave tells him he is an actor and Sorran connects him to the “Senorita”, Devonport, who is sleeping upstairs. This echoes the scene in Nabokov’s text where Humbert Humbert endures a probing conversation with a stranger in The Enchanted Hunters hotel who, it emerges later, is the serial child abuser, celebrity, pornographer, playwright and all-round raconteur Clarence Quilty, taking the name of the hotel and using it to title one of his plays. This stranger asks Humbert about his companion in some depth, hinting that he knows what’s really going on with her. Rodrigo Sorran’s conversation with Cleave does not presage the sinister ending that is to come for Quilty and Humbert, but there is a foreboding tone to their parting that is, again, so allusive and opaque that it reads ominously given the Nabokovian precursor:

> We had finished the bottle, he was pouring out the dregs. He tipped the rim of his glass against mine and made a ringing note. “You must take care of your star, in this place,” he said in the softest of whispers, smiling, and leaning so far forwards in the chair that I could see myself reflected, doubly reflected, in the lenses of his spectacles. “The gods watch over us, and are jealous.” (172)

Ultimately this encounter is a narrative feint whereby the Lolita-like overtones of Cleave’s story are raised only to be deflated. His imagination may be loaded with

cinematic images and associations that suggest dubious intentions towards Dawn Devonport, but his actions ultimately prove to be derived from paternal interest rather more than anything else. By the close, Cleave has returned to his home with Devonport, he has withdrawn from the film, his first star role, and he and his wife have become surrogate parents for the Monroe double. In this Cleave provides an interesting contrast to Axel Vander, whose cinematic imagination is more self-consciously developed than the aged actor, and whose relationship to Cass Cleave, explored in *Shroud*, is as much about his attempts to break through narcissistic cinematic cliché as it is about his attempts to control his possible exposure as an intellectual and moral charlatan.

Axel Vander, Louis Althusser, and Cinematic Cliché

Throughout *Ancient Light*, Alex Cleave is shown to be preparing for the role of Axel Vander, the appropriated name of the narrating voice of *Shroud*, Banville's 2002 novel about a European Second World War refugee from Belgium who flees to America and reinvents himself as literary critic and public intellectual. Unknown to Cleave, he is also the man who can partially explain his daughter's final days, her (apparent) suicide closing the preceding novel, *Eclipse*. The events of *Eclipse* and *Shroud* also temporally overlap, taking place, at least based on Axel Cleave's testimony, in the early months of 1990, and both novels end with Cass Cleave's death, though the events leading up to it are told from radically different perspectives. As is evident from this brief synopsis, the sequence of novels overlap and complicate each of the other texts in what will from here be referred to as the Cleave Trilogy. The purpose here is to understand *Shroud* in terms of *Eclipse* and *Ancient Light*, both of

which we have examined through a cinematic lens. As we have seen through the preceding discussion, Banville's work in the first and third novels of the sequence is inflected with a self-consciousness that does not just extend to other works of literature, but is also informed by literary and cinematic theory and intellectual history. Banville is clearly playing with scopophilia as a theory of cinematic viewership, using it to develop the themes of masculine misreading and epistemological neuroticism present in his earlier works. This is most evident in the important role the cinema as a physical space plays in the development of Alex Cleave in both novels. If *Shroud* is to be considered a part of a trilogy it seems necessary that the cinema should figure as similarly significant for Axel Vander. There is a question as to how we account for the entry of the Axel Vander narrative voice into a sequence of novels the first and third of which clearly engage with cinema. There are two related aspects to the answer. Firstly, in an inversion of Cleave's memories of the cinema, where the physical setting is crucial to both his memories and the significance of these moments, for Vander, it is *the movies shown* that "provide" his memories. That is, he acknowledges that his memories are simulacra of cinematic simulacrum. This points to the second aspect of the cinematic that Banville explores here. Where Cleave's story is intentionally framed in relation to cinematic theory and the scopophilic, Vander's goes a level deeper, engaging with the life of Louis Althusser, whose thought informs Mulvey's writing on subjectivity and cinema. In drawing on Althusser's life for aspects of the character of Axel Vander, Banville is extending the evident importance of the cinema in this series of novels.

While the physical space of the cinema is not as evocative and memorable for Vander as it is for Cleave (or Max Morden in *The Sea*), cinema, as in the movies of

his youth, are remembered and cited explicitly as being hugely influential on him. They are shown to inform and define aspects of his memory to such a degree that it is not too large a claim to say that they exercise a large degree of control over his imaginative possibilities and, by extension, his personality and view of the world. This emerges at different points in the novel, in instances of something like cinematic "ekphrasis", where Banville's writing becomes cinematic writing in the way it describes images, scenes, and filmic conventions or tropes that suggest implicitly what Vander says explicitly, that the images that fill his mind are always already existing memories due to the cinema. The cinema, like painting or scientific theories in Banville's other series, is analogous to language, with words coming to us laden with meanings that traduce and transcend what we might want to say. Where Cleave and his counterpart Max Morden in 2005's *The Sea* recall specific memories from visits to the cinema, Vander explicitly frames his own memories as being lifted straight from the movies of his youth. For Cleave the physical space provides the memory, for Vander it is film that produces his memories.

There are several moments throughout the text that hint at cinematic influence and allusion, but they only come fully into view once Vander has discussed his own relationship to the cinema. This occurs, significantly, as he is describing the early stages of his relationship with his wife, Magda, who has died after some forty years of living with Vander, though he does not discuss his role in her death until later in the text. In an ironic moment given what he subsequently says, Vander muses how "try as I may I cannot remember exactly how or when we met," (55) but still tries to recall it: "In my memory of it, that first, long-ago season in an unreally vivid New York is all haste and noise and sullen heat" (55). As with the vision of Celia Gray, the

imprecision of memory intervenes here, yet the use of “unreally vivid” to describe New York seems to both acknowledge and obscure the fictive nature of Vander’s recollection. This is where he and Magda live before he becomes a renowned literary critic, and gestures towards the cinematic aspect of Vander’s world. The “unreality” of these images does not impinge on how vivid they are, in fact it may even benefit them, allowing for additional details here and there, and all of this pointing to the self-conscious manufacturing of memory from images pulled from different sources, including the cinema.

This sense of the contingency of memory is heightened by the subsequent passages, where Vander launches into a montage-like description of moments and images designed to conjure up the sense of what life in the big city is like:

> Everything was always on the move, there was never a moment of cessation or stillness. Traffic thudded day and night along the streets above the corner basement room where I lodged; the papers on the scarred old table I used for a work desk shivered and shifted in the draught from the electric fan some acquaintance had given me [...] All day a confusion of disembodied legs passed back and forth on the pavement outside the ground-level window above my table [...] And then there was the talk, incessant, raucous, plosive with challenge or swollen with sudden declarations of sincerity and fellow-feeling. I would meet them at the end of their working day [...] the scrawny young men in open-necked shirts, with their flat haircuts and Zippo lighters, sweating earnestness, the serious-eyed girls in pumps and calf-length skirts clutching paperback copies of *Capital* to their chests like breastplates. (55)

This is quoted at length with only minor edits to convey the montage-like

quality of the passage. The series of images, drawn together in a few lines, reads as though it were cut together from stock footage; gridlocked traffic, trampling feet of pedestrians through a basement flat window, the office fan whirring in the fetid heat, the non-stop jabbering of crowded bars or restaurants at the end of the working day, and the social groups who find space to exist in massive urban centres and the animated conversations they have, the relationships they enjoy:

> sudden squabbles that were as suddenly quelled, the shouts and thrusting forefingers, and that gesture of half-angry dismissal of a contrary opinion, so characteristic of the time and place, a free-wristed, sideways slap at the air and the face turning aside, with wrinkled nose and drooping lower lip. (56)

Crucially, Vander knows it reads this way:

> all this was intensely strange to me, and yet familiar, too, I could not think why, at first, until I realised that of course I had seen it all over and over again, for years, in the cinema, every Saturday night, when I was young. America on the screen had been more intimately familiar to me than the streets of the city where I was born and where I lived. (56)

Vander's memories of his earlier life in New York are filtered through the prism of his cinematic exposure when he was younger, but the cinema doesn't just gloss his memory of bygone times with a patina of the uncanny. The implication here is that in the lived moment any incidents that approximate to those images described by Vander become inseparable from Vander's sense of the world as being mediated by or constitutive of a cinematic sensibility. The lived moment and the cinematic sense are melded together in Vander's way of viewing the world. Where Cleave visits the

cinema, Vander *is* cinema. As he puts it, "And so, in New York, the actual New York, that was how I chose to present myself, as a character out of the pictures, a fat cigarette lolling in my lips and a tumbler of bourbon at my elbow. I even used to dress the part, in brown fedora and tight, double-breasted suit and two-toned shoes" (57). Like Jean Paul Belmodo's Michel in Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* (1960) staring at the poster of Humphrey Bogart, modelling his "look" on the cool, world weary tough guy, Vander constructs his new identity out of images from the movies.

There are traces of this uncannily cinematic quality in early passages of the novel, but once Vander explicitly references the role of cinema in his memories and his own subjective experience, the filmic element seems all the more pronounced in these passages. Just to consider one example in depth, Vander, once he has received Cass Cleave's letter telling him she knows about his past, accepts a conference request in Turin at short notice. The following morning he leaves his residence on the campus of Arcady University, a spoof version of UC Berkeley in the San Francisco bay area of Northern California, heading for the airport.[11] The first hints of cinematic influence in this episode are suggested by Vander's description of the taxi driver as,

> a caricature immigrant from the East, bearish and taciturn, a Russian, most likely, as so many of them seem to be in these newly liberated days. He took my bag unwillingly and turned and lumbered with it down the porch steps. There are times when that entire coastal strip seems a film set and everyone on it a character actor. (22)

The California coast, not for the first time in history, is repurposed as the

[11] Banville describes visiting San Francisco in his youth frequently in interviews, and in a 2011 personal travel memoir for *The Guardian* he describes several memorable images from this holiday in depth.

backdrop to a movie, with the driver a character actor, playing against Vander's star turn. As with the memories of New York discussed above, Vander here explicitly references the construct of the immigrant taxi driver in America. This is a caricature, a cliché, a ready-to-hand image of what the experience of actually living in San Francisco might be like. Not only this, but the immigrant taxi driver is also a well-worn stock character in movies, often used to comic effect, where the driver does not speak the local language, does not understand the conventions of road safety and etiquette in their adopted country, or simply does not know how to drive.

And so it is here, where Vander wonders "if the Russian really knew the way to the airport", and the Eastern European's reckless driving forms part of an absurd parody of a car chase-cum-escape scene (26). Vander has received Cass Cleave's letter, and paranoia begins to infect his perception of the world. The driver,

> shifted a lever somewhere [...] and trod on the accelerator and the engine roared and the taxi surged away from the kerb like a stuck animal. Turning, I spied one of my neighbours standing out on his porch in string vest and shorts, watching me go, with what seemed a look of confirmed suspicion, as if he were only waiting for the taxi to turn the corner before running to the telephone and calling the authorities to inform them that the suspect bird next door had flown the coop. (23)

The language in this final line, "the bird" has flown "the coop", again, is a parody of surveillance tropes lifted straight from Hollywood thriller dialogue, as is the conspiratorial speculation about his neighbour. It is important to stress here that Vander is aware of the absurdity of this projection of cinematic imagery and tropes onto the banal reality of getting into a taxi and driving to the airport, the paranoid

description here is self-conscious and intentionally absurd. It does, however, give a glimpse beneath the irony to a darker side of Vander that emerges later in the story, as he continues:

> for the first time it occurred to me to wonder if the fellow might be a Hebrew. I thought it likely—those springy curls, that nose. Half the population of Arcady and its environs seemed to be of the Chosen, though not the kind that I was once used to; these Luftmenschen were altogether too sure of themselves, too pushy and uncomplaining." (23-4)

Given what we subsequently learn of Vander's anti-Semitic connections and the articles that are associated with his adopted identity, these paranoid speculations, ironic or not, gesture towards his dark past and say something about the power and danger of images. In the following passages, despite his sniffy disdain for "Luftmenschen", Vander laments how his own mind "cannot stop working, even for an instant, even when I am asleep; I can never quite come to terms with this appalling fact. Repeatedly now, especially in the night, I return to the awful possibility that the mind might survive the body's death," (24) a contrast that, once again, emphasises how Vander's observations about his world are really mirrors into this cinematically informed mind. Furthering the cinematically informed tone of this passage and Vander's perception of it, the trip to the airport then suddenly turns into a form of car chase as his Russian taxi driver transports him across a structure, the Golden Gate bridge, that seems so familiar to us largely because of its repeated, repetitive place in the background or foreground of any number of Hollywood movies and television shows. This is a most cinematic site for a very cinematic encounter:

> A battered white car driven by a frail black youth veered suddenly into the lane

> in front of us, and the Russian stamped on the brake and the taxi groaned and perilously swayed, and I was thrown forward and struck my good knee painfully on something hard in the seat-back. A traffic accident, that quintessential American road show, was always one of my liveliest terrors, the intolerable absurdity of all that noise and heat and hissing steam and pain. (25)

The idea of a traffic accident is framed as the pinnacle of a form of American entertainment as Vander is slung about the back seat of the groaning, strained taxi. His driver begins "jockeying for position", the race is on, and "with a tremendous wrench of the steering wheel he pulled into the left lane and overtook the white car and opened the automatic window on the passenger side and flung out a polysyllabic Cossack curse" (26). The performance is not over; the man driving the white car, as though working to a script, has "a skinny arm resting on the door beside him, his long, delicate fingers drumming in time to the music thundering from his car radio" gives a "broad smile, showing a mouthful of impossibly huge, impossibly white teeth" gathers up all the mucous he can muster to spit onto the car window while still driving, before shooting "forward gleefully in a black blast of exhaust smoke. The Russian spoke savagely some words that I was unperturbed not to understand" (26).

Taken in isolation, it is possible to detect the cinematic quality of this episode, but when read with Vander's own thoughts on cinema, and specifically America as portrayed in the cinema of his youth in mind, it is difficult to miss the cinematic tropes and conventions, as well as the framing of each moment of such a scene, where Vander acts as camera and editor, cutting quickly from shot to shot and lending the scene a sinister tone that is not necessarily implied in the story of getting a taxi to the airport. And, like a stone dropped in a pond, the import of this moment of cinematic

self-consciousness ripples throughout the text, where moments of seeming innocuousness take on a cinematic quality.

This sense of the cinematic informing and defining the terms by which Axel apprehends and interprets the world points to the second, deeper point at play in the novel and its relation to cinema. We've seen how scopophilia informs the masculine perspective of Alex Cleave, and how this is in part Banville playing with theoretical work on cinema. In *Shroud* Banville is engaging at a deeper level with this theoretical history. Banville has engaged specifically with the theory of scopophilia as an aspect of the cinematic experience, and how this use of the scopophilic dimension of cinema marks an aspect of Alex Cleave's character in *Eclipse* and *Ancient Light*. This emerges through reference to Banville's writing on his relationship to the cinema. Banville's interest in the theoretical is more overt in *Shroud*. Through reference to the lives of two prominent twentieth-century intellectuals Banville builds the central story of Axel Vander's life and the duplicitous persona that speaks from *Shroud's* pages.

The most focused aspect of this is in the reliance on Paul De Man's biography as source material. De Man's posthumous exposure as author of journalism for collaborationist publications in Belgium in his youth provides the central tension of Vander's story. Though Banville adds an extra layer of irony to De Man's story, where Vander did not write the stories, he merely assumed the identity of the man who did after he was taken by the Nazis when they marched through the low countries, it uses the image of a deconstructionist literature professor, and his knowledge of his imminent exposure as a fraud, to engage with literary theory. Broadly speaking, post-structuralism challenges the notion of a true self and selfhood in general. Vander's philosophical ideas come into conflict with his urge to confess

and seek absolution for his imposture when it becomes clear that he can be exposed by the researcher Cass Cleave.

This is germane material for any consideration of Banville's relationship to philosophy, literary theory and politics, and an analysis of his reviews for the *Irish Times* and other publications show a continuing interest in intellectual controversies such as the De Man and Heidegger affairs. However, though the De Man controversy is central to the narrative of *Shroud*, another twentieth-century intellectual informs the thematic of intellectual fraudulence and provides another aspect to the Vander character and his narrative. Though Banville references it in the closing "Acknowledgements" in *Shroud* (406), the overtones of Louis Althusser's later life, pointed to by Alex Davis in his 2004 review of *Shroud*, beg for an explanation given how Althusser and De Man's biographies and thought diverge. De Man, though from Belgium, made his name in the United States, teaching at Yale and becoming one of the leading lights of deconstructionist criticism there. This mode of criticism, though widely represented by European critics like Derrida and De Man, is often read as finding a home in America, sweeping across US campuses in the seventies and eighties, and many of the critical names associated with it, such as J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman were born in or, in Hartman's case, lived their adult lives, in the United States. By contrast, Althusser taught and lived at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, going from student to tutor and eventually professor without ever having to move outside the esteemed institution, and his philosophical Marxism and political communism also seems a significant feature here, being tied up very much with French history and domestic political issues.

The story Axel Vander tells in *Shroud* criss-crosses the Atlantic, where

Vander leaves Europe, like De Man, and forges a new identity in the new world, but this European story, Althusser's rise and fall, follows him too. And indeed it is worth saying that it is a very French story as well, where Althusser's philosophy and politics cannot be read without reference to the inseparable context of his membership of the French Communist Party (PCF), and the historical events within European socialism and communism through the 1950s up to 1980 and his disappearance from public life. As such, the intertextual use of Althusser's relationship with his wife and her death is a detail that merits consideration and explanation.

The invocation of Althusser's life and relationship with his wife Helene Rytmann works to inform the character of Axel Vander.[12] The most strikingly relevant element is the passage where Vander describes his wife's death with an unerring detachment that is redolent of Althusser's own description of the moment he killed Helene that opens his posthumously published memoir *The Future Lasts Forever*. The description of her death is striking because of its place at the beginning of a would-be exculpatory piece. This description is framed as a sudden awakening from a trance-like state, and he is horrified to find Helene lying motionless on the bed in front of him; "Her pelvis was resting on the edge of the bed, her legs dangled on the carpet" (15). He remembers "massaging" her neck as he often did, but from the front rather than the back as he usually did. "The muscles in my forearms began to feel very tired; I was aware that they always did when I was massaging. Helene's face was calm and

[12] "Rytmann" is the spelling Althusser uses in *The Future Lasts Forever* (117), though Douglas Johnson, in his introduction to that volume, uses "Rytman", a spelling that is widespread in much written on Althusser and this case. Intriguingly from a Banvillian perspective, Helene often used aliases, the surname "Legotien" being added to her forename, and sometimes "Sabine" replacing this too. Althusser recounts how these name changes played into charges that she was a double agent for the French intelligence services and the Gestapo in French Communist circles, but says that she initially used Legotien because "she hated her family name and had adopted that of one of the first Jesuits to visit China in response to the wishes of Father Larue" (201).

motionless; her eyes were open and staring at the ceiling. Suddenly, I was terror-struck" (15). He flees the apartment for the Ècole doctor, but it is too late. He is eventually sedated and taken away from the scene.

Given Banville's previously discussed interest in the various controversies surrounding public philosophers, it is no surprise to see him seize upon this shocking, sensational incident and use it to explore themes of self, identity, memory and loss, many of which are related to Althusser's (and De Man's) thought. More subtly, there are suggestive parallels and contrasts to be seen in the relationships of these two couples. Banville draws upon the details of their relationship, playing with the images and ideas suggested by Althusser's confessional memoir as well the image presented by biographers and journalists. The picture of their relationship that emerged after Helene's death, defined by insularity, isolation and dependence, stands in contrast with that of Axel and Magda.

Their relationship is bound up with the cinema. The other incident in the cinema in their relationship that Vander vividly recalls is footage shown during the interval in a double bill in the cinema on Bleecker Street in New York, which shows "the ruins of Europe." Vander explains how "the sight of those seemingly endless ranks of corpses had jogged something in [Magda], and now she could not stop telling me what had happened to her" (65). The episode serves to underline Vander's fraudulence, Magda's pouring out of memories prompting him to invent the story of his past, avoiding the truth. Their relationship is framed in cinematic terms by Vander from the start. "All I lacked was a companion, some big babe, loose and hard-drinking, and as tough as I was supposed to be. People were baffled, therefore, especially the girls, when it turned out to be sweet, silent, undemonstrative Magdalena

that I chose to be my moll, my mate" (57). The use of "moll" here self-consciously invokes the movies of Vander's youth again, carrying overtones of screen toughs, gangsters, and the "sassy broads" that accompany them. The regretful tone of this passage, stemming from the contrast between how "tough guys" are in the movies as against the "real life", hints at the difficulty arising from this disjuncture between how he wishes to be perceived and how (who) he is. And, as so often with Banville, these few words say so much about their relationship. Vander has "chosen" his "mate". This usage, with its overtones of animalistic rutting as against romantic courtship, is not accidental. Throughout her haunting appearances in his memory, Magda is repeatedly and consistently presented as an animal, a creature somehow different to Vander, framed in bestial terms, often with connotations of dumb, lumbering ponderousness, as if to justify her fate.

In the subsequent passages here, for instance, describing their early years together, Vander reaches for terms that denote weighty, dull, leaden presence. While he recalls her "massive, stony quality", which was "somehow granitic and unrelievedly grey" and which he found curiously attractive, she, paradoxically, came to his attention because "she kept to the background", though "not out of shyness or fear—although she was shy, she was fearful—but in order to be able to watch and listen to all that went on from the shelter of anonymity" (57). This description of her as something of a watcher, as possessing a voyeur-like personality even, suggests a lot; Vander's attraction to her is perhaps because she provides the passive audience for his performance as the Bogart-like tough guy. It also suggests an image of Magda as something like a large, grey, prey animal, an undertone raised to the surface as Vander continues to reminisce. He sees her in his mind's eye:

> coming down the basement steps in that odd, elephantine way that she had, turning sideways and lowering one broad foot on to each step and then bringing the second down to join it, her chin tucked into her fishpale throat and her gaze fixed on whatever it was she was carrying" (57-58).

Shy but huge Magda has been rendered as an elephant-like being in his memories, her recurring appearance in his recollections rendering her less and less human until he finally kills her.

It is worth emphasising here that Magda's appearance in the novel is solely communicated to us through Axel's voice. In a departure from many of Banville's other novels, *Shroud* features passages that abandon the first-person perspective. In these brief interludes, told from a third-person perspective, presumably that of Vander's imagination, Cass Cleave's story is filled out; she uncovers Vander's secret, she travels to Turin to meet him, and so on. These passages, however, do not give us any "objective" material by which we might assess the story Vander tells us about Magda, save for the obvious questions it raises about his character in general and how trustworthy he is. What is striking with regard to the Althusserian overtones is how both Vander and Althusser see their wives' deaths, and their part in them, as being acts that were justified.

Althusser in his confessional memoir recalls making the case to his analyst that Helene's death was "a suicide via a third party" (267). Throughout he recounts the violent mental disturbances that would afflict him, and the effect these had on his wife and their relationship. The weeks and months before her death Althusser describes as a "Hell for three" (251), where he and Helene saw no one but the analyst they both visited. They refused to answer the phone or door to their apartment in the Ècole, and

with Helene having told him she wanted to leave him for good, she spent days refusing to talk to him, hiding in her bedroom, refusing to eat meals with him, and so on (251). This soon escalated to the point where, according to Althusser, she'd talk openly of suicide as an escape from the "monster" that he was. He recalls how "she collected the drugs she needed to commit suicide and left them on display, but she also talked of other, more violent ways" (252), and asked at one point whether he could kill her, he assuming that, for all her talk of suicide, she would never actually kill herself. His plan was to, once again, check into hospital for treatment of a severe depressive episode, during which time she would have a change of heart, and their relationship could return to "normal". The day before he was due to go to hospital he strangled her to death.

In terms of Axel Vander's relationship with Magda, there is much at odds here. Althusser's relationship with women is framed by the philosopher himself in terms of an odd oedipal struggle, where Althusser's father Charles is merely the stand-in husband for his late brother's fiancée. Her intended, Louis, was killed at Verdun in 1917. Althusser was named Louis after this deceased uncle and, in Althusser's telling of their relationship, takes on the saintly repose and impossible expectations of his mother's image of her dead lover. According to Althusser's account, in becoming this otherworldly figure he lost the possibility to assume an identity for himself, while he also in a sense usurps his biological father within the Freudian Oedipal schema, and this leads to a warped relationship to women and sex. Helene Rytmann was eight years older than Althusser, was the first woman the thirty-year-old Althusser had sex with, and their relationship was one of a unique intensity according to many accounts on the public record. Rytmann was hugely significant influence on Althusser's life,

and, despite his status as a notable public figure and philosopher, she was the dominant figure in the relationship. Douglas Johnson, a former student of Althusser's and a friend to his death, writes in his introduction to the English translation of *The Future Lasts Forever* how Helene "was the dominating influence" in their relationship. "He was totally dependent on her, whether in terms of his health, his teaching, his publications, his friends. I once asked one of the philosophers who had shared our table at meals whether we should call on Althusser. 'Oh no' he replied, 'that woman who holds him would not allow it'" (x). He remembers Althusser calling her twice a day everyday while away from Paris, and recording his talks and seminars so he could send her a tape of these to listen to and discuss when he returned home. As such, it is tempting to read her as a mother-like figure for Althusser.

Magda is far from an explicitly imagined maternal figure for Vander, but then, it is hard to know what a maternal figure would look like to one with as overwhelming a sense of ego as Vander. In a telling moment, he remembers his parents only in terms of standing in his way: "Did I know them at all? When they were there I think I hardly noticed them, except when they got in my light, restricting my view of the radiant future" (245). Again, the metaphor here, the image of a vision of light in front of him, and of people being able to block it out, suggests the physical space of the cinema and the way the cinema has informed his way of seeing the world. Similarly, on another rare emergence of family memories he tells us "I do not intend to oppress you with reminiscences of my family," before describing his closest family members as "botched prototypes along the way to producing me" who have in his memory "a quaint, outmoded, in some cases badly blurred, aspect, like that of the incidental figures standing about self-consciously in very old photographs, smiling worriedly and

not knowing what to do with their hands" (206). They are not natural performers, they are out-of-focus, and they do not know how to act under the gaze of the camera. By contrast, Vander is a natural performer, "having lived my life in the awareness, or even if only in the illusion, of being constantly watched, constantly under scrutiny, I am all frontage, stroll around to the back and all you will find is some sawdust and a few shaky struts and a mess of wiring" (329). Vander, with an adopted name and a militantly critical view of the idea of identity, is always performing.

Though Vander never quite explains her exact ailment, it is clear from his description that readers of his confession are to conclude that Magda was afflicted with some form of nervous disorder resembling dementia that saw her regress to a child-like state. "The first sign I registered of Magda's malady was the sudden craving that she developed for children's food of all kinds, popcorn and potato chips, toffee bars, sherbet bags, penny lollipops," (21-22) he says as he muses on the gradual accumulation of deficiencies he has noted in his own physical and mental state, being aged somewhere in his sixties at the time of writing. As he broaches her death, the children's snacks have given way to an infant's incontinence:

> When did she develop her taste for toy food? I would find lollipop sticks stuck to the floors, crumbs of cake between the covers of the bed, candy wrappers floating unflushably in the lavatory bowl. Frequently now I would come into the house to meet her standing in the hall regarding me with a wild, unrecognising look. I would hear her talking to herself, in the bathroom, or on the stairs, a hushed, urgent whispering. Then one morning she walked into the kitchen leaving behind her across the floor a trail of little turds as flat as fishes, and I knew the time had come when she must go. (92-93)

And then, when Vander has decided the exact time for her to “go”, she is supplicant as a child is to parent as they feed medicine for an ailment. Vander sees himself, “Clear as if it were being projected before my wide-open eyes... sitting opposite Magda at the table in the breakfast nook, feeding her the tablets, picking them up one by one from my cupped palm and dropping them into her offered mouth” (111), and recalling how he “had told her the tablets were a special kind of candy” (111).

Magda’s death is described alongside Vander’s visit with Cass Cleave to the building where Nietzsche reputedly stayed in Turin before his final collapse. In Cass he sees Magda’s face from that night when he fed her tablets to end her life. On the face of it, this is an act of mercy, Magda’s senses having left her, but Vander’s cold description of the act itself and the circumstances around it (“I knew the time had come when she must go”), his unreliability, and other passages suggest that he did not wrestle with any great concerns or worries about the act itself. For instance, in one striking passage, talk of the origins of the Turin Shroud lead him into memories of Magda. Her name, echoing Mary Magdalene, prompts Vander’s imagination to merge these women together in a sudden moment of absent-minded meditation. He imagines Mary Magdalene’s hair, how she would have washed Jesus’ body to create the death shroud: “She would kneel beside the bathtub, a votary before the sacred fount, broad shoulders bowed, her white neck bared” (157). However, the image of her “white neck bared”, followed by the “feel of her big skull frail as an egg under my kneading fingers,” (157) takes on an ominous tone in light of the Althusser reference point. As he continues, it seems he is referring to his dead wife, who moved with him across America as his academic career developed:

Newyorpennindianabraska. Always moving, moving westward, stepping over

> the chequer board land in long, effortless strides. The cities and then the plains, then what they call the high country, with snow and pine, then the mountains, the great peaks, and then the desert, and then at last the Barbary Shore, on whose blue waters her ashes would one day briefly float, swaying. (157)

The passage is opaque in the extreme, lapsing between different women, continents and millennia, but certainly evokes Magda and death, as well as the way she continues to, in Vander's own words, haunt him since her death. The recurring, ghostly presence of Magda suggests that, however much he may try to rationalise what he did, there is a lingering guilt even he cannot shed.

Althusser's exculpatory effort is framed in terms of the regular nervous collapses he suffered throughout his life and his unhappy childhood and adolescence pointed to above. The imperative to tell his story is doubled by the circumstances of his "conviction" for the murder of his wife. As he protests in the opening chapters, his being found unfit to stand trial, far from the blessing it was taken to be in the press, has been a curse for him. It has, as he puts it, turned him into a "missing" (21) person, in the sense that he is alive and no longer incarcerated, but doesn't seem to exist for other people in light of his role in her death. His memoir is his attempt at a defence against the charges, an explanation of what happened as he remembers it. As such, there is a clear contrast in the autobiographical telling of their stories, but their connection through the killing of their spouses is enhanced by the sense of fraudulence that pervades their lives.

In *The Facts*, the opening pages of an autobiography written before he killed his wife, Althusser recalls his history of depressive episodes and how analysis had helped him through these dark periods. He describes the sense of fraudulence and

failure that pursued him throughout his life. “I had the impression that everything I had achieved in life I had done fraudulently: especially my academic success since I had copied things out and invented quotations in order to succeed” (363). In *The Future Lasts Forever* he goes into greater depth about this sense of professional fraudulence, saying that, from his youth, he learned to copy his teachers and what they wanted to hear or see in his work. In saying this it seems there is something of a wider philosophical point being made here. For instance, Althusser’s critique of “Ideological State Apparatuses”, the institutions that produce “good”, economically and (in the broadest sense of the term) socially useful subjects through ideology rather than through the threat of brute force, seems of some relevance to his account of cheating on a philosophy paper in his first year as an undergraduate and the lessons this taught him. He recalls getting a copy of his tutor Jean Guitton’s example answer from another student who’d sat the same paper a year earlier:

> Without a moment's hesitation I took the teacher's fair copy, retained most of it (the overall plan, the development of the ideas, and the conclusion), and reworked it as best I could in my own way - in other words, what I had managed to grasp of Guitton's approach, including his style of writing. (92)

Guitton is delighted by Althusser’s paper, not recognising its source or the deception involved. Althusser reports that this had a lasting impact on him. The benefits were clear; he was celebrated by Guitton, becoming a friend and confidant of his master, as well as gaining the respect and reverence of his peers as the top scholar in his class; however, it also served to amplify the sense of artifice and fraudulence that his early life with his mother had suggested to him was the only way to exist in the world. “This time, however, I could not even claim that the artifice was my own

creation," (93) he laments. "I only existed as a consequence of real deceit in relation to my true nature, by unscrupulously plagiarising the ideas, argument, and expressions of my teacher," (93) and the successful duping of Guitton leads to a general jaundiced perspective on the university as an institution that he never wavers from (94). It was only by deceiving those within the institution about himself that Althusser progresses up the ladder of academia in the Ècole.

The critique of institutional structures at a deeper level functions as a critique of individual subjectivity itself. Althusser's reading of Marx is one that sees the subject as existing through a relationship with ideology, as an ideological construct, and as such his Marxism is opposed to more humanist slants on Marxist theory. Indeed, one Ideological State Apparatus Althusser identifies is the family unit, where hierarchical notions and structures are formed. Though the relationship is not without its incongruities, in their targets it is easy to see why Althusser attempts to align his Marxism with Lacanian psychoanalysis, in that both ultimately challenge the autonomy of the subject. As Richard Allen puts it in his discussion of Althusserian interpellation, "Althusser compared this 'error' of the subject to the 'error' of the subject before Lacan's mirror who misrecognizes herself as an entity within it (collapsing the formation of the social subject with Lacan's psychic subject)" (134). Lacanian psychoanalysis reads the formation of the ego as being based on a fundamental misrecognition of the self in the mirror stage, when a child sees its reflection at around six to eighteen months old and takes it to be perfect image of control and order that it knows it cannot maintain because it does not have control over its body and self. This means that the subject's knowledge of itself and of the world is always based on "misrecognition" (from the French *méconnaissance*), that

subjectivity and knowledge are basically false and misleading. Allen cites Jean Louis Baudry's film criticism as an exemplar of the application of these theoretical insights to the cinematic apparatus. Here the screen functions as the mirror in Lacanian terms, or the social position with which the subject identifies through interpellation as Althusser would have it: "What emerges here (in outline) is the specific function fulfilled by the cinema as support and instrument of ideology. It constitutes the 'subject' by the illusory delimitation of a central location - whether this be that of a god or of any other substitute" (Baudry 46). This also is basis on which Mulvey founds her critique of the male gaze, where the structure of the cinematic experience is read as reinforcing predominant ideas of gender. As such, Banville's engagement with Althusser's life story goes deeper than just acting as a structuring device for his plot. While Axel Vander continuously references his critical work, which revolves around the kind of anti-humanist critique evident in Althusser's Marxism, the story he tells is one filled with doubt about his theoretical pronouncements. Nowhere is this more evident than in his discomfort at the emotional as well as physical affection he develops for Cass Cleave.

He explicitly acknowledges his philosophical forbearers in an early passage as he remembers his mother fixing his hair as a child. He flinches at what he calls "an over-consciousness of self, the sudden, ghastly awareness of being trapped inside this armature of flesh and bone like a pupa wedged in the hardened-over mastic of its cocoon" (41). And immediately the self-conscious impulse kicks in: "What self? What sticky imago did I imagine was within me, do I imagine is within me, even still, aching to burst forth and spread its gorgeous, eyed wings?" (41) The use of the term "imago" underlines the Lacanian connection, where it stands for the reflection the

child sees in the mirror stage of their development, and the questioning of the self as an autonomously existing thing within him is the fundamental issue here. The problem is that he cannot stop lapsing into talk about his self, this core self. Though we do not learn his birth name, we see him speak of that self in relation to Axel Vander, the name he adopts. “It’s not so much that I wanted to be him [...] but that I wanted so much more not to be me,” (285) he says, which forces him to ask the obvious question about his theory: “If, as I believe, as I insist, there is no essential, singular self, what is it exactly I am supposed to have escaped by pretending to be Axel Vander?” (286) His answer he frames in terms of ancient Greek theatre, where he imagines a veteran actor, who has played many minor parts, taking home his mask, wearing it, and no one noticing the difference, that “man and mask are one” (287). This echoes a recurring theme in Banville, where “the thing, the vivid thing”, as it is put by the narrator in *Doctor Copernicus*, is the primary focus. To create a thing, something that is put out into the world, this is Banville’s vision of art, and Vander’s best effort at this is to become another self. But, as he admits when considering his love for Cass, “despite any claims to the contrary I may seem to make, I am an ordinary soul. My hungers are human, my aspirations mundane” (332). He cannot quite live up to the expectations he has for himself, his ordinary desires betray him, as his cinematic imagination betrays his intellectual shortcomings.

The metaphorical power of the cinema and the seductively attractive images it projects form the basis of one strikingly Nabokovian element of *Shroud*. *Laughter in the Dark*, one of Nabokov’s Russian novels, originally published in 1932, trades on the early cinema, its modes and milieu, to tell a simple story of casual cruelty and self destruction. Here, a bourgeois art critic, Albert Albinus, allows himself to be seduced

by the world of Berlin's early cinema, throwing away his family, friends and fortune for the sake of his teenage mistress Margot. They meet at the cinema, where she works, and her dream is to become an actress. Albinus facilitates this by arranging auditions but she is terrible in the eyes of all but him. While bleeding him dry she is continuing an affair with Axel Rex, an artist, who manages to insinuate himself into Albinus and Margot's company for a long time without causing Albinus any unease. However, when he does discover their betrayal, a car accident intervenes to blind him and allow his figurative blindness to Margot's affair to become a literal one, where she and Axel continue their romance in front of the clueless Albert. Eventually the ridiculous play is uncovered and, in a fit of rage, Albert attempts to shoot Margot, only to shoot himself instead as they struggle against one another, and Margot escapes. As is evident from this summary, the cinema is significant as a place in Nabokov's story, but this is not the only important role it plays. At a deeper level, there is a cinematic logic deployed throughout, in a similar fashion to the cinematic elements of Vander's imagination in *Shroud*. For instance, the car accident that blinds Albert is "shot" from two different perspectives, cutting from Albert and Margot speeding through the countryside to a woman on a hillside nearby who witnesses the accident (236-237).

Though they share a first name, Rex and Vander should not be read as like for like characters.[13] While Rex lives up to the pun of his surname, wrecking things for Albinus, Vander's evil, while no less damaging (it is greater if anything, given the murder of his wife and the Nazi connection) is not as seemingly detached and

[13] There even seems to be a meta-textual aspect to Axel Rex's name. Banville asks, in his introduction to a reissued version of *Laughter in the Dark*, "who but Nabokov would invent a villain with an x in each of his names" (vi). His own villainous Axel is only afforded one x, he is not quite villainous enough to merit a second x.

autonomous from the wider world. There is, in the most basic terms, a sense of development with Vander, where he becomes a vaguely sympathetic character by the end of his story; his boyish desire for Cass Cleave, her death and the consequent death of their unborn child, go some way towards humanising him as an individual, much more than the preceding events of his life, or his behaviour in general, should make him. The connotations of their surnames also point toward the divergence in these characters. Rex is supremely confident, living up to the regal aspect of his surname, whereas Vander suggests some sort of lack, "Van der" being a traditional prefix to surnames in the low countries meaning "of the" or "from the". Given that we never learn Axel Vander's original name and learn very little of his family history, the fact that the "from the" is not completed is fitting, in that he seems to be from nowhere and not of any people.

While the Axel Rex connection to Vander is evident not just in the shared name but also the aestheticism of the self and detached indifference to the world in general, the thread of foolish romance, an older man falling for a younger woman, and the formal and thematic importance of the cinema to Albert Albinus's story, it makes more sense to see Vander as encompassing both Rex and Albinus at different points. Indeed, the cinematic imagination of Vander and the critique of the cinematic gaze as reinforcing predominant ideas and ideology find a sympathetic companion in the critique implicit within Nabokov's narrative. Here, Albinus is, like so many Banville narrators (Vander included), prone to misreading the world. Vander misreads Cass Cleave's intentions and what she actually knows about him, and he also misreads the world in a philosophical sense, where the anti-humanism of his philosophical ideas is brought into conflict with his way of thinking and speaking about a "true self" and the

nagging sense of responsibility he feels in relation to Magda and Cass. Part of his misreading of the world lies in the cinematic images that filled his youthful mind and this is the same problem Albert Albinus suffers under. For instance there are several portents of what is to come for Albert in the opening pages of the book. He finds himself with some spare time wandering about the city. Ominously, he looks for something to occupy his time rather than sit and wait for his appointment because "the sight of other men with girl friends always upset him" (19). Though he is married with an eight-year-old daughter, a "secret foolish craving" for encounters with other women plays on his mind, Elisabeth, his wife, failing "to give him the thrill for which he had grown weary with longing" (15-16). He happens across a cinema where he catches sight of a poster advertising the feature; it shows "a man looking up at a window framing a child in a nightshirt" (19). In this moment he hesitates, but buys a ticket and seals his fate. The image of the child is a portent of the future his visit to this cinema on this evening leads to, the death of his daughter, who in a later scene stands at an open window looking down on Albert in front of their home, an episode that leads to her fatal illness (159-160).

Though Albert cannot be blamed for failing to read this sign, once he enters the theatre he fails to pay attention to the movie. Distracted by the usherette, he pays no attention to the finale of the film: "a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun. There was no interest whatever in watching happenings which he could not understand since he had not yet seen their beginning" (20). The irony of this only emerges in the final chapter of the book, where this scene plays out with Albert as the masked man with a gun and Margot, the usherette he has been distracted by, as the girl. Unable to forget the girl, he returns three days later, and

the image on screen - “A car was spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliff and abyss” (22) - takes on a symbolic import regarding Albert’s fate, and presages the scene of his blinding, a car accident as he speeds through mountainous countryside costing him his sight (236).

There is more than just a foreshadowing and fatalism at stake here. In using the cinema in this manner, Nabokov is also gesturing towards the question of imagination and cinema. As Julian W. Connolly puts it, “one can see in Nabokov’s handling of personality and plot an attempt to expose the vulgar conventionality of the protagonists’ aspirations by linking them with the characters and plots of popular film” (216). Much like Vander’s relationship to the images he has seen growing up on the movie screen, the cinema here is being presented as an Althusserian apparatus of sorts, not with a political intent, but to point to the aesthetic and imaginative limitations of the form. As Barbara Wyllie puts it: “It is film's powerful, seductive force that leads many of Nabokov's narrator-protagonists to emulate the processes of film-making in the depiction of their world” (2002 279). The processes of film-making produce subjects in Nabokov who see the world through the structures, clichés and plot devices of cinema.

Nabokov’s attitude to the cinema was notoriously ambivalent. Though he enjoyed watching countless movies throughout his life, his preferred pictures were slapstick comedies by the likes of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, and he often showed an ignorance and indifference towards Hollywood luminaries throughout his career (Wyllie 2005 215). For him, cinema was pure entertainment and “the grotesqueness of cinematic cliché” (Boyd 363) was as much a source of great, sneering mirth as anything else. Nabokov said of *Laughter in the Dark* that, in writing

it, he “wanted to write the entire book as if it were a film” (Appel 258). He was so successful in reflecting this world that Nabokov came to regard the novel as his “poorest” (Appel 262), the characters, in his view, “hopeless clichés”. Nonetheless he was happy to try to work in Hollywood because of its financial rewards. As the opening of *Laughter in the Dark* puts it, there can be both “profit and pleasure in the telling” (7) of stories, and Nabokov was only too happy to seek both in his work. In his ambivalent attitude towards the limits and conventions of cinema there is, in a limited form, the germ of a critique that echoes in Banville’s fiction and the clichéd misreading of images that defines his protagonists. The overlap between Banville and Nabokov’s texts reinforces a textual connection and artistic influence that bear further consideration in the future.

Both Alex Cleave and Axel Vander experience formative moments through the medium of film. In the dark space of the cinema stalls their youthful minds absorb both the images and underlying logic of the medium, which adds a cinematic veneer to their experience of the world and imbues their relationship to others with a narcissistic significance that is both damaging for those around them and, ultimately, the narrators themselves. For Cleave, the cinema’s influence on his way of seeing the world is relatively unself-conscious. His masturbatory sojourns to the picture house speak of a damaging, profound sadness that for decades he has managed to suppress, but which he can no longer avoid following his nervous collapse on stage. It is as though he has come to the end of his ability to suppress the difference of others and the world around him, and through the irrepressible otherness of his daughter, even following her death, she prompts him to break out from the entropic circularity of his narcissistic self-obsession and the cinematic mode through which he views the world. Similarly Axel

Vander benefits in this way from his relationship to Cass, albeit his is a consciousness much more aware of the contingency and limits of language and the cinematic basis on which much of the imagery that fills his mind and memories is derived from. Both men share more than just a connection to Cass, their minds seeking to control through their memories the stories and women around them, and ultimately they have to acknowledge the inevitable futility of these aims as well as their fundamental misunderstanding of the world because of their attempt at cinematic omnipotence. Their relationship to Nabokovian counterparts is based on the cinematic overlap between the texts and their central characters and how these men view women in relation to their own fantasies, and the Nabokovian contrast ultimately makes clear that the paucity of cinematic convention underlines the paucity of their imagination and how they view the world. Nabokov states in the 1956 dated postscript to *Lolita*, entitled "On a Book like Lolita", that the initial inspiration for the story came from the drawing of the bars of its cage by a captive monkey (*Lolita* 353). The bars of the cage these men paint are ones drawn from experiences that are based in the cinema of their youth and, in order to escape, if escape is even possible, they need to see beyond those constraints to the world outside.

Chapter 3

"You're Supposed to be Betraying Me":

Fidelity, Invention, and Intertextuality in Banville's Adaptations

While anyone with a passing interest in film has a sense of what is meant by the term adaptation, this assumption overlooks a complexity where sustained critical engagement with adaptive works is concerned. It is instinctively tempting to contrast the adaptation of a well-known novel to film with film versions of literary or non-literary texts that take inspiration from, but significantly differ from, their source material (taking some of the most obvious examples from the Hollywood canon, contrast Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* with his *Apocalypse Now*), but such a schema already raises and elides a number of issue regarding adapted works (the fact that the script of *The Godfather II* was written by the author of the novel, Mario Puzo, though there was no novel to base it upon immediately suggests itself here). Central in the history of such discussion is the question of the fidelity of a filmic adaptation to the literary text, though this common source of conjecture is frequently raised only to be dismissed as too simplistic to form the basis of a rigorous intellectual discipline where critical study of adaptation is concerned.

In times like these, where the geese of comic book, young adult fiction, and fantasy or sci-fi "franchise" adaptations continue to lay the golden eggs that finance the film industry, it is, at the very least, understandable from the point-of-view of movies-as-consumer-products that questions of faithfulness to an earlier text

preoccupy many film-goers. Such is the flagrant economic cynicism of some of these productions, the general audience's expectation to have their favourite text rendered "faithfully" on screen, notwithstanding the complexities and assumptions such a term implies or elides, is reasonable, and even seems justified, in light of the transaction producer and consumer are party to here.[14] However, critically speaking, it is important that questions of faithfulness to source material do not lead to an oversight of more fundamental issues regarding the seemingly privileged, Venn diagram-like relation between a "source" work and the filmed version of it. Thus, this and the subsequent chapter will endeavour to follow, in different ways and to varying degrees, the imperative enunciated by James Naremore (quoted by Albrecht-Crane) when he says "the study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication" (18), as the traditional understanding of adaptations as somehow special by virtue of their literary beginnings does not seem sustainable following the possibilities presented in poststructuralist ideas of decentred texts.

Any critical analysis has a duty to the specificity of that which it analyses, but a balance must be struck between considering the inevitable divergences and adaptive decision making in "transferring" a work from one form to another and the kind of assumptions that presuppose the published work is necessarily superior by definition to the filmed version.[15] While this is not the only way in which concerns with "fidelity" of adaptations come to dominate adaptation studies generally, it is one of the

[14] See recent adaptations of JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit,* a single novel split into three films, albeit incorporating parts of other Tolkien works, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, where the final novel in the series was split over two films, or the *Twilight* saga, where the final instalment was also split over two films, as examples of this cynicism.

[15] Continuing with *The Godfather* examples, it immediately suggests itself here, as the film is lauded by critics, (it places twenty-first on the current BFI Sight & Sound critics list of the "50 greatest films of all time"), while the novel, a family melodrama, would not place among many literary critics' greatest novels.

more commonplace and resilient assumptions around the reading of adapted films. Privileging the written text in the relationship between it and the filmed text reinforces the honorific prestige of the novel over film and sustains the circularity of fidelity readings, a tradition that reaches its pinnacle in the eyes of many adaptation scholars in George Bluestone's *Novels into Film.* Though Bluestone's ostensible objective is to get away from what John Hodgkins calls "superficial cataloguing of convergences and divergences [that] did little to illuminate the complexities of the adaptive process" (5), this merely leads him to reaffirm "the underlying assumption [of fidelity criticism] that literary precursors are inevitably superior to their cinematic adaptations" (5). Bluestone concludes that cinema and literature ought to "remain separate institutions, each achieving its best results by exploring unique and specific properties" (218).

This view reflects an older distinction drawn out in Lessing's *Laocoon*, which makes a distinction between temporal and spatial art. Painting is contrasted with poetry in this schema, with writing and reading seen as temporal forms where actions are depicted, and painting and sculpture are seen as spatial. W.J.T. Mitchell questions this dichotomy, seeing it as weak because the representation of bodies, the essence of painting, is simply easier or more convenient for painting, and the representation of action more difficult, rather than impossible (*Iconology* 101-102). This distinction lies at the heart of the Bluestone's preference for the classics over the filmed works based on the classics, and in undermining this split Mitchell's critique reflects the tendency in adaptation studies to question the focus on fidelity in adaptation studies.

Banville's comments on the alterations he and director Deborah Warner made to the plot and characters in the film version of *The Last September* suggest that Banville, to an extent, views his own adaptive work through the prism of what Robert

Stam calls “the ‘medium-specificity’ approach” to adaptation, which assumes that “every medium is inherently ‘good at’ certain things and ‘bad at’ others” (78). Banville justifies the substantial changes from Elizabeth Bowen’s novel in 2008’s *Arts Lives* documentary “Being John Banville”, for example, by saying that though these changes will have shocked those familiar with the novel, they were necessary because “on the screen you have to see” the figure of the IRA man, meaning that the IRA cannot remain on the fringes of the film’s story as they do in the novel. The medium of film has necessitated the changes it would seem. While this does not necessarily come into conflict with Mitchell, as Banville could be read as saying that it simply made it easier to adapt *The Last September* by concocting a love affair between Lois and the IRA man Peter, it does suggest a significant gap between what the different mediums can and cannot do.

However, as the following chapter will discuss in greater detail, his fiction, both recent and older, suggests that hard distinctions between artistic forms are more complicated. His works in general abound with intertextual connections, references, quotations from other writers and so on. It is well noted (see McMinn) that *Ghosts*, for example, draws upon Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* for its basic structure, or, at the lower end of the spectrum of potential sources of inspiration, Banville rips numerous plotlines from the front-pages of newspapers, and there are also the life stories of Kepler and Copernicus, which form the base for some of his earliest works. And this is a far from exhaustive list, the throwaway references to Yeats, Nabokov, Hofmannsthal, as well as artists from outside literary forms, accumulate throughtout his work. This is not to claim that these references amount to a dissolution or breakdown of distinctions between different forms, but it does gestures towards a

more intertextual understanding of textuality on Banville's part in general.

In this regard, Graham Allen has argued for a "repositioning of the analyst, from metacommentor on generic kinds of adaptational practice to interpreter of a shifting, unstable intertext" through the destabilisation of the adaptive relations between intertextual works, placing "both [analysis and adaptive text] now on an interpretive level with the 'source text', which we can no longer see as anything more than an intertext, and which itself exists in an interpretive relation to other texts" (34). Such a position points to the value of what Allen calls the "intertextual density" of cultural works because "the texts we tend to canonize are usually the most elaborately intertextually woven" (36).

However, such ideas still pose difficulties, not least because they appear to open a vast chasm beneath the traditional practices of textual scholarship and meaning. Thomas Leitch, aware of the anxiety such radical reading strategies may provoke in those less inclined to experiment in the field of adaptation studies, still encourages us to avoid the "near end of the slippery slope between adaptation and allusion, where categorical distinctions still seem seductively plausible" (quoted in Allen 33), as such tendencies towards delineation of a set or stable method by which adaptation studies might establish itself as a discipline run the risk of repeating the cycle. As Leitch shows in his "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Studies," this often means that adaptation studies remains a comparative technique whereby a privileged work, usually the literary text, is compared with its filmic progeny for similarities, variations, differences and these are "evaluated" by some metric that privileges the literary text over the cinematic. By exploring adaptation's possibilities through the intertextual relations between works, there is the potential to

move away from this circular practice.

In this chapter the focus will be on the way in which Banville and his collaborators on both *The Last September* and *Albert Nobbs* worked with the "source" work and invented new features for their purposes to tell their own stories for a different context to that of their source material. The following chapter will look at some of the possibilities opened up by the position articulated by Allen, by considering in-depth the cinematic aspects of the Benjamin Black writing persona and some of the works written under that name. These works are deeply indebted to the cinema on a number of levels and, though they are not adaptations in the conventional sense, the ranging intertextuality of the texts examined makes clear that they belong in any discussion about the boundaries between different forms.

Banville has written numerous scripts over the years for different forms. There are his radio adaptations and original scripts for radio dramatisations as well as stage versions of several Heinrich von Kleist plays, plus an adaptation of his novel *The Book of Evidence* to a one man show, and a stage production for children. However his most sustained interest regarding scripts has been for screens, both big and small. The focus here is on his feature-length cinematic work, but it is worth noting other endeavours in this area because they illustrate his enduring interest in film production as a process and a collaborative form. In addition to adaptations considered here, Banville is frequently cited as a collaborator with director, screenwriter and producer (and novelist) Neil Jordan. Jordan's 1999 adaptation of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* benefited from Banville's insight, though he goes uncredited in the movie's titles. Banville also has stated in the past that Jordan approached him first to write the script for *The Last September*, which was subsequently directed by Deborah Warner.

Further, there are reputedly many unfinished or unfilmed scripts in Banville's history, among them a work based on Sir Roger Casement's life, a screen version of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, and the original versions of his opening three volumes of the Quirke series written under the moniker Benjamin Black. Ironically, the novels he wrote based on his original TV scripts have subsequently been adapted into feature-length TV movies by the BBC and RTE, albeit scripted by three different screenwriters.

Banville's first successfully produced foray into film was an adaptation of his own novella, *The Newton Letter*, for Channel Four in the UK in the 1984. His most recent effort was also based on his own work, *The Sea*, and released into cinemas in 2013. In between he has been credited as sole screenplay author on the Deborah Warner directed 1999 adaptation of *The Last September* by Elizabeth Bowen, as well as playing a significant role in the collaboration around the screenplay based on George Moore's short story "The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs", with Glenn Close in the title role and producer's chair driving this work. The adaptation draws on a stage interpretation of the story which Close performed in during the early years of her theatrical career, and the circuitous development of the film is signalled in the opening credits, where Hungarian director Istvan Szabo is credited with the "story", but Banville, Close, and Gabriella Prekop are responsible for the "screenplay".

This chapter will discuss Banville in relation to this ambiguous relationship between the "original source" and the adaptation, examining the elements that are altered and those that are added to the films *The Last September* and *Albert Nobbs.* The intention is not to evaluate or judge these decisions but to discuss their structural and thematic significance and to consider how the inventions in Banville's screenplay

reflect back upon the source material. The preceding chapters have discussed in depth the relationship between Banville's male narrators and their worlds, a relationship that is often mediated by the women in their lives. Intriguingly, both Banville adaptations of works by other authors focus on female characters. In *The Last September* we see Lois Farquar begin to think of herself as an independent woman through her interaction with different forms of art. *Albert Nobbs* tells of a woman forced to act as a man in public to survive in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland. Both of these works provide an interesting contrast when compared against one another and against the third adaptation to be discussed, *The Sea*, which is Banville adapting his own novel. As such, it deals with one of Banville's male narrators where the women in his life act as mirrors for his narcissistic behaviour. Each of these works displays a reflexivity towards cinema as a form that merits consideration, and there is significant overlap, despite their different time periods and diverse characters, between the formal and thematic material. The primary focus here is on their status as adaptations, looking at the relationship between the source material and Banville's adaptation. A secondary concern, related to a thematic thread from the previous chapter, is how the content of Banville's adaptations are intentionally gendered as much as the works of Banville the novelist.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the relationship between a male narrator and the world he fails to understand is a preoccupation of Banville's novel-writing, where women act as a mirror for his comically narcissistic central characters. These film adaptations exploit the source material themes relating to women, and amplify them through formal experimentation and the content of the source material. *The Last September*, Elizabeth Bowen's novel about the last days of a Big House in

southern Ireland prior to British withdrawal, focuses on Lois Farquar who has just finished school and is, in the words of her friend Marda Norton, a "woman so determined to love well, so anxious to love soon"(82). Yet, as her story unfolds, she begins to see the possibilities beyond a world where a woman's main aim in life is to find a husband. *Albert Nobbs'* complex production history means that Banville's "ownership" of the screenplay is more diluted, but nonetheless merits some consideration because it was released during the late period this study is centred upon. It also shows his evident interest in the industry and Hollywood by virtue of his working with Glenn Close on the script, and shares in related themes to *The Last September* and his wider work. Finally, *The Sea* provides an opportunity to explore the Banvillian male narrator identity referenced above in a cinematic setting and how the cinema relates to this persona and the wider themes of Banville's work. The central character here, Max Morden, both idealises and mutilates the women in his life, and the cinema is itself a significant place in this way of relating to the world.

Lois Through the Looking Glass: Banville's *The Last September*

The Last September, Elizabeth Bowen's elegiac novel of dislocation and decay, draws on the setting of her childhood on a rural Anglo-Irish estate in north county Cork before the granting of independence for the Irish Free State. It mixes acute social observation, political commentary, and a coming-of-age story with something of a lament for a lost way of life. Born in 1899, Bowen was raised on an estate, Bowenscourt near Kildorrery in county Cork, similar to the fictional Danielstown of the novel, and the story she tells of Lois Farquar, niece of Richard Naylor, the heir of Danielstown's big house, is one that resonates with her own story

as an Irish emigrant to Britain. Published in 1929 but set in 1920, Lois's parents are absent, her rarely mentioned father a figurative ghost in her past, and her mother closer to a literal ghost, having died some years previously and she haunts Lois's story throughout, as different people refer to her absence and her sad life.

Her mother's life provides both a contrast and a possible prognostication of Lois's future. Lois has recently left school and is spending the summer on the estate close to a British army barracks. The presence of the troops and their families provide entertainment and company for this Anglo-Irish outpost of the Big House estate, while also representing many uncomfortable and unacknowledged truths about the past, present, and future for Ireland and the people of Danielstown. Released in 1999, the John Banville scripted film version of Bowen's novel takes a significant amount of licence with the source material, reordering the events of Lois's final summer of innocence, and this consequently reorders the revises and updates the significance of Bowen's original tale for a contemporary audience.

The following will benefit from a reading of the divergences between the two versions of *The Last September* because the plot and character developments are so substantial between the two works. However, there are also significant inventions within the screenplay that amount to more than just rearranging or rewriting Bowen's novel. Jill Franks, in her reading of *The Last September* adaptation, invokes Roland Barthes' term "cardinal functions" when discussing the alterations made to the substantial story line of the novel for filming (123). Cardinal functions "open up alternatives of consequence to the development of the story", and the intention here is to account for the formal purpose and thematic weight of these adjustments. Any noted changes are referenced because of their function in the plot, their relationship to

the process of transposition to a different medium, or their thematic or symbolic import. They are not intended as lamentations, but rather as opportunities by which a text some seventy years old at the time of adapting is revivified for an audience in a different time and place. They also serve to emphasise the story of growth Banville and director Deborah Warner wish to tell regarding Lois, and they bear a political significance as well, as Shannon Wells-Lassagne has outlined in her reading of Banville's adaptation.

While there are minor alterations evident from the start, the substantial differences emerge in the second half of the film. Most significantly, the story of Lois changes from one of nascent desire and romantic flirtations with British soldiers, in particular Gerald Colthurst, to a story incorporating a more active and engaged affair with the IRA man Peter Connolly. Bowen's novel features the IRA, but they are an amorphous force, lurking around the estate and wider countryside, never given much more than a line of dialogue or only granted a personality through the talk of others in and around Danielstown. Such a significant divergence alters the narrative weight of the film, meaning that Lois's story becomes even more prominent in the film version than the novel at the expense of more impressionistic aspects of the story. The adaptation of the work increases Lois's story, repositions her significance within the bounds of Danielstown and brings to the fore the intersection of sex and politics that is present in Bowen's novel, albeit loitering like the IRA rebels around the borders of the estate, rarely emerging from the undergrowth.

The novel is a story of false starts, of muddles and misunderstanding as Lois struggles with questions about who she is, who she wants to be, and how she handles the expectations of her family regarding her future. Her conflicted dalliance with the

English sergeant Gerald Colthurst (his surname is Lesworth in the Bowen's novel, an unmistakable statement about his social standing in the eyes of some characters on the Danielstown estate) ends with his death, but not as melodramatically as depicted in the film. Gerald is victim of a rebel ambush away from the estate in the novel, but in the film Peter Connolly, Lois's fugitive lover created by Banville, shoots Gerald as he searches for Lois in the abandoned mill. Gerald's death is heavily symbolic in both versions, but this change again seems like another instance of Banville feeling the need to "show the IRA man", as it accentuates the tragic symbolism of Gerald's death; the English soldier dies pursuing the Anglo-Irish Lois, and at the hands of her Irish rebel lover. This provides a resounding and dramatic moment of closure for the film, where Gerald's death off-stage at the hands of unidentified rebels might lack "cinematically".

Following Gerald's death, Lois decides to leave the estate with Marda Norton, moving to London to see more of the world rather than limiting herself to Irish horizons. Jill Franks notes the significance of diverting from the novel here:

> In the novel, Lois is sent to live with a family in France so that her aunt can control and protect her. In the film, she accompanies her friend Marda on Marda's honeymoon, hoping to have romantic adventures, and embracing the legacy of her absent father, a so-called "bounder." Banville and Warner embolden Lois, and give her the willpower and independence more characteristic of a late twentieth-century heroine than of a submissive, convention-bound, turn-of-the-twentieth-century female role. (124)

Marda's role is another substantial alteration. In the novel she departs after she and Lois encounter an IRA man in an abandoned mill on the estate, her disruptive

presence a source of frustration for Lady Naylor, whereas in the film she stays until the end, acting as a friend and confidante for Lois as her last summer of innocence comes to a tragic end. Marda's back story is also altered, where Hugo Montmorency, another guest at Danielstown, pursues her affections despite being married and accompanied by his wife on the estate. In the novel, Hugo is similarly keen on Marda, but she shows no interest in him, laughing and joking with Lois about his behaviour. In the film, Hugo and Marda had once been romantically involved, but events had intervened, and Marda feels much more conflicted about his advances, given that she has become engaged to a wealthy stockbroker in London. The interposition of a previous romance between these two functions, on one level, as a plot device, where, rather than Marda and Lois discovering the IRA man hiding out in the mill, it is just Lois who finds him as Marda has stayed outside with Hugo, discussing their past and possible futures. Marda's absence from the mill means she is unaware of the fugitive in their midst, where she suffers a cut due to a stray bullet from the IRA man's gun in the novel. Her absence thus allows Lois to begin her secret tryst with the hiding paramilitary Peter Connolly. On another level, the failed relationship between Hugo and Marda acts as a counterpoint to the youthful, dangerous, illicit frolics of Lois with Peter, while also maintaining Marda's role as a decisive, strong woman, whose own proposed marriage is one she enters under no illusions and having experienced the world.

The significance of Marda, ten years older than Lois, is that she provides friendship and something of an alternative, contemporary role model for Lois as she muddles her way through a summer where she is expected to make important decisions about her future. Her aunt, Lady Myra Naylor, spends much of her time

trying to talk Lois into various artistic pursuits as well as interfering in her relationship with Gerald because, in her view, he is not of the appropriate class or social standing for Lois to be involved with seriously. Just as with Gerald, however, Lois is bordering on ambivalent about her future, her aim at the start of the story seemingly being to will herself to fall in love with some man, almost any man, around Danielstown before the summer is over. Marda's visit provides something of a contrast to this innocent, naive desire, as well as the ideas and behaviour of Lady Naylor, because she is single, has had several engagements and partners, is cosmopolitan and an artist. If Lois is looking for an alternative to being a dutiful wife, Marda provides that.

Indeed, Marda at times seems to provide something more than that. There are hints of an embryonic attraction on Lois's part to the older woman. Marda's open personality and generally ambivalent attitude towards men is suggestive of a gender ambiguity and Lois's development of an interest in Marda as the story proceeds shows that she has recognised something of herself in the guest. As they leave Danielstown, Lois rests her head on Marda's shoulder, an innocent gesture but one that can be read as gesturing towards the more romantic overtones of their relationship.

Hugo is also a source of romantic interest for Lois for a while. The imminent arrival of Hugo and his wife at the beginning of the novel and film is a cause for great excitement for Lois, who runs around the house when their car pulls into the drive, such is her eagerness to see him. In Bowen's novel it is more explicitly averted to that Lois has some sort of crush tending towards serious designs on Hugo prior to and during his stay on the estate. These gestures are rendered all the more striking because of the absence of her father and the knowledge that Hugo once had been romantically involved with her now deceased mother. These not-quite-incestuous overtones are

downplayed in Banville's script, where, instead, it is Marda who is more receptive to Hugo's questionable charm.

These gestures towards possible sexual relationships are trumped, however, by the meeting in the mill with Peter Connolly. While Marda and Hugo remain outside of the dilapidated mill, resuming the flirtation Hugo had began the previous night, Lois wanders into the rundown building. Inside she spies Peter Connolly asleep. He wakes and she flees back to the house, Marda remarking "you look as though you've seen a ghost" as she passes. And in a sense she has. Peter and Lois were childhood friends, Lois is still close to his family, and in the film Peter's sister, Livvy Connolly, is presented as Lois's best friend. This has the effect of standing in significant contrast with the novel, where the sense around Danielstown is of a creeping isolation. In the novel, it is not so much that there is hostility or antagonism between the residents of the estate and those living in the surrounding areas, there is just very little contact between them. This world is ending because the social outlets for those on the Danielstown estate are largely drawn from British soldiers and their families, who are solely there to protect Britain's rapidly decreasing interest in Ireland, and various refugee-like figures such as the Montmorencys.

It is notable that there are only two real points in the novel where the world of the Anglo-Irish Naylors and their guests is interrupted by the wider Irish lower-class. Peter Connolly is presaged in the novel's pages by Peter Connor, the son of a local Roman Catholic family whose farm is near Danielstown, and who are nonetheless on friendly terms with Lois, her uncle and aunt. Peter is on the run from the British authorities, suspected of an ambush in Co. Clare, but this does not cause tension between the Naylors and Connors when they meet. Lois visits the Connors's farm

with Hugo Montmorency as they return from the nearby town in their horse trap. Michael Connor, the father of Peter, is tending to his animals and they stop to chat. Lois inquires about his grandchildren and then his daughter-in-law, and there is no awkwardness as Michael refers to her being:

> desthroyed with it all and disheartened. Indeed, miss, she is in great distress; and she always looking and starting and craning up the boreen. It is torn in herself she is; distracted for Peter and dhreading he'll come. It would dishearten yours to be with her daily and nightly the way she is, the poor woman. [16] (65)

He goes on to complain of the soldiers too:

> And the military from Clonmore have the hearts torn out of us nightly, and we stretched for sleep, chasing and charging about in the lorries they have. Sure you cannot go a step above in the mountains without them ones lepping out from your feet like rabbits. Isn't it the great pity they didn't finish their German war once they had it started? (65)

Lois then directly asks "And no news of Peter?" Michael says no, thanks them for their visit, and Lois and Hugo resume their trip home. To underline the sympathetic impression Lois has of the Connors, she tells Hugo on the way home of Peter's travails:

> He could be shot at sight. He is wanted over an ambush in County Clare, they got him once but he escaped again—I was so glad. I shouldn't wonder if he was up the boreen at the moment. I know he is home, for Clancey saw him

[16] The idiosyncratic spellings here are (presumably) Bowen's attempt to render the west Cork accent of the tenants.

> three days ago. But don't speak of it—one cannot be too careful. Poor Mrs. Peter must be in a dreadful state, wherever he is. (66)

Lois's sympathy is with "Mrs. Peter", and she doesn't mind if Michael lied to her just then about Peter's whereabouts; she's even glad he escaped from the army in Clare. Emphasising her naivety, she then wonders out loud, childishly, whether Gerald would've shot Peter if he'd been with her instead of Hugo and Peter had come wandering down the "boreen". Hugo stodgily impedes on her fantasy, "Peter might have shot Gerald." "Oh no, not when he was with me. Besides," she replies, adding with an all too ironic portent "Gerald is so matter-of-fact. Nothing could make him into a tragedy" (66).

The Connors briefly reappear, when Peter is captured by Gerald, who announces the news to the Naylors, expecting a very different reaction to the one he receives:

> "I'm sorry to hear that," said Sir Richard, flushing severely. "His mother is dying. However, I suppose you must do your duty. We must remember to send up now and inquire for Mrs. Michael Connor. We'll send some grapes. The poor woman—it seems too bad." He went off, sighing, into the library. Gerald was horrified. His duty, so bright and abstract, had come suddenly under the shadowy claw of the personal. "I had no idea," he exclaimed to Laurence, "these people were friends of yours." (91-92)

The Connors underline the conflicted and confused allegiances that rent the Danielstown world asunder, just as in Banville's screenplay the world of the Anglo-Irish Naylors is portrayed as one with many shades of grey. The "claw of the

personal", as Bowen puts it, can be felt in many of the confusions of Banville's script, yet there is a qualitative difference in how this is done. The Connolly family appears briefly, in the form of Peter's father, a shopkeeper, when Lois goes to buy supplies for Peter Connolly, who remains holed up in the mill. There is a noticeable unease in this episode, and the transaction only takes place when Livvy, Peter's sister and Lois's best friend, lets her father know that Lois can be trusted. Yet the positioning of Livvy as best friend, Peter as a childhood friend and lover, and the comedy of manners that punctuates the script expand the connections between the Protestant Naylors and Catholic community around them beyond those of Bowen's novel. Bowen's novel features only two other references to Catholics, those being Mrs. Fogarty, an Anglophile who hosts all the soldiers in the garrison for tea, decorating her rooms with pictures of the soldiers and Union Jack cushions, and the rather suggestive "D.I.'s niece" (143) who attends the final dance with the soldiers and is presented as wild girl, dancing with all the soldiers and losing herself in her reveries. This character is not even given a name, existing purely as a trickster-like, devilish, unstable presence among the soldiers, her confidence and seemingly wanton behaviour standing in contrast to the more reserved army wives and unmarried Anglo-Irish women in attendance.

This sense of reserve is also absent in Banville's Lois, who, over a series of meetings with Peter Connolly in the old mill, is attracted to him with an intensity that she never feels for Gerald. Marda notes at one stage how Lois is "tribal" in her loyalties, this being presented as very Irish, and causing confusion to Gerald. In the novel, it is Marda and Lois who see the figure of a rebel in the mill as Hugo, rather pathetically, grumbles outside, upset at his impotence where both Lois and Marda are

concerned. Hugo's inability to woo Marda is ironically contrasted with the IRA man who fails to control his weapon, "short-looking" and "scarcely bigger than a button" (124) though it may be, making Marda and Lois feel "framed, rather conscious, as though confronting a camera" (125), and shooting at the women, causing a small cut to Marda's hand with the errant bullet. This incident is especially interesting because readers are not "in" the mill when Marda is injured, but instead outside with Hugo. Banville takes this meeting between Marda, Lois and the unnamed IRA man, using the suggestive imagery and tone of Bowen's scene to a much fuller overtly sexual and politicised extent.

During one of their later meetings, Peter and Lois are about to make love when they hear Gerald and his colleague Daventry approaching the mill. Richard Naylor, through the staff on the estate, has discovered Peter's whereabouts and tipped off the British soldiers. In the panic that follows Lois demands that Peter injure her: "I'll say you held me hostage, you'll have to wound me or they won't believe me". Marda's wound is transferred to Lois. The wound can be read as symbolising Lois losing her virginity, becoming a woman, growing up and so on. The liaison with Peter also speaks, at a politically symbolic level, of the sympathies of the Anglo-Irish, as represented by Lois, and that their sympathy for the rebels, for their fellow Irish countrymen and women, is perhaps misguided because of the underlying violence and threat of the rebellious Irish.

However, it is also worth noting that Lois, prior to their interrupted embrace, asks if Peter killed a "Black and Tan" whose death is depicted in an earlier scene. Peter tells her he did, and the confession doesn't disturb or shock Lois. Rather she is intrigued, asking what it feels like, before they eventually kiss and stumble to the

floor. The threat of the rebels as a political force is also foreshadowed in this encounter where Peter Connolly is aggressive in his attempt to have sex with Lois, the attempted rape interrupted by Gerald and his colleague Daventry. The symbolism of Lois's "rescue" by the British soldiers from the rapacious Irish rebel is noteworthy on a political level, but this glimpse of the darker side of her erstwhile neighbour does not dissuade her from visiting Peter one last time as the film moves towards its tragic conclusion.

The love affair between the Anglo-Irish, Protestant Lois and "native", Catholic Peter signals the transition of Lois from girl to woman, but also marks the transition that is happening in Ireland and change in the relationship between Britain and Ireland. These personal and political changes are foregrounded by a novel invention in Banville's script, Lois's possession in several scenes of a telescope through which she views the comings and goings at Danielstown much like we, the audience, see them, as an anachronism, as being marked by a quaintness, a nostalgic air and a faintly ridiculous comedic aspect in light of the roiling revolutionary forces at play just beyond the boundaries of their estate. The telescope has a double function, allowing Lois to see how her present is fast becoming the past, and thus emphasising her sense of independence and transition from passive to active subject in her own story.

The nostalgic aspect of the telescope is signalled by Lois's first use of it, where she watches from an upstairs room in the house as preparations for one of the Naylor's tennis parties begin out on the lawns. She puts the telescope to her eye and we cut to Lois's eye-view, a black circular border added to the pictures showing where her vision focuses. Immediately the world she is viewing is bathed in a sepia-like yellow, draining the colour from the grass, the clothes and all the figures she views busying

themselves outside. This discolouration of the shots through the telescope is intended to render these visions like pictures from early film and photography. The first sight Lois sees through the glass is a servant woman, likely Mrs. O'Brien, one of the Catholic staff, an apron tied around her waist, a tray of food in her hands as she moves out to the tent where the guests will be hosted. Not only is the colour sucked from these images, but there is also a disrupted, staccato rhythm to the view through the spyglass, the servant walking jumpily along as she works.

The antiquated feeling is further amplified by the subsequent shots through the glass in this sequence. After the servant we see some guests arriving by horse and cart, looking absurdly over-dressed to a modern eye in their tennis whites, rackets in hand, the women in ankle length skirts and men wearing striped jackets as the horse and his attendant stand in the background. Next, Lois focuses on some children playing on the tennis court, and again, they're overdressed and look so antiquated in their long skirts, high stockings, heavy jackets and caps. That there is such an old-fashioned, nostalgic air to these events happening yards in front of her serves to underline the point that Lois is really looking into the past through the spyglass. To emphasise the contrast further, there is a cut as Lois looks out at the children, where we are back in the room watching over Lois's shoulder as the children run across the grass, and the colour is not drained out of this shot, there is no change of tempo in the footage, and the world seems much more contemporary and real.

A car pulls up with more guests, but, while this car would have been a new, exciting vision of the future at the time, its style to contemporary eyes, again, speaks of a bygone age. The whole sequence plays like black-and-white camera footage, the sudden moves of the telescope notwithstanding. The final shot through the telescope is

of a man and a woman, perched on a bike, in the far off distance meeting on the edge of surrounding woodland. In the subsequent scene we realise the woman is Livvy Connolly, Lois's Catholic friend, and we can surmise that the man, dressed in long, grey coat is an associate of her brother, who is on the run from the army. Lois's interest is piqued immediately by this spying of an illicit meeting given Peter's outlaw status, her telescope zooming in to focus on the pair. The telescope is then inverted, her eye framed by a circular darkness and widening in her effort to make out the mysterious figure, before lowering, presumably because of a moment of recognition, that it is Livvy and one of the rebels, the circle of the telescope finally lingering on her apprehensive lips. In this moment Lois moves from being a passive girl to an active woman. The shot of her eye looking through the telescope tells us that she is moving from being a woman that is looked at to a person who can look at the world and act within it. However, as Franks notes, this is an ambiguous move, because the telescope not only stands as a symbol of the place and past from which Lois is gradually becoming detached, but also becomes a symbol of "her dangerous involvement with the world of adult sexuality" (130).

Lois's intrigue leads her to wander off during the party, telescope in hand, toward where she saw Livvy and the grey-coated man. She climbs a ruin and begins to spy on the party again. The images are, again, yellowed, a vision of the past as a contemporary happening. Marda stumbles about the tennis court, seemingly confused by the party, looking out of place and at a loss what to do, while Lawrence plays tennis. Suddenly she hears someone near her high perch. She explores further and spots three men beneath her, one seemingly the man she'd seen in the grey coat and another is Peter Connolly, Livvy's brother. She whispers "Peter" as the other two men

leave, but he does not hear her and disappears.

As such, the telescope and Peter the rebel are inextricably linked. The telescope automatically ages the Anglo-Irish scenes and party, making them look antiquated and old-fashioned already, the images viewed "through" the lens-like border on camera are like already weathered, dog-eared photographs of a bygone age or some absurdly fast footage from the very earliest days of film technology. It also helps Lois to see both her own personal future and gives an insight into the future facing Ireland in the shape of the rebels and the political turmoil facing her family and the Anglo-Irish generally, though she does not read it as such yet.

The personal significance of this object to Lois story is evident in the reappearance of the telescope throughout her liaisons with Peter Connolly. Each time she visits him she brings the spyglass with her, presumably using it as an excuse to disappear into the surrounding countryside should anyone ask where she is going. It is particularly prominent in the scene where she and Peter kiss for the first time. Peter asks her, in seeming frustration, why she is always staring at him; "what are you looking for?" The stress placed on Lois's looking at Peter in this scene is suggestive given the introduction of the telescope as a signifier of both the rapidly fading reality of the present, and suggests a growing sense of subjectivity in Lois's development as a young, independent, emotionally strong woman capable of making choices for herself and determining her own future rather than having such decisions made for her.

Primarily the telescope is intriguing because it is, at the very least, playing with any simple reading of the camera as gendered masculine. Without wishing to over interpret the symbolism of the telescope, it is, in Freudian terms, a phallic object, symbolising Lois's grasping of her identity and her ability to make choices for herself.

Given the effects added to the shots “through the lens” of the telescope, it is justifiable to read the telescope as synonymous with photography and, more pertinently here, the movie camera. It functions as a tool by which she comes to realise her own future lies away from the soldiers and rebels of rural Ireland, not as a tool of male dominance. Through the telescope we see why Lois is no longer the “girl” who Marda describes as being “determined to fall in love”. Through the camera-like telescope, Lois sees that she has other possibilities to the life planned for her by Lady Naylor in Ireland.

The role of the telescope as a tool by which Lois comes to realise her future, or at least recognise the potential future she might live beyond the constraints and conventions of the Anglo-Irish estate, finds an interesting counter point in a scene shortly after Lois has discovered Peter in the mill. Here, an older art form is used to explore Lois’s developing psyche. A painting in the Naylor’s house seems to absorb, for a brief moment, Lois’s face, as though she were the subject of the portrait. In this scene, Gerald initially takes Lois by surprise with a kiss and she is shocked at how sudden and forthright he is. She begins to distance herself from him, asking “how do you know I’m not in love with a married man?” slyly referencing her crush on Hugo. Gerald laughs off these protests, telling her how he thought about her the previous night as the soldiers patrolled the countryside.

Lois, listening to his confession, is suddenly distracted by her reflection in the dark sheen of a painting on the wall. The camera position during this moment of distraction is notable because it projects Lois “into” the portrait. Lois’s reflection is staring directly into the camera through her “appearance” in the painting. The portrait itself is of a curly-haired, red-lipped woman, presumably either an ancestor of the Naylors or former resident of Danielstown. Either way, or neither way, she is, just by

virtue of having her portrait painted and hung in this house at this time, symbolic of an ascendency class, and of the life lived by women of this class throughout history.

Lois is suddenly absorbed in the painting in two, related senses; for the viewing audience it looks as though she is in the painting, but she also seems to momentarily lose herself in the painting, her mind drifting from Gerald and her eyes transfixed by her reflection in the darkness. The oddity of this moment, emphasised by the ethereal, otherworldly music that accompanies it, is signalled visually by the lingering camera and angle of shot, and says a great deal both about the potential future facing her if she wills herself to marry at this point in her life. It is not surprising that this moment coincides with Gerald confessing his feelings to her and his hopes for their future together. The absorption into the painting is a moment where she considers the possibility of playing the role of the lady she is expected to become, as this image from the past suggests she could be another woman whose portrait would probably hang on some wall in decades or centuries time, but whose existence would have been in all likelihood a repetition of so many women's lives from the past, taken for granted and excised from history. John Berger, in his discussion of painting and women in *Ways of Seeing*, enunciates a commonplace in artistic composition that reflects on a wider societal and historical view. Put crudely, it states that "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (47). Lois' projection into the painting here is an opportunity for her to see herself in these terms, to understand the historical and cultural forces that could shape here future, and to act self-consciously in light of these.

That Lois glimpses this vision of a future world in the painting is not only suggested by the content and portrait-like composition of the shot, nor indeed the glazed look on her face as Gerald talks and she contemplates her reflection, but also because of how she reacts to Gerald once her temporary trance is broken. Her face breaks into a curiously affected smile, seeming to suggest a worldly sophistication beyond her twenty years, and the tone of her voice similarly suggests that she is performing an exaggerated version of the woman she is supposed to be, of the kind of woman she appears side by side with in the portrait. “Gerald, darling...” she says elliptically as he tells her how he thought of her all night as his company toured the mountains looking for rebels, an excessively dreamy, distracted smile slowly drifting from her face. “Did you have breakfast even?” she asks, more composed now, staring directly into the portrait, as if she were testing out this possible persona, this look, this mode of being a woman who sits for portraits and whose picture hangs on walls of stately homes.

The gong is struck announcing that their meal is ready, and this breaks the spell of the portrait, but Gerald is now entranced by the sight of Lois and what she has said. Lois, however, has discarded her temporary role as the portrayed woman, refusing to acknowledge that she called him “darling”, this word having grabbed Gerald’s attention. Lois changes the subject, observing that Gerald is “soaking wet” from the rain and smells “like a dog” because of it, a telling simile, given that Gerald, rather puppy-like in his naive pursuit of Lois then declares “I’d die for you”. His passionate declaration seems to make no impression on Lois, who, as though challenging Gerald, asks him “what did I say? Say it.” “Darling”, he replies, and they are interrupted by Lady Naylor.

This sequence is germane territory for interpretation from several angles. What we can say for certain is that it marks a crucial point in Lois and Gerald's relationship. From this point on Lois's interest in the young officer cools significantly, transferring to Peter Connolly whose presence in the mill she discovered in the previous scene. As such we can interpret the portrait as a mirror for Lois, in which she sees both her past, as in the history of her family, the history of the Anglo-Irish ascendency class, and specifically the women of this history, and, potentially, her future, the kind of woman she could (or is expected) to become. What is more ambiguous is Gerald's relationship to this self-image and moment of seeming insight on Lois's part. Certainly it can be read that her becoming "the portrayed woman", a passive role, is a performance for Gerald's consumption, but he is far from a male upper class equivalent.

Gerald's affection for Lois becomes a bigger issue for Lady Naylor than it seems to be for her niece as the plot develops. At a political level, his declaration that he would die for Lois is sadly prophetic, in that this young, propertyless man from humble origins in Surrey, a place Lady Naylor gasps at the mention of, does give up his life for the sake of Lois and her class, except it is not in some duel or moment of passion as his romantic tone would suggest, but rather it is in his role as a soldier pursuing the rebel menace that is supposedly threatening the Naylors *et al*. On one level, the significance of the portrait scene could be read as Lois's awakening to the distance in class, wealth, expectations, between herself and her crush Gerald. And it is no contradiction to see this awakening as also having a psychological element, in that a young woman of Lois's background, much like Marda before her, is in the position to make such a choice, whereas a figure like Gerald, while he is a man and has many

opportunities available to him because of this, is also not able to follow any and every possible avenue because of his class, his background, his "people".

Saying all this, the class dimension to Gerald's story seems to be one aspect of the wider dynamic between the English and the Anglo-Irish. Lois's moment in the portrait seems to be more one of dislocation, where she does not identify with the portrait, but rather tries out this perspective only to move on. As such, it is also worth noting that, by the end of the movie, she also discards the other object of creative significance, the telescope, which has witnessed her love-making with Peter Connolly and recorded her spying across the estate. She gives this away to her cousin Lawrence as a parting gift when she moves with Marda to London. The vision it provided has helped Lois see her future, and in discarding it she shows she has moved on to the next stage of her life, capable of making her own way in the world and not requiring this vision of the past any more. The interposition of these objects, the telescope and the painting, by Banville and Warner into Bowen's story serves to expand the story of Lois's development as a subject that, while important to and present in the novel, is not the central focus in the way the film production chooses to make it.

Albert Nobbs' Logic of Appearances

Albert Nobbs provides an interesting contrast with Lois Farquar. Albert tries to forge an identity for herself but by very different means and for very different reasons. [17] Lois embraces the inevitable risks and dangers that her body and her sexuality imply, but Albert's relationship to her physical self is a source of deep fear, pain, and

[17] It is worth stating that the pronouns used here correspond to the biological identities of Albert and Hubert because they "choose" to live as men due to violence, economics, and the threat of exposure rather than because they actually wish to be men.

loneliness. Rather than appropriating objects that connote control and then discarding them, as Lois does with the telescope and the painting, putting these symbolic tools of control over the world to her own use in her story of psychological and sexual growth, Albert attempts to internalise and reproduce a logic of appearances that the addition of both the telescope and painting in Lois's story serve to undermine. Through her mimicry of masculinity and suppression of her body, she denies the person she could have been.

This is not because she is a masochist. Albert pretends to be a man to survive and escape the miserable existence of a homeless orphan following a brutal assault at a young age. The script is based on a George Moore short story and draws upon a stage interpretation of the story by French playwright Simone Benmussa, though this goes unacknowledged in the titles.[18] Banville's credit is further diluted by the film's circuitous production history. Discussing the convoluted production in 2013 he explains his role:

> The script needed to be given an Irish accent, and the director Stephen Frears had suggested to [the producer and lead actress Glenn] Close that I was the one she should ask to do the job [...] She and I, along with a producer and director, spent a weekend in Paris hammering away at the script, and in the following months Close and I did a radical rewriting of it. ("John Banville: The Movies and Me")

He is credited as a screenwriter for the film and featured prominently in the publicity before production and when the film was released. Again, there are

[18] There are numerous divergences and similarities between the stage and other versions of the text. Moore's "voiceover" framing, for instance, opens the play, and his title, *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs*, is retained, but these are altered in the film. For the sake of brevity and the focus on cinema here, the novel and film are of primary interest here.

significant divergences between the short story of Moore and the production released for the screen, but the intent here is not to ascribe value to these decisions, rather to consider their purpose and effect on the texts presented and the intertextual import of these across Banville's work, both in the cinema and beyond. In this instance the inventions and additions of Banville *et al* are welcome because George Moore's text is so slight as to demand embellishment during the adaptation process.

For example, in the screen version we get a fuller picture of the surrounding world of Albert Nobbs. Moore's text is framed as a conversation between Moore and a *seanachai,* Alec Trusselby, and was originally published as part of Moore's *A Story-Teller's Holiday*, published in 1918. The whole text takes the form of regular meetings between Moore and Trusselby during which they exchange stories. The story was subsequently reworked and published as part of a Moore short story collection, *Celibate Lives*, published in 1927. It is a short and impressionistic piece, Moore in the story recalling his childhood stays at the hotel on Dawson Street in the heart of 1860s Dublin, where he remembers the figure of Albert Nobbs, who used to serve his family throughout their extended stays in the capital.

Moore's memories as set out here provide much of the context upon which the movie draws for its opening scenes. "Now that I come to think of it, I can see Morrison's as clearly almost as I do Moore Hall," (38) he says as he begins to describe the grandeur of Morrison's, and that it seems as vivid in his memory as his childhood home shows how much time the various guests spend in the hotel throughout the movie. They are more like tenants than hotel guests, a small boy and his sister chirruping "hello Nobbs" as they pass him by in the corridor in an early scene, a gesture that shows how familiar they are with the hotel staff, and points towards

Moore himself and the framing narrator that is dispensed with in the adaptation. Further scenes show the intimate familiarity of staff with their regular guests. Nobbs attends to a room one morning while its guests, a viscount and his friend, swig from bottles of wine and loudly discuss whether they should “wake the girls” in the adjoining room as they strut around naked, a bottle placed suggestively in shot to cover an apparent erection. Such is the casual ease of these wealthy patrons that they do not even look at or acknowledge Nobbs’ presence in the room.

This scene also doubles as an ironic contrast with Albert’s own desperately guarded privacy. Albert’s life prior to the visit of Hubert Page is one of sad, quiet loneliness. This is a necessity rather than a choice given the desperate poverty and scandal she would risk were she to reveal the truth of her gender. It is tempting to describe this as her true identity here, but, as Albert’s story emerges, it is clear that both Banville’s script and Moore’s story cast doubts on this sense of self-identity. Further gestures towards the sexuality and overflowing passion beneath the staid, austere world of the hotel is injected by Banville through the depiction of a barely concealed affair between Dr Halloran, a resident, and Mary, one of the servants in the kitchen. They are shown in numerous scenes flirting, obliquely referring to their relationship, and conducting an affair that could lead to Mary’s dismissal from the staff and consequent homelessness.

Though this relationship is played for laughs, contrasting starkly with the sombre, suffocating tone of Albert’s story, it points to the economic consequences of gender and sexuality that animate many of the characters and relationships throughout the story. Where Dr Halloran will still be a doctor, the woman in the relationship, the servant, risks a much more uncertain fate. This is also echoed in the other affair

depicted, between servant girl Helen and a new addition to the staff, Joe Mackins. He eventually abandons Helen in the script, leaving her with their child and also out of work as the hotel will not allow Helen to raise a child on the premises. And, of course, the viscount and his aristocratic friends who stay in the hotel are shown to enjoy bacchanalian revelries, but they can afford to, as their economic and gender advantages allow them to live with such freedom. In this way Banville's screenplay amplifies the themes that define a number of texts in Moore's oeuvre focusing on the role and rights of women in nineteenth-century British and Irish life.

Given the kind of risks sex in this world involves for a person of her status, Albert's embrace of asexuality is understandable to an extent. It is not, however, the primary or sole motivation for her repressed sexuality and hidden gender. We learn of the assault she suffered in her youth, which accounts for Albert opening the story as an isolated figure, completely focused on saving money in order to open her own shop and escape the life of the hotel in which she works and lives. We see her in the opening scenes counting out the coins she has collected in tips that night, logging them in a notebook, and stashing them under the floorboards in her room. This follows a suggestion from another of the servants that he and Albert share a "nightcap", but Albert bids him a stern good night. Her focused asceticism is broken by the arrival of a painter, Hubert Page, who Albert is forced to share her quarters with due to an overbooking of the hotel. Page's role is expanded in the film, where she is crucial to the plot, providing the flea that leaps into Albert's clothes and causes her to strip off, thus revealing her secret. She also provides a telling contrast with Albert because, by a convenient coincidence, Hubert also happens to be a woman living as a man.

In Moore's short story, Page becomes a symbol of something Albert aims for,

because Hubert has managed to find a comfortable, happy life despite her secret. She even lives as a husband to another woman's wife. Thus, Hubert's flea causes an itch that Albert cannot scratch, setting in motion the pursuit of a wife and a life that is doomed to failure. The desire for a partner becomes a consuming one for Albert, tied up with a pursuit of acceptability and legitimacy that will be conferred on her by becoming the proprietor of a shop and the husband of a beautiful wife. After this vision of companionship and support is glimpsed in Hubert's life Albert cannot forget or renounce the thought that happiness, despite her very unusual circumstance, is possible.

Hubert only appears in Morrison's hotel once in Moore's story, subsequent mentions representing the ghost of this meeting for Albert, and rendering her importance all the more epiphanic for Albert for being so fleeting. Hubert repeatedly intrudes on Albert's thoughts, informing her fantasies of the future and happiness, but never again intercedes in Albert's tale during her life time except by reference to this one meeting in Albert's memory. By contrast, in the script, she becomes a recurring character, and we get a glimpse of the domestic bliss Hubert and her wife have managed to create in scenes where Albert visits them. These recurring appearances undermine the ghostly, mysterious possibility of the future that she signifies for Albert in the original story. Hubert isn't just someone who wandered in one night to the hotel and disappeared the next day. In Banville's script, Hubert's domestic reality is depicted, bringing home to Albert the reality of possible happiness. Albert tracks her down from a few scant details and visits the home Hubert and Cathleen have made together in an effort to understand how they've managed to create this space of sanctuary and love for themselves. Albert is even moved to comment on Cathleen

when first visiting Hubert, saying “I thought she'd be different.” “In what way?” Hubert asks, "Well she's... real" is Albert’s surprised response. Again, returning to Banville’s statement about the need to show things in the cinema, Hubert isn’t just some distant memory offering a vague hope for Albert here, but represents a real, tangible possibility for Albert.

The problem is that, for all the “reality” of Hubert and her happily arranged domestic situation, Albert has no real sense of herself because of the obscurity of her origins. Whereas Hubert can explain who she was, where she came from, why she is as she is, Albert is rendered close to speechless when she comes to speaking about herself. The only marker of a past she retains is a photograph given to her by her guardian who told her it is a picture of her mother. Of course, the picture could be anyone, and this neatly underlines the logic of Albert’s pursuit of acceptability: as long as her image can pass for that of a man, or this photo can pass for that of her mother, then that is what matters.

The consequences of this are a desperate loneliness in Albert’s personal life, so fixated is she on maintaining the facade that she is a man. It seem fair to surmise that Hubert and Cathleen enjoy a sexual relationship even though their marriage is framed as one born out of convenience, Hubert explaining at one point that she had married Cathleen having suffered through a violent marriage to a man prior to their meeting. For instance, in the scene just described, Hubert’s reply to Albert is a throaty laugh and knowing nod, “Ah, she’s real alright! You’ve been thinking about my Cathleen, have you?” Or when Hubert is showing Albert how to roll a cigarette, they are discussing Helen Dawes, a maid in Morrison’s, and Hubert, jokingly, talks about her as a possible replacement for Cathleen if she should “run off to America”, before

talking about her “sweet little face, and all those lovely blonde curls. Ah sure she’s gorgeous.” This is followed by Cathleen lighting Hubert’s cigarette, a suggestive act, particularly in cinema, where it suggests intimacy and sexual attraction.

By contrast, Albert’s origins are defined by speculation and rumour rather than any solid relationships, “I don’t know the beginning” Albert says when Hubert asks about her life. Her only security in the world is her place as a servant, a role she adopts out of economic desperation and physical terror. As a woman pretending to be a man, she betrays herself through the naivety of a neophyte, her unsophisticated and foolish pursuit of adequacy through an extremely improbable marriage showing her simultaneously at her most innocent and her most masculine. Even if Albert were in a position to reveal the truth about herself to those around her, what would she reveal other than a body that does not match what she’d led people to believe? When asked her name by Hubert, she replies “Albert.” “What’s your *real* name?” Hubert asks again. “Albert” is the reply. Her identity is Albert, the waiter, the servant, the lonely, stuffy figure who hovers over diners and guests in Morrison’s hotel.

In this absorption into the role of Albert, she inverts the actions of Lois in *The Last September*. By taking on the guise of a butler, a role that invokes a social hierarchy that is defined by strictly observed order and etiquette, Albert attempts to deny, suppress, and almost obliterate any semblance of female being she may betray. The butler’s uniform and the necessary behaviour, character, and manner they imply is a weighty symbol of patrician social domination. The symbolic resonance of hierarchy, social status, class rigidity and gender roles is so oppressively present in Albert’s persona that, as portrayed by Glenn Close, Albert is rigid and stiff as a board whenever performing her duties as a waiter or supposedly enjoying her clumsy

moments with the fellow servant she sets her eye upon as a possible wife. Even the ironic import of her moment of exposure trades on this stiff, seemingly implacable manner. That something as small as a flea causes the veneer to crack, an identity built up over decades of a life seemingly shattered by something so minuscule, speaks both to the fragility of identity, that one's sense of self can be ripped apart in a moment, and to the social construction of identity as such, that it is always in relation to others and to that which is different that identity is defined.

The irony of the flea's minuscule size and far reaching consequences also extend to this chapter, as not only does it activate the plot, but it also points towards the primary problem with Albert's constructed identity. As Albert says when Hubert asks what had caused her to jump around and strip off in such a panicked way, "It was a flea, I'm a martyr to fleas. You must've brought one in with you. I'll be covered in blotches in the morning." Though she can maintain a masculine facade, her body has betrayed her. Albert's appropriation of the uniform and manner of a waiter allows her to adapt to her desperate circumstances, but it does not serve to replace her biological self, her body, and the questions of gender and sexuality that have been silenced by her traumatic past haunt her adult self. Tellingly, Hubert doesn't say a word about her secret, instead waiting until the next day when, silently, and with a hint of sexual menace in the preceding moments, baring her breasts to Albert when they are alone together, who lets out a strained gasp before fleeing from the room, not speaking a word. Albert's body betrays her while Hubert's speaks confidently. It is also worth noting that, purely on a physical level Albert is unassuming, shrivelled in her body language and posture. She is content to slide towards the walls when guests are falling drunkenly around the hotel, where Hubert is much more expressive and comfortable in

her behaviour and physical presence, bounding around, joking with staff, and generally confident in her performance as a man.

The fact that Albert's desire for a partner is as ambiguous as to barely broach the subject of sex points to the unavoidable problem she feels with her physical existence, and the consequently detached relationship she endures with the world and those around her. Albert approaches this idea of a relationship as a purely instrumental matter, internalising a logic of appearances and surfaces, where, as long as all appears normal, acceptable, legitimate, then all *is* normal, acceptable and legitimate. The question that preoccupies her is when Hubert told Cathleen she's a woman, before or after the wedding? Or "where do Hubert and Cathleen sleep" she wonders out loud at one point, with a naivety and detachment that seems to completely elide the question of sex. The simple possibility of a wife, any wife, represents an object by which Albert will secure herself in the world. It is not enough that she appears to be a man of business, she must also appear to be "a man"; that is, she must find a wife.

Albert fixes on Helen through her meeting with Hubert. Cathleen works in a shop that they both maintain, and Albert takes on this as the image of acceptability she wants to mimic. Albert begins to consider opening a tobacconists after Hubert's visit, discussing her plans with Dr Halloran, who also notices that "Nobbs" has plans to get married from this discussion, "who's the lucky lady?" he asks, though there is none, just the idea of a wife serving behind the counter in Albert's shop. Albert then visits a boarded up building plastered with "for sale" posters. Here, her imagination takes over and we get a vision of the empty premises morphing into the shop she wants it to be. "A Nobbs Tobacconists" appears over the door, and Albert steps closer to look inside, muttering to herself "two counters, one for tobacco and things, the other for sweet

meats" as she surveys the dilapidated interior. She then spies, at the back of the shop, a door "leading to the parlour. The *wife's* parlour." The wife, any wife. Subsequently we see Albert helping a guest with their luggage, receive a tip, and saying to herself "now she can have a clock and a marble chimney piece." Who "she" is exactly is irrelevant to Albert; it is the form of a wife not the person that matters. Albert's theoretical wife acts as social currency, the possession of which will confer acceptability onto Albert.

The economic and psychological overlap here is all the more conspicuous because of the commercial dream Albert returns to again and again and "the wife's" place in it. Later, Albert fantasises about Helen sitting beside the fire in the parlour room, and his dying vision is of the clock on the fireplace. Returning from Hubert's house Albert's mind wanders back to the prospective property, only this time the sentimental music and gold-tinged lighting of the imagined shop scene are accompanied by images of customers and sales and stock on display. And we see Cathleen behind the counter serving customers, before switching to Helen in the space of a cut. Now Albert has fixed onto Helen as her future wife.

Up to this point there has been little to no interest shown on Albert's part towards her. Helen has already become close to Joe Mackins, a new employee at Morrison's, much younger than Albert and, altogether, a more likely partner for Helen. That Albert is unaware of this when he asks her to "walk out" with him on returning to the hotel says everything about the way Albert is approaching this pursuit of a wife. Even the language he uses startles Helen, asking her if she is "engaged" at three the following day bringing a level of formality to the conversation that she cannot help but find funny. At the insistence of Joe, Helen agrees in order to get

money and presents out of Albert. She thus becomes the means by which another man seeks to do business, only it is not, as Albert envisages, behind the counter of a shop, but more underhand and conniving. Joe's aim is to get to America, and Albert Nobbs looks like his ticket.

The absurdities only accumulate as their relationship develops. Their conversation is stilted, the only genuine interest Albert shows in Helen is when she mentions she used to work in a shop. Albert's eyes light up. "A shop?" Suddenly he's all ears. "And did you live over this shop?" he asks, incongruously, thinking of the plans for a parlour and domestic dwelling she has for the property she has viewed, and Helen, again, is mystified by these questions, saying "you are the strangest man I ever met," with some unintentional insight. Later, Helen storms off when Albert lays out her plans for both of them, their wedding, the shop and their future together before they've even shared a kiss. To get Helen to stop he shouts how Joe will abandon her and her unborn child, and Helen turns back to Albert, trying to convince both herself and Albert that Joe won't leave her, before resting her head on Albert's shoulder, deflated. They share a brief moment of affection, embracing as Helen begins to cry, and snow starts to fall around them. Encapsulating all that has been noted about Albert's muddling of commerce with love, Albert, thinking of the hat he has bought Helen, says "don't worry, I'll buy you a new one". The moment is broken. Helen, confused and upset, says "no" and hurries away.

What all these moments show is that Albert hasn't just adopted the outward appearance of a man, but internalises and manifests a masculine logic and behaviour that reduces the world to a mechanistic totality. In personal relationships this reductive perspective is fully displayed. The attempt to court Helen is one aspect of it, but it also

emerges with Hubert in Banville's adaptation. Hubert's wife is never encountered in Moore's story, she is just mentioned, but she is portrayed in the film. After the typhoid outbreak, Albert goes to see Hubert, and discovers that Cathleen has died. Albert, sensing an opportunity as much as consoling a distraught Hubert, suggests that they could set up house together, "You could keep at the house-painting, and I could run the shop... I could live here, but like Cathleen. Neither of us would be alone" she says. Hubert, realising the mistake she has made in trying to understand and help Albert, is taken aback by Albert's utilitarian approach to romance. "You can't just..." she says, her words ceasing as though she has been punched in the stomach, before trying again to explain to Albert that her relationship with Cathleen wasn't one that was purely based on calculation, that they were very much in love with one another. Hubert then takes Albert upstairs, showing her Cathleen's dresses. Albert says she can't remember what it's even like to wear a dress, so they put them on and walk to the nearby beach, Albert looking more awkward and terrified than usual at first. She breaks into a run, a moment of relief from the burden she has carried around for decades, but realises that it would make no sense for either of them to go back to living as a woman, with both having lived as men for so long. Hubert is trying to show Albert that she needs to look elsewhere for a partner, that she is looking at relationships the wrong way if they are reduced to transactions as Albert thinks of them. The ending sees Hubert's perspective validated, where Albert has died defending Helen from a drunken Joe Mackins, but Helen faces a life on the streets because of her child, Joe having left for America without her. The final scene shows her with her child, named Albert, and Hubert offering her a place to stay, fulfilling the promise made in jest to Cathleen when discussing Helen earlier in the film.

In noting these incidents where Albert's commercial sense intervenes in her relationships, it is, however, crucial to recognise and emphasise that Albert here is far from the cause of this state of affairs. Rather it is the wider economic and social reality that forces her into this behaviour. The misery of her early life, the identity it robbed her of, and the consequent circumstances in which she had to act to survive, render any question of personal responsibility close to moot. When describing the assault that prompted her to change identities, Albert can barely bring herself to acknowledge, and avoids describing in detail, the acts perpetrated against her. This absence from her story suggests that something of her has been destroyed through the assault they perform on her as a teenage girl. It is marked by ellipses in Albert's speech, the event too traumatic to put into words. This event is a pivotal occurrence in Albert's story as it drives her to her first job pretending to be a young man as a waiter. Describing her impoverished life in London having left the convent to Hubert and Mary, she haltingly recalls how "One night... there was five of them. They caught me and they pulled me about... under the stairs... They hurt me, and then they left me there." The gaps between her staggered utterances speak for themselves, intimating some violent sexual assault, and this inability to articulate the trauma she suffered repeats throughout her life. She suppresses all her natural, human desires. She is constrained in her physical being. She can only bring herself to tell this story to Hubert and her wife because they, for different reasons, understand the kind of suppression and repression she lives with everyday.

This assault and the decision to break from that world, whatever it required, leaves Albert an isolated figure throughout her life. Her isolation is a repeated visual motif in the film. Most strikingly it is in her role as a servant in Morrison's that this

visual representation of Albert's physical, sexual and psychic isolation from the rest of the world is emphasised. The encapsulation of this isolated existence in the film is presented during a typhoid outbreak that does not feature in Moore's story. As a servant in Morrison's, Albert is stationed on the landing at the end of one of the upper floors in the hotel. In the previous scene we have seen her coughing, alone in her room, struggling to dress as she tries to suppress the effects of an illness that has already caused the death of one of her fellow servants in the hotel.

As she sits, waiting, at the corridor's end, the family of the boy we take to be George Moore's narrator represented in the film leaves its room, the "Moore's" father leading the way, bringing all their belongings with them and not allowing the potentially ill servants, for once, to carry their luggage. Albert staggers to her feet, the camera distant, and her image surrounded by flowers, decorations, ornaments and trappings of Victorian interior design. Stumbling towards the family as they leave, the mother of these children we've seen periodically running about the hotel turns back towards "Nobbs", but her husband calls on her to hurry up. The sickness circulating Dublin has cut off the one point of contact Albert has with other people, her role as the impeccably mannered, almost unnoticeable servant to Morrison's guests. As though realising this, Albert retreats to her room, refusing any treatment from the resident doctor in Morrison's, collecting meals left outside her room like a prisoner would in jail.

The resolution to Banville's story of Nobbs manages to find some light amid the darkness. Albert's death leads to the discovery of her saved money and her secret. While those working in the hotel are dumbfounded, the money is used to save their place of work from closure following the outbreak. Helen Dawes has been abandoned

by her boyfriend with his child, but Hubert happens to meet her while redecorating the hotel, and the film closes with him offering to take care of Dawes and her baby, Albert. In a notable parallel to *The Last September*'s close, we see two women joining together to make their way in a world that is less than accommodating for independent minded women.

In terms of adaptation, both of these films feature notable inventions and amendments on the part of Banville as the adaptor. These inventions do not just serve the plot, but also comment on the cinematic process itself. In *The Last September* the film-like quality added to the telescope scenes underline the transition taking place within Lois's world and in her personal life. In *Albert Nobbs*, the fantasy sequences around her imagination's vision of the shop she hopes to own, and the whole image of a happy, contented domestic life that this comes to represent, serve to underline the potent reflexivity of the cinema as a place for fantasy and dreams. Both of these adaptations are based on works by other authors; however, there is a similar level of self-reflexity in the *The Sea*, Banville's most recent adaptation and one based on his own work.

Banville Adapting Banville: *The Sea* on Page and Screen

In *The Sea* we are, in Banvillian terms, sailing on more familiar waters than in his adaptation of *The Last September* and *Albert Nobbs*. It is based on his own novel, and so follows a man, Max Morden, rather than a female central character. However, like much of Banville's previous work, the women in Max's life are central to his story. After the death of his wife he revisits the site of a traumatic episode from his

childhood hoping to overcome the sense of loss and regret that has come to define his adult life. His relationships with women, from his mother, to Connie and Chloe Grace, to his wife Anna and his daughter Claire, and even Rose, the *au pair* who becomes the landlady of the guesthouse, act as mirrors by which we are to understand him and Max understands himself. The cinema plays an important role in exploring Max's relationships, where his first kiss (or at least the first kiss Max can recall) with Chloe Grace takes place and marks Max's entry into the adult world of relationships. In examining this episode and the related formal and thematic connections to the cinema throughout the text, this section will show how the cinema informs Max's relationships in both versions of *The Sea.*

Prior to its production and release in 2013 Banville had seen a script of his produced by Channel Four, a version of *The Newton Letter* titled *Reflections*, which was first broadcast on the television network in 1984 and given a limited theatrical release, but *The Sea*'s production for cinema was from the outset a prestige production, being made in the aftermath of its Booker prize win in 2005, and was always intended for a full cinematic release. Writing of his involvement in the world of cinema in 2013, Banville recounts how the production of *The Sea*, in contrast to *Reflections* decades earlier, followed a more circuitous course than the Channel Four production:

> When in early 2006 Luc Roeg of Independent films commissioned me to write a script based on my novel *The Sea*, we both fully expected it to be showing in cinemas within a year or two. In the event, it took more than six years before Roeg got the money in place so that the director, Stephen Brown, could start filming late last summer in Co. Wexford. ("John Banville: The Movies and

Me")

This necessarily collaborative, contingent process stands in contrast to the author's life, and whereas it is not unusual for an author to adapt their own work for the cinema, it certainly poses different questions with regard to the practice of adaptation.

It is more common to see a professional screenwriter employed, sometimes in collaboration with the author, a team of screenwriters or others involved in the wider production, though this can have significant implications for any production. As Simone Murray notes in her discussion of the "intermedial figure" of the screenwriter, using the author of the novel to script the adaptation "has the advantage of mobilising the author's deep knowledge of the source material", and, importantly from a commercial point of view can act as a check on any issues readers might have regarding the "authenticity" or "betrayal" of the initial work (143). This, however, can be a double-edged sword, as the author's intimate knowledge of their text can prompt difficulties when cuts and alterations to the action or structure of the work are required. Famously Nabokov's initial draft script for *Lolita* ran to some 400 pages, where the rule-of-thumb is that one page of script translates into one minute of screen time, meaning any filming of it would've run to almost seven hours or thereabouts. In this instance the author accepted the demands of the new medium and soon provided the director Stanley Kubrick with a revised script approximately half the length of the original (Allen Nelson 60), and even this was substantially changed by Kubrick for the final version of the film.

Banville's own professed attitude to his screenplays is markedly lacking in preciousness, saying in 2008's *Arts Lives* documentary "if you're going to come to

[the adaptation of your novel] with the precious attitude of 'my wonderful creation must not be interfered with', then stay away from movies." Echoing a recurrent theme regarding his novels and how they are received by readers, he asserts that once he has written his script or books and handed them over to the producers and directors he is happy to see those people take over responsibility for what is made of them. He even discusses how the director of *Reflections* phoned him during filming asking if they could keep a scene that had been partially ad-libbed by one of the actors. "You guys are supposed to be over there betraying me" was his surprised reaction; "To me, a script is simply a thing that you start with, it's a skeleton, and then you put flesh on it. I think all scripts should be betrayed, that's what a director is there to do." This attitude will sound familiar to a reader of Banville interviews over the years, where not only does he often celebrate and embrace the way readers take his novels and refract the images and ideas through their own experiences, turning them into different objects from that which he ever expected, but also he frequently professes dissatisfaction with every novel he has written. For instance, asked by Belinda McKeon in 2009 "Do you really hate your novels?" he replies, almost enthusiastically, "Yes! I hate them. I mean that. Nobody believes me, but it's true. They're an embarrassment and a deep source of shame" ("John Banville: The Art of Fiction").

A reader might then assume this means he is coming to the adaptation of his work with a pragmatic attitude to the work at hand, but then he adds, "They're better than everybody else's, of course, but not good enough for me." This gnomic qualifier, undercutting Banville's apparent modesty, may help account for what many film critics reviewing *The Sea* noted as a static mood and dryness of script, where lines and dialogue that worked in the novel fell flat or seemed incongruous on screen. Jonathan

Romney's notice for *The Observer* summarises the film as a "lugubriously literary affair", Mike McCahill in *The Guardian* acknowledges the strong performance of Ciaran Hinds as Max Morden in spite of the script, where "the laboured structure cuts insistently around [Max] to get at a psychology mostly scrambled in translation." Other online critics who took it in during its festival circuit run are more forceful in their criticisms of the structure and script, and even a generous review in *The Irish Times* from Donald Clarke is forced to acknowledge that "*The Sea,* as scripted by the author, never feels like anything other than a literary adaptation [in which]... we are always striving for inner worlds that, expressed fully on the page, remain stubbornly inaccessible to the camera."

These observations regarding the "literariness" of the scripts and the difficulties of structure engendered by the source material suggest Banville, in adapting his own work, has cleaved too closely to the source material, and that, perhaps because of its prize-winning status, it was not "betrayed" in the way it should've been. In this, it also calls to mind what Kamilla Elliott calls "the incarnational adaptation" in her enunciation of six different adaptation types in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. As she describes it, in the rhetoric of incarnation that surrounds adaptation "the words that hint at sight, sound, touch, taste and smell tantalize readers into longing for their incarnation in more phenomenological forms" (161), meaning there is a supplementary quality to much discussion around adaptation and to adapted works. Quoting Antony Burgess when he drily dissects the logic of film adaptations, she writes "Every best-selling novel has to be turned into a film, the assumption being that the book itself whets an appetite for the true fulfilment - the verbal shadow turned into light, the word made flesh" (161).

These corporeal terms regarding the nature of this film adaptation find a striking thematic analogue in the preoccupations of Max with the physical throughout both book and film. Mark O'Connell, in his discussion of the families of Banville's narrators' shameful relationships with their own figurative and literal "flesh and blood", notes how Max can barely contain the revulsion he feels for his parents, even in distant memories, when they are compared to the Graces, the family he befriends during his summer holidays one year on the cusp of adolescence. Describing the scene when the Graces first see his mother, father and himself at the beach, Max's disgust at his parents is palpable, O'Connell picking out some of the most telling terms:

> the 'coy little hem' of the mother's "mouse-pink" swimsuit "stretched across tight just below the crotch"; the father's "trunks abulge"; the twitching muscle in his jaw as he watches the mother's "clumsy efforts" before he hauls her against her will through the water. All of this seems to tiptoe in distaste around the intractable fact that his parents' relationship is, whether he likes it or not, at least in part a sexual one. (ch. 5)

His disgust is all the more acute and intense because the Graces are watching on:

> They stood regarding us without expression, as if we were a show, a comic turn that had been laid on for them but which they found not very interesting, or funny, but peculiar only. I am sure I blushed, grey and goosepimpled though I was, and I had an acute awareness of the thin stream of seawater pouring in an unstoppable arc out of the sagging front of my swimming-trunks. Had it been in my power I would have cancelled my shaming parents on the spot, would have popped them like bubbles of sea spray, my fat little bare-faced

> mother and my father whose body might have been made out of lard. (Banville, *The Sea*, 37)

As O'Connell puts it, "the sense of bodily repugnance is unmissable: it is their fatness, their physical inelegance, that shames him more than anything else" (ch. 5). But it is not just his parents' bodies that are at issue here, it is his own too. For one thing, whether Max likes it or not, biologically, his own being has come about only through the combination of cells that originated in these "fat", "lard"-like bodies (is it any surprise when we learn that Max is not Max's name at all, that he is yet another Banville protagonist who has altered his name? His mother asks "why does she keep calling you Max? Your name is not Max" when Anna visits her, and he explains he has changed his name, though never revealing what he was christened (210)).

Secondly, in addition to the comic capering of his parents in front of the heavenly bodies of the Graces, there is a further description of his own body betraying him: "I had an acute awareness of the thin stream of seawater pouring in an unstoppable arc out of the sagging front of my swimming-trunks" (37). It is not difficult to read the latent symbolism of this description, where Max imagines his younger self wetting himself in public, the "thin stream" "unstoppable", this image a nightmare of seemingly unending humiliation, and the performance of his own body's betrayal seems to be purely for the Graces' amusement, a family who, in the very first line of this confessional novel, he compares to gods. When Chloe Grace, by contrast, emits stenches or excretes dead cells, it is remembered warmly and affectionately by Max (139).

Though this brief remembrance of his parents and the Graces together is omitted from the screenplay, the shame Max feels for his parents and background is

still present. His mother, when he returns from the Cedars one afternoon, remarks “I suppose you were off with your fancy friends” before wondering if “you are ashamed of us” in one of the few moments where young Max’s time away from the Graces is depicted. He is embarrassed by the obvious class difference between the Graces and his own family, a hectoring mother and semi-detached father, whose meagre rented “chalet” in the seaside village stands in notable contrast to the Cedars, the stately house the Graces reside in during their stay and the guesthouse Max stays in when he leaves the city.

This shame he feels both for his parents and himself is echoed in the bodily revulsion he expresses throughout the novel and in aspects of the film. There are numerous scatological references throughout both. For instance, when Max arrives at the Cedars to stay, he is invited to dinner by the landlady on his first evening, having tramped along the beach and some familiar sites in the village during the day. To the clear discomfort of the landlady and the only other guest, Colonel Blunden, Max goes from describing the campsite and “chalets” of his youth to a memory of how these structures had “no plumbing” (a pun? Max at several points references the Colonel’s toilet habits, which he can overhear, and odd discussions he has with him about the digestive system’s final stages) and his father had to empty the chemical toilet once a week “under the lupins bushes”. The description of this memory in the novel manages to connote a greater degree of shame, as Max remembers his father conducting this ritual “at darkest midnight, with spade and flashlight, muttering curses under his breath,” and Max confesses that the memory is still with him, as he cannot help but detect “a lingering sweet whiff of nightsoil” (50) behind the scent of lupin bushes, even today. Max’s dissolution extends beyond his personality, his mood, and his sense

of loss following his wife's death, into not just his language but how and when and what he chooses to express.

In another comic episode around the toilet, Max describes how he plotted to befriend the Grace children and find his way into their house so he could be closer to Connie Grace, their mother, who he is initially infatuated with. Recalling how he "loitered about Station Road hoping for a glimpse of Mrs Grace" he describes how he would slow to "the pace of a somnambulist" as he was walking past the Cedars guesthouse, hoping she would emerge at just the moment of his passing. He trained his attention on the windows:

> ...especially the bedroom ones, and was rewarded one day - how my heart hammered! - by a glimpse behind a shadowed pane of what seemed a nude thigh that could only be hers. Then the adored flesh moved and turned into the hairy shoulder of her husband, at stool, for all I knew, and reaching for the lavatory roll. (77)

It is not even clear what he has seen, just what he takes to be Carlo Grace's hairy shoulder, but the first thought is of the toilet, his fantasy of the Connie Grace's welcoming flesh turned into the more repulsive aspect of the body in an instant, her husband sitting on the toilet.

During one memory sequence depicted in the film, Chloe is heard to shout "Go on, quick, I just did a pee!" to Max as they play in water along the shore, and he immediately dives into the surf, gliding between her legs and resurfacing as she says "You're disgusting". Or, recounting his decision to return to Ballyless after his wife's death, he launches into a prolonged consideration of "the products of my sadly

inescapable humanity, the various effluvia, the eructations fore and aft, the gleet, the scurf, the sweat, and other common leakages, and even what the Bard of Hartford quaintly calls the particles of nether-do" (70), a heightened appreciation of which has coincided with her death. These thoughts occur to him as he lies in his daughter's childhood bed, sulking, having fought with her while visiting the seaside village that he has decided is to become his home for the next few months at least. His anger at his offspring, the most significant "product of [his] sadly inescapable humanity" leads to this meditation on the "repugnance of my own flesh" he has felt since Anna's diagnosis. This repugnance bleeds through the whole text, including his relationship with his daughter.

His daughter, as with Cass in Alex Cleave's story, is a source of confusion and disappointment to him. Discussing this in one early meandering digression, he muses how:

> I know so little about her, really, my daughter. One day when she was young, twelve or thirteen, I suppose, and poised on the threshold of puberty, I barged in on her in the bathroom, the door of which she had neglected to lock. She was naked save for a towel wrapped tightly turban-fashion around her head. She turned to look at me over her shoulder in a fall of calm light from the frosted window, quite unflustered, gazing at me out of the fullness of herself. Her breasts were still buds but already she had that big melony behind. (62)

It is telling that in describing his ambiguous relationship with his daughter, he turns immediately to this image of her, an image that is so bodily, so material, presenting her nascent sexuality and the inevitable change from girl to woman. Also, the setting is significant, calling to mind as it does Pierre Bonnard's paintings of his

wife, Marthe, as she bathed and washed herself; the book Max is trying to work on is about Bonnard. “What did I feel, seeing her there? An inner chaos, overlaid by tenderness and a kind of fright” he admits, before moving immediately to how she has disappointed him:

> Ten years later she abandoned her studies in art history—Vaublin and the fete galante style; that's my girl, or was—to take up the teaching of backward children in one of the city's increasingly numerous, seething slums. What a waste of talent. I could not forgive her, cannot still. I try, but fail. (63)

The Bonnard reference gains another layer of significance here, as Banville inserts Vaublin, one of the numerous invented masters he creates in *Athena*, his novel about fake paintings, as the subject of Claire’s studies. Rather than following in her father’s path, becoming a “dilettante” and dabbling in artistic and academic research of images, she chooses to work with children, in all their messy, corporeal unpredictability. The reference to the fete galante style of painting (literally, “courtship party”) presages a further element of this disappointment:

> It was all the doing of a young man, a bookish fellow of scant chin and extreme egalitarian views, on whom she had set her heart. The affair, if such it was—I suspect she is still a virgin— ended badly for her. Having persuaded her to throw up what should have been her life's work in favour of a futile social gesture, the blackguard absconded, leaving my misfortunate girl in the lurch. I wanted to go after him and kill him. At the least, I said, let me pay for a good barrister to prosecute him for breach of promise. Anna said to stop it, that I was only making matters worse. She was already ill. What could I do? (63)

As if the point needed any greater emphasis, the father here, wishing to deny that which became obvious when he walked into the bathroom on his daughter years earlier, that she was becoming a woman and would enjoy a bodily existence that he could never control, still tells himself his adult daughter is a virgin. When her affair has ended, he comically looks for justice, trying to assume the role of protector in a situation where legal remedies or extra-legal violence are absurd, and their hyperbole betray the failure to accept that she is no longer the girl he thinks she is. “What age is she now, twenty-something, I am not sure” (44), he asks himself when introducing her first; he still thinks of her as a child. Later he plots to coerce Claire back to her abandoned art studies, where she “will do what I could not, and be a great scholar, if I have any say in the matter, and I have. Her mother left her some money, but not enough. I am the big fat goose, and costive with the golden eggs” (175). The end of the novel, with Max recovering, features the return of the jilting lover, and the announcement that they are to wed, but Max still maintains he will push her down the right path (258-9).

However, her relationship and career choices are not the most significant example of her betrayals of him. At a physical and biological level she disappoints him. He acknowledges that she is “very bright”, but has to accept that she is “not beautiful”. Comparing her to his wife, he says:

> I cannot pretend this is not a disappointment, for I had hoped that she would be another Anna. She is too tall and stark, her rusty hair is coarse and untameable and stands out around her freckled face in an unbecoming manner, and when she smiles she shows her upper gums, glistening and whitely pink. With those spindly legs and big bum, that hair, the long neck especially—that is

> something at least she has of her mother—she always makes me think, shamefacedly, of Tenniel's drawing of Alice when she has taken a nibble from the magic mushroom. (44)

The Alice reference here is telling, once again pointing to his failure to accept her as the woman she is and as the person she chooses to be. The image he is referring to is one of 92 illustrations used to accompany Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass and What She Found There.* The image itself shows an elongated Alice, her neck stretched like a giraffe's almost, and her body out of proportion entirely. Still:

> She is brave and makes the best of herself and of the world. She has the rueful, grimly humorous, clomping way to her that is common to so many ungainly girls. If she were to arrive here now she would come sweeping in and plump herself down on my sofa and thrust her clasped hands so far down between her knees the knuckles would almost touch the floor, and purse her lips and inflate her cheeks and say Poh! and launch into a litany of the comic mishaps she has suffered since last we saw each other. (44)

She is clumsy, buffoonish, the image of her gums showing when she smiles, "knuckles" that "almost touch the floor", and "spindly legs", suggest, again, she is out-of-shape, somehow not right or normal, and not only that, but almost semi-human or primate-like.

Her physicality and ungainly way is a marker of Max's general fascination with and disgust at bodily waste and the very physicality of the people around him and, indeed, his own body. His parents, especially his mother given his father

absconded “to England” when Max was a teenager, have tarnished him from the start by bringing him into the world, already polluted by their deformities. His wife Anna’s body has betrayed her and their relationship by somehow concocting this fatal illness. As she puts it, when her diagnosis is confirmed,

> "Do you know what it is?" she said with bitter vehemence. "It's inappropriate, that's what it is." I looked aside quickly for fear my eyes would give me away; one's eyes are always those of someone else, the mad and desperate dwarf crouched within. I knew what she meant. This was not supposed to have befallen her. It was not supposed to have befallen us, we were not that kind of people. Misfortune, illness, untimely death, these things happen to good folk, the humble ones, the salt of the earth, not to Anna, not to me. In the midst of the imperial progress that was our life together a grinning losel had stepped out of the cheering crowd and sketching a parody of a bow had handed my tragic queen the warrant of impeachment. (19-20)

Her illness is rendered poetic and romantically fantastical by being described as a sudden interloper serving papers to a damned aristocrat. Earlier, the tumour in her body is transfigured into a baby:

> Her belly was swollen, a round hard lump pressing against the waistband of her skirt. She had said people would think she was pregnant—"At my age!"—and we had laughed, not looking at each other. The gulls that nested in our chimneys had all gone back to sea by now, or migrated, or whatever it is they do. Throughout that drear summer they had wheeled above the rooftops all day long, jeering at our attempts to pretend that all was well, nothing amiss, the world continuous. But there it was, squatting in her lap, the bulge that was big

baby De'Ath, burgeoning inside her, biding its time. (18)

The imaginative manipulation of the tumour into child amounts to an ironic counterpoint to the kind of disappointments his actual child has caused him to suffer. All of these transformations of the illness through language serve to mask the bodily reality of her material existence and eventual non-existence. Max spends his time in Ballyless trying to understand his childhood summers there, but he is also trying to recover from the trauma of Anna's death, and as he sinks into depression, attempting to drown himself in booze, he snaps in one telling moment: "You cunt, you fucking cunt, how could you go and leave me like this floundering, in my own foulness, with no one to save me from myself. *How could you"* (196). Combining both an aggressive reference to female genitals, a word laden with misogynistic meaning, and his own sense of "foulness" about his own existence, this is the apotheosis of Max's decline, a howl into the void, and a notable coincidence of revulsion at his own body and that of his wife who has left him "floundering" by dying. His foulness and Anna's death are inextricably linked, the feminine, the body and his dissolution bound together, interdependent.

This discomfort regarding the body of his daughter signals a wider attitude that is of significance to the cinematic threads we are following in his work, for at base Banville's narrators are voyeurs. The focus on the real, actual, physical body, in all its beauty and ugliness, it "eructations and effluvia" stands in stark contrast to the fantastical surfaces and clean images of the cinema. The ambiguity in personal relationships is resonant and analogous to the relationship between the cinema-goer and the images on screen. The previous chapter discussed the potential for gender-related readings of Banville's Alex Cleave Trilogy, where the cinema features

prominently in those novels, but it is worth reiterating this point before proceeding with an examination of the importance of cinematic, photographic, and performance imagery in Max Morden's imagination and Banville's metaphorical palette.

As with Alex Cleave, the narrator of both *Eclipse,* Banville's novel immediately preceding *The Sea* and of *Ancient Light*, published seven years later, *The Sea*'s narrator holds particularly resonant, significant memories of the cinema of his youth. In *Eclipse,* it is a place of solace, of teenage isolation, of dubious "tears" the young Alex Cleave cannot help but "shed" in the cocooned darkness of the theatre; in essence, it is the birth place of the man he is to become, his relationship to his wife, daughter, and women in general must be understood through this initial insight into his formative, younger self. The "tears" come unbidden, he is at a loss to explain them, but he cannot stop visiting the cinema: "It became a shameful habit then, twice, three times a week I would do it, in different picture-houses, the dingier the better, with still no notion of what I was weeping for, what loss I might be mourning" (*Eclipse* 23).

For Max, the cinema as physical space is the site of a similarly significant experience, albeit not the solo one Alex Cleave enjoys. In the novel, Max goes into great depth regarding the cinema in Ballyless because it is the scene of a kiss that, if it not the first he exchanges with Chloe Grace, it is the one he remembers more vividly than others. This memory is brought about by his wondering when, exactly, he transferred his interest from mother to daughter. He cannot find the specific moment when his affections changed, but as soon as he begins to think about Chloe, he naturally returns to her bodily secretions and odours; "Apples, yes, her breath too had an appley smell" (138-9). I doubt I need to labour the symbolism of the fruit chosen

here, but the Edenic reference, along with the repeated Olympian comparisons he uses for the Graces, and the tragic death Chloe suffers, are enough to suggest that her ghostly, otherworldly presence allows Max to revel in rather than be repelled by her corporeal detritus.

> Like little animals, we were sniffing at each other. I liked in particular, when in time I got the chance to savour it, the cheesy tang in the crevices of her elbows and her knees. She was not, I am compelled to admit, the most hygienic of girls, and in general she gave off, more strongly as the day progressed, a flattish, fawnish odour, like that which comes out of, which used to come out of, empty biscuit tins in shops—do shops still sell loose biscuits from those big square tins? Her hands. Her eyes. Her bitten fingernails. All this I remember, intensely remember, yet it is all disparate, I cannot assemble it into a unity. Try as I may, pretend as I may, I am unable to conjure her as I can her mother, say, or Myles, or even jugeared Joe from the Field. I cannot, in short, see her. (139)

These bodily memories of Chloe Grace find an echo in the previously discussed fixation of Max on the physical being of those related to him. However, Chloe stands distinctly in contrast with the others because their smells and bodily effluvia are a cause of unease and even disgust for Max, whereas his memories of Chloe's are warm and benign, her lack of hygiene a positive because it brought these fawnish, biscuit tinny tones to her presence. But it is in his attempt to picture her, to remember her physical presence, that we see why this is acceptable. It is because she is not quite of this world for Max now, if she ever was. These smells, tastes, moments he recalls, they have been worked over so often in his mind they have detached from the physical person that Chloe was to him, and become fetishised images or ideas that

wholly distort the physical reality. The fetishisation of Chloe immediately precedes this kiss Max so vividly remembers in the cinema.

Though calling it a cinema is generous, and Max plumps instead for the more antiquated and suggestive "picture-house". Tantalisingly, Max breaks with his memory, and Banville seemingly with the fourth wall of his fiction, to talk directly to the reader about the work they are reading, for this long-remembered kiss "took place—no, was exchanged—no, was consummated, that is the word, in the corrugated-iron picture-house, which all along has been surreptitiously erecting itself for this very purpose out of the numerous sly references I have sprinkled through these pages" (141-142). Is this Banville speaking to us through Max? Though Max often mulls over his words, and gestures towards the inevitable artifice of resuscitating the past through memory, the invocation of the picture-house being "surreptitiously erected" for a "purpose" through "sly references" dotting "these pages" suggest a significance beyond the memories of a grieving, middle-aged man. It suggests the first half of the novel has been leading up to this point. The cinema scene and the possible-but-maybe-not-quite-certain "first kiss" mark the half way point of the novel, which is divided into two untitled sections. This opens the second half, and it is a pivotal point in the unravelling of Max's story as he has dropped the fantasy of Connie for, at the time, the reality of Chloe.

Describing the cinema's proprietor, a "Mr Reckett, or Rickett", whose sons seem "ashamed" of the "family business, with its taint of peep-shows and the burlesque", and then the arrangement of the barn, where the "screen was a large square of linen which any stray draft would set languorously asway, giving an extra undulation to some heroine's silk-clad hips, or an incongruous quiver to a fearless

gunslinger's gun-hand" (142), Max's mind can't help wandering to the sleazily sensuous. The "silk-clad hips" and languorous undulations immediately position the shed as, however unlikely, a site of sensuality, calling to mind Banville's youthful infatuation with Marilyn Monroe discussed in the previous chapter. A tendency of the old projector to "overheat" (not just the patrons) is recalled, "smoke coming out of its innards" (142) once according to Max, meaning two reel changes were often required. During these intervals, the seedier side of the movie house emerged:

> Mr R, who was also the projectionist, did not raise the light, thus affording - deliberately, I am sure, for Reckett's or Rickett's Picture-House had an invitingly disreputable reputation - the numerous couples in the house, even the under-age ones, an opportunity for a minute or two of covert erotic fumbling in the pitch-dark. (143)

It was during one of these interruptions that Max remembers this kiss, in remarkably intense detail. "I had been holding Chloe's hand for so long I had ceased to feel it in mine—not the primal encounter itself could have fused two fleshes so thoroughly as did those early hand-holdings—and when with a lurch and a stutter the screen went blank and her fingers twitched like fishes I twitched too" (143). The audience begins shouting and stamping their feet impatiently, and "as at a signal, under this canopy of noise, Chloe and I turned our heads simultaneously and, devout as holy drinkers, dipped our faces toward each other until our mouths met" (143-144). In contrast to Alex Cleave, the cinema's dark space has provided Max with a moment of companionship and solace, a brief moment of excitement and connection with another person, and the simplicity of a moment of childhood happiness. It is the high point of Max's story, the decline from here terminating in Chloe's death.

As depicted in the novel, the reader is provided with the charged emotional intensity of Max's memories as he describes them, but in the adaptation, it is not so easy to convey such thoughts, experiences and feelings. The cinema scene is included, and again is a site of an important structural as well as thematic moment, where Max drops his fantasy regarding Connie Grace and falls in love with Chloe, but it is recalled through an encounter Max has with Chloe's father, Carlo Grace.

Carlo, played by Rufus Sewell, seems to conform to the Mephistopheles-like character of Banville's other works, but does so while also hinting at the recurring role of the thespian Banville deploys in *Ghosts*, Croke the aged actor among the castaways, and gives more time to in *Eclipse* and *Ancient Light* in Alex Cleave. Carlo is a trickster, full of comic accents, playful euphemisms, cheeky lines and dark wit. When Max recalls first seeing the family at the beach, Carlo's first line is delivered as though he were a child, complete with a put-on rhotacism; "more dwink mummy" he says as he holds up his empty wine glass for his wife to refill. She pours and asks "are you sure it's not corked darling?" "Everything tastes a little sour at the seaside, even you my darling" he replies, in an ironic mode typical of him throughout the film. A further indication of Carlo's constant performance is provided when Max first visits the Grace's summer house. He has just befriended Chloe and Myles, the twins, and as they walk up the drive, Carlo grabs Connie and launches into an impromptu waltz. As Chloe introduces Max to her parents, casually saying "this is 'Morder', or something", Carlo, full of mock-surprise, eyes bulging, voice ringing with British aristocratic camp, replies "Murder? Crikey, better stay on the right side of you." Or when Max begins to recall a vivid moment where he and Connie Grace, Carlo's wife, are alone in the kitchen of their holiday home, the Cedars, he remembers Carlo and the twins

tramping in with their dog, tearing through the kitchen, causing chaos, breaking the sense of intimacy Max has layered over this brief interlude, Connie symbolically offering an apple to the youthful Max as his adolescent lust fixes on her. Carlo adopts a mock cockney accent interrupting the scene, “welcome to h’our h‘umble h’abode” he japes, wrapping his arm around young Max’s neck. Similarly on the beach he adopts a Norman Wisdom-like comic persona, prat-falling and gurning his way around along the sand, leading the troupe made up of his family behind him in the manner of an intrepid explorer, barrel-chest stuck out, chin lifted, marching through the dunes.

In another odd moment of performance, he marches across the beach, pouring a glass of wine on the sand and bellowing "the great god Pan is dead, long live the god" in some form of mock-ritual. And later, when Max catches Carlo strolling from the beach in the company of a local woman, flirting with her and casually smacking her on the backside, Carlo takes him aside in the local cafe, explaining in a typically larky, playful, though equivocal way that he’d like young Max to keep quiet about what he’d seen. “Look here old Murgatroyd, I wanted to have this little chat with you...” he says, again in a tone that amounts to a parody of British upper-class chumminess. His playing around with Max’s name (Murder, Murgatroyd), joshing tone and ridiculous accent, open up an ironic space for them to “have it out, man to man” regarding Max’s “intentions towards [his] daughter”, as Carlo puts it, eye twitching as though his brow and cheek are searching for a monocle to complete the Colonel Blimp act Carlo is deploying. What he really wants to deal with is the delicate subject of his marital infidelity. Talking to Max about Chloe, he says “I’m assuming you and she are ‘playmates’, and nothing more than that... Well everyone needs a

playmate, even chaps like me", before explaining how the woman Max saw him with is his "playmate". "I admire your discretion, right old sport?" he closes, with a collusive smirk.

In all these moments, all these performances, Carlo is so varied in how he is presented physically, audibly, verbally, and so on, that it is impossible to know which is the actual Carlo, how he behaves when he is "himself", or even if he ever is himself. By adopting all these different voices and personae, he emphasises the artificial aspect to Max's memories, that they are constructions out of the snatches of memory he can now recall some fifty years later. Carlo functions at once as a representation of performance and, because of the different stereotypes and personalities his act invokes, the cinema itself.

As if to emphasise the connection between Carlo, the act of performance, and the sexual overtones of the cinema as a space, his "little chat" with Max is intercut with shots and sounds from Max and Chloe arranging and visiting the rickety old shack that passes for a cinema in the holiday village. Not only do we have the camp act of Carlo, his hammy accents, cheesy lines and vaudevillian act, as he knowingly muses over these images, but we have the cinema itself act as the site for Max's gradual transfer of his affections from Connie Grace to Chloe. As Carlo talks about playmates, we see intercut shots of Max and Chloe separately arriving at the cinema. *The Wicked Lady* is the film advertised outside, a 1945 caper about the wife of a landed gentleman who leads a double life as the impersonator of a famous highway man, and scenes from the original movie play during this montage, with clips of dialogue interrupting Carlo's meditations on relationships. The "wicked lady" of the title speaks breathlessly, imagining how the highway man, Captain Jerry Jackson,

must feel when he pulls off a heist: “Think of the exhilaration, the excitement and the danger. Once a man has taken to the road everything else must seem tame and insipid. I don’t see how he could ever give it up.” These lines play over further edited clips from the film showing robberies in progress and Jackson riding away on his horse.

In the context of Carlo’s commentary, and the subsequent image of Chloe and Max kissing, the lines seem pregnant with meaning. How can a man give up the pursuit of women? Max is getting his first experience of rampant passions, while Carlo clearly enjoys the “exhilaration, the excitement and the danger” still. The film is also clearly the same film Max and Chloe refer to in the book. After their kiss they retire to the local cafe, the same one in which Carlo has his “little chat” with Max, and talk about the film, Chloe saying “As if they wouldn’t have known that highwayman was a woman.” It would be easy to assume the adaptation would dispense with obtaining the particular film referenced in the novel if it were not significant. As such, it seems legitimate to consider *The Wicked Lady* as a meaningful intertext that tells us something about *The Sea* as much as *The Sea* tells us about it. The most relevant detail to the current discussion is that, clearly, the film centres on a woman who betrays the boundaries that would seem to define her place in society. Indeed, historically it is a prime example of “the woman’s film”, which Jeanine Basinger defines in the following way: “A woman’s film is a movie that places at the center of its universe a female who is trying to deal with emotional, social, and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman” (20). These can often be broken down into further types of film, such as drama, melodrama, comedy and so on, and the genre is now seen as largely anachronistic, based on the need to distinguish films for women from gangster and western movies that were films for men. Given the

preceding discussion of *The Last September* and *Albert Nobbs*, it is worth noting this overlap. Such a thread is also relevant to *The Sea*, where women continually defy Max's "authority".

The cinema as a physical place is summoned up to broach the youthful romance of young Max and to reference the more complex area of adult relationships in *The Sea*, both as novel and film. However, it is also worth considering the technical processes of film here. Because of the digressive nature of much of Banville's writing, the film version of this novel features a leaping narrative structure, where different sights, sounds, images, even smells set off diversions down into the deepest memories and most scarring moments of Max's life. This trait is almost excessively emphasised by film. Where cuts between different time periods and sites of significance in a novel can flow, interweave and overlap in a fashion that does not draw attention to itself, by the nature of the medium, film cuts and switches between time and place are heavily demarcated in the work. The cut is an essential tool in narrative cinema. In a novel, it is simply words on the page that lead to digressions, but in cinema it is the more immediate image that either hints at significance (for instance, towards the end of the film version, Max is involved in a bar brawl when he drunkenly turns off a television soap opera in anger and disgust as it runs through some hospital-based illness storyline) or launches fully presented memories and flashbacks. Because of the immediacy of cinema's flickering images, stripped of the cognitive processing of reading text, Max's every moment in the seaside retreat of his childhood is pregnant with potential for remembrance, meaning and symbolic resonance for his modern day self.

In technical terms, the loaded potential for meaning present in every breathing

moment and Max's surroundings as he visits this site of deep importance to his younger self is marked out by the way in which the memories which are triggered are filmed. Max's memories and contemporary situation are colour coded, where the light of each scene tells us where and when we are viewing. The contemporary world of Max in the guesthouse and its surrounds are layered in a seemingly inescapable blue, much like the Bonnard painting "The Bath" Max meditates upon periodically, the memories and reminiscences of his youthful days are bathed in golden light that lends them the air of choppy home movies from some clichéd family film reel. The blue of Max's contemporary life seems to bleed out from the initial diagnosis of his wife's terminal cancer the previous year. Both novel and film open with hospital scenes from Max's recent past, the memory of his wife's death and his and her visit to the consultant, Dr Todd, when her diagnosis is confirmed, and these blue moments continue to interrupt Max's routine in Ballyless. Grim conversations, awkward moments with old acquaintances when they realise his wife's illness, tortured silences as they sit in hospital rooms, these are saturated in a watery blue, connecting these dark moments with the final scenes of the Grace twins, as they slowly sink under the water in Max's childhood memories.

This contrasts with the gold-tinted images of his youth up to that point. Though we learn that his is far from a happy childhood, his memories of the beach, the village and the summer holidays with the Grace family are represented in something resembling a home-movie style, Max's time with the Graces becoming the kind of idyllic home life he has not enjoyed. On this level these moments are clearly interpretable as a film within a film, Max's visualisation of this time with the Graces, his memory, becoming a movie camera, him the director and providing a stylised,

nostalgic, ambiguous picture of the summer he remembers.

It is in the character of Anna, Max's wife that the medium of film and the question of gender issues fully intersect. In the novel Max discusses their relationship in great detail, how she is the daughter of a wealthy, probably criminal, "entrepreneur", and that her wealth has elevated him to a social station that assuages the shame he feels about his parents and his class origins. Mark O'Connell notes how she has fulfilled the role the Graces played for young Max:

> Max's relationship with Anna is, at least in part, conceived as a means of escaping the shabbiness of his upbringing. She is, in this sense, a kind of reincarnation of Chloe Grace, in that she represents everything he was not born into; the world she inhabits is everything his world is not. (ch. 5)

We also learn, after his recollection of the cinema kiss, that Anna had, in her final months, revived a long dormant interest in photography, taking photographs around the hospital as she was being treated. This springs into his mind incongruously, as immediately preceding this Max has been recounting a series of memories of himself and Chloe after they had kissed in the cinema. The unreliable, smouldering camera reels of the barn-turned-cinema serve to remind us of the material reality of the images projected; they are streams of photographs turned into moving pictures through speed and light. Max admits that, in the darkness of the interval between the reel changes, he had fallen in love. All of the subsequent memories he describes to convey this new experience, however, portray Chloe as a capricious, unpleasant young girl. Max justifies his docile adoration by explaining:

> Since she was the one on whom I had chosen, or had been chosen, to lavish my

> love, she must be preserved as nearly flawless as possible, spiritually and in her actions. It was imperative that I save her from herself and her faults. The task fell to me naturally since her faults were her faults, and she could not be expected to evade their bad effects by her own volition. And not only must she be saved from these faults and their consequences for her behaviour but she must be kept from all knowledge of them, too, insofar as it was possible for me to do so. (166)

"Enraptured humiliations" are what he calls these tests of anger and viciousness (164). She is dismissive of him, ignores him, when he grabs her and shakes her, imploring her to "see me and only me" she plays dead, limbs hanging loosely and eyes crossed (165). She kisses him with such force that his lip splits against his tooth, causing him to bleed, then pushes him away, ignoring him, and he recounts her dare, depicted in the film, to dive between her legs after she's urinated into the sea water (169). He also recalls her suddenly smacking him across the face as he tried to embrace her one day, and how she also coaxes him into bullying another boy they met at the beach for no reason other than boredom (170-2)

Then suddenly Max's mind turns to photography. "I have always disliked being photographed, but I intensely disliked being photographed by Anna" (172). O'Connell's analysis of Max's shame about who he is, his self disgust, suggests that the turn from the abusive episodes, particularly the striking of the young boy, to Anna's photography is not coincidental. He writes of how Banville's narrators spend so much time and effort hiding their "true selves" from both themselves and others, but there are moments when the mask slips (ch. 5). The photographs that Anna takes of him are one such instance: "In those half dozen black-and-white head-and-

shoulders shots that she took of me—and took is the word—I seemed to myself more starkly on show than I would have been in a full-length study and wearing not a stitch" (174). He sees himself in these pictures, though they were taken when he was "young and smooth and not unhandsome," but in under her lens he looked like "an overgrown homunculus... the pictures she produced were the mug-shots of a raddled old confidence trickster. Exposed, yes, that is the word, too" (174-5). Exposed is the word, much like the film in a camera when light is allowed through the lens, burning itself onto the plastic strip. Like Alex Cleave, Max revels and reveals in the dark of the cinema to the bright lights of centre stage.

Or, indeed, the eyes of another, for, as O'Connell notes, the bullying of the young boy, a "townie" as Max calls him, evokes a similar sense of being exposed, and immediately precedes his discussion of the photographs. Max doesn't mind the violence or intimidation of the boy, what gets at him is "the look which the boy gives him before walking away. 'He knew me,' Max tells us, 'knew I was a townie too, like him, whatever I might try to seem'" (172). This moment of recognition breaks through the barriers and boundaries Max has attempted to build around who he is, how he sees himself and wishes to be seen, the art writer, the dilettante, the "kept man", rather than the poor boy from the chalets. Anna's camera and his fellow "townie's" moment of recognition bring him back to who he is rather than who he wants to be.

The photography is also significant because it involves the collusion of his wife and daughter to smuggle the camera into the hospital without his knowledge, and also points to Anna's life before, or at least away from, Max. In this there are undertones, again, of his difficulty with allowing those women who are closest to him to live their lives as they want. Note the condescension and dismissive tone in his

thoughts on Anna's photography, for example. While acknowledging "her special gift, the disenchanted, disenchanting, eye" evidenced in her photographs, he wonders "Did I seem to disapprove of her attempts to be an artist, if taking snapshots can be considered artistry? In fact, I paid scant attention to her photographs, and she had no reason to think I would have kept the camera from her. It is all very puzzling" (176). These thoughts occur to him as he wonders why Anna asked their daughter Claire rather than him to find her camera and bring it to her. And he returns to Claire's studies here too and how he will convince her to do what he would like to have done (175).

Also, the photographs she takes in the hospital lead back to a character called Serge from her past. He develops the pictures for her, and irks Max considerably. With his "burly" build, "mane of beautiful black hair" and "lisping accent which all the girls are said to find irresistible" (177), Max's impression that he "may possibly have been something more than a friend" to Anna is evident, and points to one reason for her and his unease around her photography. The materiality of film again intrudes, where the process of making pictures, as opposed to merely consuming them in the dark of the cinema, makes a necessity of this relationship, and may have made it even more than just a professional one. And the pictures themselves, when developed, are, in the words of Serge, shaking his head, "Some pictures!" Max is most struck by the,

> calmly smiling way in which they displayed their wounds, their stitches, their suppurations. I recall in particular a large and at first sight formal study, in hard-edged shades of plastic pinks and puces and glossy greys, taken from low down at the foot of her bed, of a fat old wildhaired woman with her slack, blue-veined legs lifted and knees splayed, showing off what I presumed was a

prolapsed womb. (180)

Max's unease around the material body, instead preferring the fantastical in his distant memories of a long-dead girl, is once again clear, and is brought to the surface by photographs taken by his wife, whose past he does not know and cannot be sure about, and whose photography interest clearly was a source of some tension in their relationship. Anna's photographs are, in her own words, an "indictment [...] of everything", and they draw out the repeated themes that define Max's world. The cinema as a physical space offers one side of this relationship, the dark side, but its progenitor, the photograph, exposes Max to the light.

As with Banville's oeuvre as a whole, the adaptation of *The Sea* works over the protagonist as he delves further into himself, his history and world, an act that is both deeply narcissistic and also purgative because he comes through the other side. There is a way of breaking with Narcissus's transfixed reflection in the shimmering pond. Max's kiss in the cinema is a moment so replayed in his mind, so indelibly seared into his consciousness, that it and the subsequent dalliance with Chloe Grace takes on an excessive, morbid, faintly tragic curiosity and symbolism for him throughout his life. Where the self-reflexive references to cinema in Banville's adaptations *The Last September* and *Albert Nobbs* function to underline the possibilities opening up for the central characters of those works, the adaptation of *The Sea* follows the novels of the Cleave Trilogy in seeing the cinema as an aspect of the protagonist's narcissism. These male characters are frozen by the images they see on screen, the narratives of cinema and the fantasies it sustains in their youthful minds coming to damage their relationship to the world at large, reality, and those around them. In their focus on the cinema screen, they fail to see others around them.

Chapter 4

Black Mirror:

The Dark Reflection of Hollywood in the Benjamin Black Novels

In the context of a discussion of the cinema and Banville it is tempting to read Benjamin Black as Banville taking on a role to write more popular fiction. The clichéd shorthand and generic conventions of the form seem to align with the cinema in a way that his Banville novels do not. The genre of crime fiction is certainly heavily overlaid with a cinematic history tied to the adaptations of genre defining works for the early and classic periods of Hollywood cinema, which, as discussed in the first chapter, provided images for the youthful Banville that he still draws upon in his writing. Further, Black is another opportunity for Banville to play a role, the performance involved in being an author and at once both foregrounded by the invention, and elided, because it obscures the performance involved in being John Banville.

His public utterances on the Black persona and writing style support this idea, where he contrasts Black's easy way of writing with Banville's intensely circumspect method, and the appeal of this new identity seems clear, in that it offers a degree of separation between two modes of writing, as well as an opportunity for Banville to indulge in recurring themes of ambiguity around identity and self at a meta-literary level. A question immediately arises as to the extent of this separation, and whether a division of "literary" and "genre" fiction is tenable at all? Given how Banville often frames the Black persona and his writing style, it is not surprising that some writers

bristle at Banville's professed ease when writing as Black against the difficulty of writing as Banville. Talking of "genre fiction" itself is problematic given how vexed the idea of literary genre is, and Banville's claims to dislike the "ghettoisation" of writing into distinct categories such as "crime fiction" or "literary fiction", reflect some of this tension. Rather than there being discrete genres into which works fit neatly, Banville states that there simply is good and bad writing, though he draws a distinction between Banville's "art" and Black's "craft".

This reluctance to accept the compartmentalisation of writing for the sake of easy categorisation and delimitation of given works reflects something of the unease regarding genre that Jacques Derrida discusses in "The Law of Genre", where attempts to define the limits of genres as self-contained, uncontaminated categories are read as a kind of madness, where all that is "not-genre" must be excluded from all that belongs to a genre, a situation that is unsustainable given the relational nature of language. Thomas O. Beebee, in *The Ideology of Genre,* attempts to come to terms with these difficulties, arguing for a dynamic, relational understanding of generic difference, where no work is taken to be self-identical with "the laws of the genre", but rather exists in the spaces between generic boundaries. Genre, for Beebee, is a useful if imprecise tool for the literary critic because it brings ideological issues to the fore as it draws attention to the use-value of texts. For instance, in comparing pulp romance novels with military and espionage thrillers, he notes how the fantasy and fantastical elements of great, torrid love affairs is emphasised in the designs and titles of the romance stories, but how the military related novels would almost be indistinguishable from non-fiction stories dealing with similar material; "war exists, whereas we must imagine love" (5) is the implication. More complexly, genre is also

useful because it can show the gaps and joins in a piece of writing; it aids any "postmodern" or deconstructive interpretation of texts, insofar as it helps to signal the instability of language itself, because no text will be the full instantiation of its archetype. It must, in some sense, even if only minimally, deviate from some, ultimately arbitrary, generic norm.

The tension implied by the generic schema, between the will to conform and to deviate, is a useful frame through which to view Banville's relation to Black and vice versa. The preceding chapters have discussed Banville's novels in relation to cinema. The intention here is to interrogate the Benjamin Black persona in relation to the recurring cinematic tropes, references and style that emerges in his work and to examine this self-reflexive element of Banville writing as Black. This construction of another writing persona, and the material written under its Benjamin Black signature, is presented by Banville as a departure from his usual mode of writing, but, as it coincides with the novels discussed in depth above, it shares in the cinematic fascination of Banville's late period.

Banville explains the development of this writing persona in straight-forward terms. He was inspired by the style of George Simenon's *roman durs* - literally "hard novels" - whose terse, sparse style and mood Banville drew upon in transferring a series of rejected television scripts he had written into the first Quirke novels. As Black, Banville has now written a series of seven novels about 1950's Dublin following the pathologist Quirke as he negotiates the shadowy world of a Church-dominated Ireland. Certainly the invocation of Simenon "hard novels", where moral abasement and stolid, smoggy squalor mash together to present characters adrift in a mid-twentieth-century urban fog, offers an insightful parallel with the Ireland in which

Quirke works. For example, Simenon's *Dirty Snow*, often cited by Banville in his discussions of the Black novels, tells of a young thug in occupied France during the Second World War, and it is tempting to draw a comparison between this world and the 1950s Ireland of Quirke, a world defined by the power and influence of Church authorities. This is especially prominent in the first Black novel, *Christine Falls*, the plot of which revolves around the death of the title character and the negligent posthumous activities which may have covered up the cause of her death and reason she died. The fog that envelops much of this Black novel is fitting metaphor for the moral fog created by the Catholic Church where social and sexual morality is concerned, and provides the story with a plot and period resonance; individuals think they are doing right by following their mother church and aiding its goals, but are mis-stepping in the moral murk created by the absurd puritanical fantasies of what could rightly pass for a religious state. The complexity of personal and public relationships for Quirke leads to a necessary split between the public and private that finds an apt metaphor at several turns in the cinema. Indeed, the cinematic influence on the Quirke novels is largely at the level of metaphorical image and self-reflexive moments of insight. As such, in the cinematic language and images of the Quirke novels, the clear demarcation between Banville and Black, between art and craft, is thrown into some doubt.

This chapter will focus on this ambiguity. It will first consider the self-referential metaphors and images of the cinema in the Quirke novels as a whole, where the cinema is not as central to the plot and characters as the "Banville novels" of the same period, but is nonetheless a significant and recurring image for Banville writing as Black. This survey of cinematic influence over the Quirke works will lead

to a deeper reading of Banville's two other works as Black, *The Lemur*, published as a serialised story in the *New York Times Magazine* and subsequently as a single volume work, and *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, where Banville, with the blessing of the Raymond Chandler estate, revives Phillip Marlowe and several characters from Chandler's *The Long Goodbye.* These two works are as heavily influenced by the cinema as those previously discussed. *The Lemur* is riddled with references to cinema. The intention here is to focus on *Chinatown* as a crucial structural intertext, where the story as told by the detective figure John Glass is a farcical inversion of the tragic noir mystery. *The Black-Eyed Blonde* similarly draws on a multitude of cinematic references, but also goes behind the curtain of Hollywood itself in exploring the sordid world of Marlowe's Los Angeles. These deep readings of Banville's Black fiction will serve to illustrate and examine the ambiguity in this split writing personality.

"Spending too much time at the pictures": Quirke and the Cinema as Metaphor

Throughout his novels, Banville constantly points to language as language; narrators mull over descriptions and definitions, refer reflexively to the text and the words being used, and generally grapple with words in order to get them to as closely as possible mirror their thoughts, emotions and memories. This necessarily leads to 'breaks' in the story being told, where the reader's suspension of disbelief is constantly disrupted by the author announcing the fictionality of the tale, making up names while admitting that he can't remember or doesn't know the real name of the person he's talking about, admitting to telling lies or possibly misremembering incidents. These asides and winks to camera have a cumulative effect in the way they subtly but insistently cast doubt on the narrators and their trustworthiness; if they are

making up people, their names, the descriptions, etc, how are we to believe they haven't done so elsewhere in the story? It can also be interpreted as going a step further, insofar as it raises questions about memory and personhood generally, where the malleability of history (personal and public) is foregrounded as a far from stable issue.

These self-conscious elements with regard to language itself would seem to necessarily come at the expense of narrative impetus. As such, Banville's turn to the detective/crime genre is surprising precisely because it places stories structured around detective plots in the middle of a body of work that has rarely shown much of an interest in narrative progression or resolution at all, except insofar as it can occasionally feint in one direction or another only to immediately undercut expectations. Mikhail Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, points to the parodic origins of the novel and how it as a form possesses the ability to comment on itself, other art-forms and the world in general by virtue of this parodic, quotational, necessarily multi-voiced nature, in contrast to other genres. In incorporating other forms, the novel comments on them rather than presenting them as sincere instantiations of their form. As such, verse in a novel is never verse, it is the idea of verse, or an excerpt from a script isn't a script, it represents an idea of what scripts are, what they feature, how they work, etc. Similarly, the novel can bring in features of other kinds of novels to comment on them. Banville is certainly aware of this equivocal potential in his chosen form, and the ironic detachment the novel can offer to an artist, and uses it with effect.

In *The Book of Evidence*, for example, Freddie Montgomery's lodging with Charlie French, an art-dealer and surrogate father-figure, is interrupted by the

appearance of an apparently wealthy, powerful (most likely political) figure, Max Molyneaux, one evening for an infernal dinner party, surrounded by a group of handlers, hacks and hangers-on. This episode is likely to prompt many questions in a reader's mind. Who is this Max exactly? What's his relationship with Charlie? Why is this absurd dinner-party being hosted in Charlie's large but unsuitable, barely used house, where Madge, Charlie's "occasional woman", comes in to prepare the meal because there's no one else to do it? There are cryptic discussions between Charlie and Max about Charlie's work as an art-dealer, and further dinner-table conversations which immediately cease as soon as Freddie appears; Charlie seems to be absolutely terrified of him either doing something to disrupt this meeting-masquerading-as-a-dinner-party or witnessing something he shouldn't, but what?

Then there are further questions regarding Ireland, politics, society generally that might crop up if a reader was so minded; clearly there is something shady going on here involving a powerful person, a not uncommon image where power and influence in Ireland (and the world I suppose) is concerned. Either way, Banville is setting up an intriguing episode that could be full of narrative possibilities, and a reader might at some level expect a reasonably developed explanation of the cloak-and-dagger, vaguely sinister atmosphere surrounding this episode in the novel, perhaps for it to have some narrative importance in the conclusion of Montgomery's tale or the court case he is supposedly writing his book of evidence for.

However, these expectations are to be disappointed. The final reference to the episode, one shot-through with possible resonances given the background story Banville has used as his inspiration for this novel, is given little more than a derisive seven-line paragraph on the next to last page of the novel "explaining" all:

> Oh, by the way, the plot: it almost slipped my mind. Charlie French bought my mother's pictures cheap and sold them dear to Binkie Behrens, then bought them cheap from Binkie and sold them on to Max Molyneaux. Something like that. Does it matter? Dark deeds, dark deeds. Enough. (212)

This is an extremely suggestive paragraph on several levels, offering the seed of multiple interpretive possibilities that I will not go into here, but, at a most basic level, it illustrates a lack of interest in plot that is recognisable in so much of Banville's work, and it shows the parodic, ironic tone that suffuses his writing. In the middle of a novel about a prisoner recounting his tale prior to trial, he sets up this suggestive scene, raising the possibility of possible conspiratorial or thriller-like developments and then deflates them with a few vague lines on the second last page.

Given that the subject of language itself is foregrounded in the novel, this is quite a natural, acceptable move to make. Such an explanation would be far less appropriate in many crime novels because, as Franco Moretti notes in his analysis of Sherlock Holmes and the role of the detective in crime fiction, "when [detective fiction] assumes the dimensions and the name of the novel, it is a novel only in the number of pages it takes up – that is, physically, not structurally" (147). The ruminative, playful, deceptive narrative games that Freddie/Banville chooses to play in the *The Book of Evidence* are acceptable because a novel allows the space for such games, for such ironising, parodies and undercutting of narrative convention, where language's ability to represent is often called into question, where language itself is at stake. In contrast, a classic detective fiction often depends upon the solidity of its language, its world and the stability of the world in which events take place. While in the course of the mystery's unravelling there is, physically speaking, room for

diversions and there may (and, indeed, must) be red herrings, false leads, missteps in the investigation in order to prolong the story, in terms of narrative the work basically consists of a repeated deferral of resolution until the author decides to resolve his puzzle. A puzzle cannot have pieces missing or it will fail.

In this way it is easy to see the similarity between detective fiction and riddles, where the writer assumes the role of the sphinx, and the riddled becomes the reader. As John Frow points out, the riddle, just like the detective story, depends, for its satisfactory progression, on giving the riddled reader enough information to prompt an engagement, but not enough so that they can guess the ending or answer. The pleasure and structure of the riddle-mystery consists in the obscuring of the resolution through puns, word-play, double-meanings, just as in detective fiction a seemingly innocent or innocuous sign (i.e., an object, an incident, etc) is imbued with a new meaning, a double-meaning, when viewed in a different context or interpreted in light of different information, the revelation of which is under the control of the author.

Nonetheless, in reading the Quirke novels, a consistent image emerges relying on the cinema as a mediational device between the world as the characters perceive it and as it is. The cinema functions in these works to signify doubt and duplicity, giving an air of mystery to events or characters because of the implication that this is “just” an image, that the deeper reality is being obscured by this performance. For instance, in the first Quirke novel, *Christine Falls*, the death of the eponymous Christine is connected to the trade of newly born children from Ireland for adoption in America, with a fee going to the church and questions as to where the children came from politely ignored. The nature of these transactions is laid out in one scene early in the novel where images of performance and cinema dominate as they are used to describe

a sad and darkly farcical meeting between a couple who want to adopt a child and the order of nuns who administer the trade in children on the US side of the Atlantic. The scene is told in the third person, and moves between the perspectives of Claire and Andy, a couple hoping to adopt. Claire recalls her time spent working for the nuns after being orphaned as a child, and how, for all the years she'd spent around the nuns, she "never could quite get onto their way of thinking" (105). As the Sister Stephanus begins to set out the terms and conditions of the adoption - that is "not in the official sense" an adoption - Claire notes how her clear, "unrelenting" tone sounded like "a voice on the radio, or something that had been recorded," (107) and the sense of performance further inveigles its way into her mind as she notes that even though Sister Stephanus "was from South Boston she had an Englishwoman's accent, or what Claire thought an Englishwoman's accent would be, refined and crisp" (107). And when Andy, her less than enthusiastic husband, begins to act the caring and responsible partner to impress the nun, Claire notes how he begins to emphasise his accent, which she imagines is how "the winds out on the western plains would sound", and this seems only fitting as she sees him "playing up the cowboy act and the crooked, John Wayne smile" (108). Moments later they visit the nursery, where their baby, Christine, is handed over to them. On seeing the long room filled with cots Andy is taken aback, the cowboy suddenly finding himself in a very different movie: "Andy stared, impressed, and barely stopped himself producing a whistle. It was like something out of a science fiction movie, all the little aliens in their pods" (110).

These references underline the artificiality of the arrangement they are entering with the nuns. All three actors in the scene have unvoiced motives and impulses that their performances serve to hide. Claire references Andy's way with women, and her

determined effort to impress Sister Stephanus is made in the knowledge that Andy is unreliable, likely to cheat on her in the future, and not as keen as she is to adopt this child. Andy's performance as the caring husband is belied by numerous details besides the implication of infidelity. Claire remembers he had called her a "whore" before because of how she was dressed, and also his truck driving job takes him all over the region and often he is gone for days at a time without calling her at home (103). And Sister Stephanus's performance is not just found in the dubious moral justification she finds for the "unofficial" adoption service. "The Lord, I always say, is our legislator" she says, and looks to Andy and Claire "awaiting acknowledgment of the quip" (106). She also has ulterior motives with regard to Andy. In order to keep him near to the child, she offers him a different driving job working for the parish. No pay is discussed, but it's safe to assume this work would, in part, pay off the debt owed for the transaction they are arranging. It would also make Andy and Claire financially dependent upon the Church and those who arrange these extra-legal adoptions. As such, the whole episode is a dark comedy of manners, all sides trying to negotiate the uncomfortable truths hidden beneath their surface performances, and the artifice is emphasised by the cinematic references and framing of the episode.

Andy and Claire's lives are framed repeatedly in terms of the cinema. When Andy enjoys a tryst with their neighbour, her sudden arrival in their house is described as being "like one of those scenes in a movie when the whole audience knows exactly what is going to happen yet holds its breath in suspense" (174). There are further references to his movie star qualities, as he is jokingly compared to Audie Murphy, a World War II veteran who became a film star, primarily appearing in westerns, when he returned from the war and was celebrated for his acts of heroism. Similarly,

Claire's flirtatious dancing with a colleague of Andy's is seen through the prism of the cinema screen, where, as the music stops, her partner makes "an exaggerated, sweeping bow, and Claire pressed her clasped hands to her breast and put her head to one side and batted her eyelashes, like she was some heroine out of the silent movies," (212) and they both laugh at their performance. As she returns to Andy sitting at a table, she lifts "a hand to touch her hair, still being the movie star" as Andy's anger grows (212). This playing of roles, however, can only go on so long, and eventually the lies these images mask cannot hold. Andy's anger finally takes over, his rage is focusing on the crying child, and Claire's discovery of Andy holding the dead baby is presented as a glimpse behind the scenes of the film business: "The light was not switched on in the room, yet she saw the scene as if lit like the film sets there were sometimes pictures of in movie magazines, with a harsh, unreal brightness" (223). The falling away of this image of completeness Christine was supposed to bring to her life becomes a movie set, the irony doubly emphasised by the frame of reference being a photo from a magazine, the set being a picture of a picture of her picture of happiness. Similarly, Andy's acting ability is now found wanting, where he is described as "an actor desperately trying to memorize the lines that presently, when the curtain went up, he would have to deliver with such force and sincerity that the whole house would be convinced" (225).

This is a recurring feature of the cinema trope throughout the Quirke series of novels. It is referenced to underline the illusions and images characters labour under about both themselves and others. Elsewhere in *Christine Falls*, for instance, Inspector Hackett, Quirke's contact inside the police force regarding murder investigations, bursts out laughing when Quirke asks if there have been any "developments in the

Dolly Moran case?" "You must go to the pictures an awful lot," he says once he's overcome the hilarity, before running through some of the clichés a regular film-goer might reel off if they were looking for evidence in a criminal investigation. "Developments, now—let me see. We have a full set of fingerprints, of course, and a couple of locks of hair. Oh, and a cigarette butt—Balkan Sobranie, I recognized the ash straightaway—and a lucky monkey's paw dropped by a person of Oriental origin, a lascar, most likely" (202-203). Hackett's list of increasingly ridiculous clues is a list of pulpy, cinematic thriller clichés to underline the point. In *The Silver Swan*, Deirdre Hunt compares Dr Kreutz, the mystic "spiritual healer" she visits, to the movie stars of her childhood - "John Gilbert or Leslie Howard or the fellow who played Zorro in the follyeruppers" (120) - and who she used to imagine leaning down from the screen to "kiss her softly, quickly, gaily on the lips before turning back to join in the action again" (120). But the dashing fantasy of gentlemanly Kreutz is shown to be a false one when it emerges that, far from being in the pictures, Kreutz has been behind the camera, making pornographic images of his clients to blackmail them. Similarly his partner in this scheme, Leslie White, is described as sounding "just like how the actor doing the voice-over in a film would sound, only not [...] the kind of film that was ever likely to be shown in a picture house in this country" (247), tying the idea of the illicit to the cinema once again. Or Jimmy Minor, an opportunistic reporter out of central casting, is imbued with tics, language and mannerisms that are explicitly framed as being drawn from the movies in *Elegy for April*. He's introduced as affecting "an accent from the movies" in the opening scenes of the novel (7), and puts on his "Jimmy Cagney voice" (163) when explaining how stories are covered and covered up by national newspapers. Jimmy's emulation of cinema's wizened reporters also sees him miss the story behind the events of the novel because he's lost in

fantastical narratives and speculation.

Each of these examples serves to draw out the metaphorical potential of "the pictures" in the Quirke novels. Given the time and place in which the events take place, the cinematic imagery and references have minimal scope to go beyond the surface of the cinema. In the other Black novels, *The Lemur* and *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, Banville makes more of the image of the cinema to engage with the world of Hollywood, its shiny surfaces and the darker corners.

(Mis)Reading *Chinatown* in *The Lemur*

The Lemur is a 2008 novel by John Banville writing under the pseudonym Benjamin Black. It is the third in a series of crime fictions written under this name, these texts differing significantly from Banville's other novels in several respects, such as narrative perspective, tone, and thematic content. Here the focus is on the deep intertextual links present in characters, plot, themes, and structure *The Lemur* shares with the 1974 noir thriller *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski and written by Robert Towne. These connections are significant on a number of levels. For one, and of particular interest here, *Chinatown* is just of many references to cinema, so the novel is a clear signifier of Banville's late career interest in the cinema and Hollywood. It also serves to situate the novel within the generic bounds of crime fiction by virtue of *Chinatown's* critical status within cinematic history as a pastiche of earlier crime movies and adaptations. Thirdly, it also blurs the distinction between Banville and Black. In essence, what we see in the relationships between these texts is the re-elaborating or re-interpreting of a pervasive, deeply embedded text, an ur-

intertext being constantly readapted and retold.

Throughout *The Lemur* there are countless allusions to other artists and their work, from literature to painting, cinema to musicals, and photography to comic-books. Abundant references are to be expected from Banville writing as Banville, where quotations from, and references to, the broader world of art are commonplace. Several of his novels include small notes on source materials for his work; *The Untouchable*, for instance, includes a list of "acknowledgements" on its final page, listing books which informed Banville writing of his story, a combination of the lives of Cambridge spy Anthony Blunt and Northern Irish poet Louis MacNeice (406). However, the other Black books, *Christine Falls*, *The Silver Swan*, *Elegy for April*, *A Death in Summer*, and *Vengeance* do not contain anything like the same range of references. This analysis will expand on the theme of the untrustworthiness of cinematic images established in the preceding section on the Quirke novels, looking at the range of references, and the *Chinatown* ones in particular, as a comment on the cinematic imagination of the central character John Glass and his ambiguous relationship to Banville's narrators outside of the Black series.

The Lemur is considerably different to the other Black books in several obvious respects. The main character and detective figure in the other five books is Dr. Quirke, a pathologist in 1950s Dublin who noses around suspicious deaths due to personal curiosity or familial attachments, even if the wisdom of these inquiries generally defy his better judgement. Most obviously, *The Lemur* deviates significantly from this template because of its setting in early twenty-first century New York City, and because of the change in its detective figure. John Glass is a formerly crusading journalist whose sudden, unexplained, and seemingly inexplicable disillusionment

with his trade leads him to accept a commission from his father-in-law, the wealthy Irish-American and former CIA operative Bill Mulholland, to write his official biography. The acceptance of this task sets in motion a chain of events that leads to murder and confrontation of long hidden secrets.

This change of character allows for a change of content too, because Glass is much more of a Banvillian protagonist than Quirke. As crime writer Declan Hughes perceptively observes in his *Irish Times* review of *The Lemur*, what we are dealing with here, rather than Banville writing as Black, is,

> Black writing as Banville, and John Glass is that familiar figure: Banville Man. Banville Man, furrowed brow wreathed in smoke, forever caught between a swoon and a sneer; Banville Man, the rumpled aesthete whose exquisite nerves are ever besieged by the crass and the vulgar…; Banville Man, whose loathing of the hell that is other people is surpassed only by his loathing of himself. (47)

Hughes supports this reading by pointing to three features: that the plot suffers as Glass is such an unconvincing, unlikeable, uninteresting character; that the action "all seems to unfold in a strange overheated nineteen fifties dreamworld" (47) due to the way the brittle characters sharply and intently interact with one another; that some of the cultural references are absurdly rarefied or obscure. Hughes' first two criticisms can be discussed elsewhere, but the third raises the question of intertextuality in the work, and I will argue here that Hughes has unwittingly hit on a very significant feature of the novel, its intertextual references, but has misread their meaning.

Hughes certainly has a point about the obscurity of some of these references. Many of Glass's comparisons and similes would be outside the frame of reference of

Quirke. Glass's mistress in a certain light reminds him of "Man Ray's photograph of Kiki de Montparnasse posing as a violin" (101), or the way she is dressed in another scene reminds him of the Cathedral in Siena (42), and a police officer's face reminds him of an El Greco martyr (51), to name but a few. These aren't so obscure as to be impossible to decipher, but such images and comparisons frequently do run the risk of disrupting the casual consumption of the text.

These overly descriptive, somewhat obscure diversions can disrupt what Roland Barthes calls "the reality effect" that writing often trades upon, where the signifier and referent conspire to hide the true nature of the sign by diminishing or obliterating the signified. As Barthes puts it, "reality" as presented in a piece of writing "is constituted by the direct collusion of a referent and a signifier; the signified is expelled from the sign, and with it, of course, the possibility of developing a form of the signified [...] This is what we might call the referential illusion" (147-148). The signifier and the referent are taken to be as one in realism, so when a reader doesn't understand, or only partially understands, a reference, such as those Banville is making in this Black novels, the self-identity of the word to the thing is shown up as an illusion. Even though a reader can read the word and understand the syntactical context to some extent, they do not understand the concept, the signified, which the signifier is supposed to represent.

As Hughes's criticism indicates, this might prompt a critic to ask if *The Lemur* fits within Banville's turn towards genre fiction at all. Certainly Banville's other work enjoys breaking the referential illusion, and these references would seem far more appropriate in one of Banville's earlier novels, where the narrative focus frequently drifts from the story at hand to philosophical meditations and musings on life, art,

memory and selfhood. In purely structural terms, they are an encumbrance, frustrating the progression from mystery to resolution and serving no obviously significant function.

However, to focus on the obscurity of some of the references in *The Lemur*, as Hughes' criticism does, is to overlook many of the more mundane or commonplace intertextual links that punctuate Glass's observations and narrative. While Banville's novels are, generally speaking, intertextually over-flowing, the diversity of sources explicitly mentioned in *The Lemur*, ignoring those hinted at or alluded to, is plentiful even by his usual standards. There are explicit references to *Oliver Twist*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Alice in Wonderland,* S*ome Like It Hot*, Orson Welles's *Mr Arkadin* and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* at different points in the text, to name just a few, as well as more prosaic, non-artistic textual materials such as numerous newspapers, magazines, Wikipedia and Superman comics. Almost every chapter has some other art-work or product of creativity explicitly referred to in its text or embedded in the language and situations described.

The significance of this jumbled collection of sources is open to interpretation. By their nature, texts as full of overt and implicit or unintentional references offer up interpretive possibilities that exceed the scope of any reading. It would be easy to outline numerous speculative possibilities here, but I will argue here that a sizeable chunk of the intertextual references in *The Lemur* work to place it in the context of Banville's turn to the crime fiction genre, even though, as discussed above, it differs markedly from his other writings as Black. As such, it will be argued that one function of the intertextual play of this novel is to make it a piece of genre fiction.

This is made evident by the extensive allusions to cinema, in specific genres

and images from certain movies, and also the overlap between the world of "Hollywood", that being the world of cinema, and a particular kind of "Hollywood" at that, one that in large part mimicked (and mimics) the kind of genre narratives it presented on screen. As such, *The Lemur* presents a liminal world of Hollywood where reality and fiction blur. In this liminal relationship one can also begin to see the outlines by which *The Lemur* may be understood in the broader context of Banville's work as a whole, where the limits of personhood, being and consciousness is a constant source of introspection for Banville's narrators.

However, it also opens up the text and suggests possible answers to questions such as that posed by *The Lemur's* Banvillian tone under the Black name. The presentation of *Chinatown* specifically as a deeply resonant ur-intertext is justified because each of the three main characters in *The Lemur*, "Big" Bill Mulholland, his daughter Louise, and her husband, John Glass, who plays the role of detective in this narrative, in some way echo characters or significant elements in *Chinatown*. *The Lemur,* in its themes and action, maps onto *Chinatown* in a significant way.

Bill Mulholland is a wealthy Irish-American patriarch, still attached to Catholicism and its moral and social conventions, despite his success in the amoral world of business and, more pointedly, his work as a Central Intelligence Agency operative until the late sixties. Elements of Mulholland's background are loosely based upon Ernest Hemingway's life. For instance, his third wife Nancy Harrison, "writer, journalist and Martha Gellhorn lookalike" (8) immediately points to Hemingway, as Gellhorn, a journalist and writer, was also Hemingway's third wife. In the same passage we are told that she leaves him because she "couldn't take the endless rain and low-browed natives" on the west coast of Ireland where Mulholland

had an estate “not an Oscar’s statuette throw from the home of his old friend and drinking buddy John Huston” (8). Hemingway and Huston were also friends, Huston working on the script of the film adaptation of Hemingway’s *The Killers*. Further, the rugged manner and life of action as a CIA man show that Hemingway also informs elements of Mulholland’s character.

However, it is the Huston connection that deserves more attention because it is Huston who plays the all-powerful Noah Cross, whose hunger for wealth and power sets the tragic events of *Chinatown* in motion. *Chinatown* pays homage to the film-noir style of cinema, and the hard-boiled tradition of crime-writing that gave it story-lines. This is a form of writing that Dennis Porter, in his reading of the private eye in detective fiction, recognizes as being distinctly of,

> the 1920s and 1930s, and the place at issue is not simply America, but the American far west with a particular emphasis on the state where the advancing frontier finally ran out of land, and where the American dream may be said to have come to end in more than one sense, California, north and south. (95)

Put simply, when you get to the Pacific coast, there is nowhere left to run. The noir and hard-boiled traditions revolve around uncertainty and loss of faith in institutions and knowledge as a general concept, in marked contrast to what Chandler, following Howard Haycraft, calls ‘the Golden Age’ mystery novel, where the answer is normally waiting to be discovered through a series of logical deductions (185). *Chinatown,* in shocking fashion, reflects this inherent scepticism about the limits and worth of language, meaning and truth, and Noah Cross is at the heart of this scepticism.

The provision of water for growth of the city that Porter situates at the end to the American Dream, Los Angeles, is the catalyst for action in *Chinatown*. Huston/Cross is one half of a duo in *Chinatown* who are used to dramatize the true story of the Los Angeles water wars in the early decades of the twentieth century. The other is Hollis Mulwray, the man whose death provides the mystery element of Polanski's noir. These two characters represent two sides of a colossal figure in the history of southern California: William Mulholland. Not the Bill Mulholland of *The Lemur*, but a real-life William Mulholland, former head of Water and Power in Los Angeles in the early decades of the last century. It is not a coincidence that this man, represented on screen in part by John Huston, should share his name with the patriarch in *The Lemur*. While Hemingway is part of the "Big" Bill Mulholland character, the interposition of the Huston-as-Cross friendship is a pre-figuring of his narrative significance.

William Mulholland was head of the LA water and power department during the period of the California water wars, which raged during the early decades of the last century when the city of Los Angeles, desperate for water to support its expanding population, began to draw it from rivers and lakes that farmers in surrounding areas depended on for irrigation. In *Chinatown*, Noah Cross represents this appetite for water and power which the real-life Mulholland had to satisfy for his city, an appetite which led to the deaths of an estimated 431 people when the recently constructed St. Francis Dam broke in 1928. Hollis Mulwray represents the other side of the real Mulholland, a dutiful civil engineer, whose response to the St. Francis Dam catastrophe was to take full responsibility, saying he envied the dead due to the shame of the disaster (Blitz 2015). In *Chinatown*, it is the appetitive, devouring Cross who

kills the conscientious Hollis Mulwray due to his refusal to build a dam that will help irrigate land Cross has been buying at knock-down prices from ruined farmers. Underlining the historical basis of the story, in an early scene at a public meeting on a proposed dam Mulwray references "500 lives" that were lost when a previous dam gave way, and says "I'm not going to make the same mistake twice," to the consternation of assembled farmers from the drought affected area. Cross and Mulwray once owned and ran the city's water department together, but Mulwray had decided that the water ought to belong to the public, and the two had split, with Mulwray working for the city as chief engineer and Cross moving into private real estate.

In *The Lemur*, "Big" Bill Mulholland is pre-figured as, potentially, a malign force like Cross due to John Glass's suspicion that, like Cross, Big Bill had his former business partner, Charles Varriker, killed twenty years previously. Glass is now worried that he may have killed again to hide this secret, this time killing Dylan Riley who was investigating Mulholland's past. Riley is a computer expert and researcher who Glass employs at the start of the novel to look into Mulholland's past as part of the biography project, and whose death prompts Glass to begin questioning his father-in-law's past and his old business partner's death. It transpires that Big Bill is not the Noah Cross-like evil presence Glass believes him to be. However, crucially, his implicit power and coercive threat is essential to the functioning of the story, as it is the reason Louise, his daughter, hides the secret about her son's real father from everyone, Glass included, which mirrors the actions and behaviour of Evelyn, Noah Cross's daughter in *Chinatown*.

In *Chinatown*, the motives for hiding the paternity of Evelyn's child are more

complex than in *The Lemur*, but this desperate effort links both women insofar as it draws them under the suspicion of the detective characters and the audience, and the incestuous overtones of the father-daughter relationship in *The Lemur* resonate with the actual incestuous relationship at the heart of *Chinatown's* mystery. For instance, the uncomfortable lunch Gittes and Cross have at Cross's ranch is opened by Cross asking the private eye whether he had slept with Evelyn yet, and a similar unease is found in *The Lemur* when John Huston appears in the text, seeing that Glass is taken aback by Louise's beauty, "the old satyr… saw at a glance what was going on in the young man's breast, and grinned his orang-utan grin and handed him a martini and said: 'Here son, have a bracer'" (22). The collusive atmosphere of this moment, the use of the primate comparison, raising the spectre of primal instincts, the invoking of the image of the satyr, all point to an unspoken erotic overtone that resonates with the Cross-Gittes scene, even if it is less jarring on first reading. In his role as motivating force behind all the action of the story, Bill Mulholland is Noah Cross's doppelganger.

The drama over water supply forms the political underpinning of *Chinatown's* story that, at a character level, is played out over Evelyn Cross-Mulwray, daughter of Cross, wife of Hollis Mulwray. Evelyn's suspicious behaviour throughout the film leads J.J. Gittes, the private eye and protagonist in *Chinatown*, to think that she may have killed her husband. He has died, in what is originally presumed to be a suicide but later is shown to be murder, following a newspaper exposé of his apparent philandering. Evelyn is constantly evasive, she is not curious about who set up the false love-affair sting on her husband, she is not forthcoming about who her father is, she refuses to help Gittes discover who her husband's "mistress" might have been, and so on. As the film hurtles towards its tragic conclusion, Gittes becomes convinced that

Evelyn has misled him, that she killed her husband over his apparent affair and now plans to kill his mistress too. The truth emerges when he confronts Evelyn about why she wouldn't tell him where the girl was, who she was? Evelyn tells him "She's my sister"; Gittes hits her in anger, thinking she is still lying. "She's my daughter" Evelyn now cries, Gittes hits her again. "She's my sister and my daughter!" Evelyn eventually wails, revealing the secret that she has worked so hard to hide. Hollis Mulwray had not been having an affair; he had been visiting his step-daughter, the child of an incestuous rape of Evelyn by her father, the all-powerful Noah Cross.

Similarly, Louise Glass, John's wife and Bill's daughter, hides a secret about her child upon which much of *The Lemur's* drama hangs. Her son David was not fathered by Rubin Sinclair, her first husband, but rather Charles Varriker, the saviour of her father's business, whom she had loved but was unable to marry because her father resented his help and success. Given Bill Mulholland's Catholic ideas about faith and marriage, this secret could jeopardize the future of the now "illegitimate" David Sinclair, Louise and Varriker's son, who is due to take over the Mulholland Trust, a prestigious and powerful position, from his mother. Dylan Riley, "the Lemur" as Glass calls him due to his appearance, discovers the truth about Louise and David, attempts to blackmail them, but David, a chameleon-like figure throughout the novel - in one chapter looking like a priest, the next a dandy, the next a sailor *a la* Tony Curtis in *Some Like It Hot* - realizes the threat this poses to his future, as well as the pain it is causing his mother, and kills Riley.

The manner of his death establishes another connection between the two texts. David shoots Riley through the eye, and as his mother reveals the truth about her past, it becomes clear that this is a tribute or reference to his father, Varriker, who killed

himself with a shot through the eye when he and Louise could not be together. Varriker's possible murder but actual suicide neatly reverses Mulwray's apparent death, where suicide is initially suspected, only for it to become clear that he was murdered. Further, the shooting through the eye-socket is another unmistakable reference to *Chinatown,* where, in the shocking final scene, Evelyn Mulwray's dead body slumps from the driver seat of her car towards the camera, her eye having been blown out of her head by a stray police bullet.

Thus, the structural echoes between Evelyn and Louise are established, but close reading of *The Lemur* also shows there to be deep textual connections between both women, as Louise is characterized in *The Lemur* by elements connected to Evelyn Mulwray in *Chinatown*. The initial description of her face calls to mind Faye Dunaway's stark, high features and poised presence in the role of Evelyn: "Louise Glass was forty-eight and looked thirty. She was tall and slim and a redhead. Her skin was pale to the point of translucency, and her sharp-featured face was lovely from some angles and fascinatingly harsh from others" (14). One of the distinguishing features of *Chinatown's* cinematography is the draining of colour from the images filmed, rendering it closer to the era of film-making to which it pays tribute, and one consequence of this is to emphasize Dunaway's striking features and pale skin against the shadowy light of 1930s Los Angeles.

On first reading, this description could be regarded as generic and unspecific, but other textual evidence indicates there is a greater connection between both characters than just this description. For example, to return to John Huston's house in Ireland and Glass's first meeting with his future wife and her father, we are told they arrive having "ridden over from the mansion down the valley that Mulholland had

recently purchased, and Louise wore stained jodhpurs and a green silk scarf knotted at her throat" (23). In *Chinatown*, this description of Louise almost exactly matches Evelyn Mulwray in the scene where she first employs Gittes. He is waiting in the garden when Evelyn arrives back from horse-riding, in jodhpurs, with what one might guess is a silk-scarf knotted about her throat. Further, in the *The Lemur* this first meeting between Louise and John recounts how Louise's "skin was flushed pink from the ride", and Evelyn is similarly flustered as she explains to Gittes how she hadn't seen her husband that morning as she had gone riding early and missed him. "Looks like you went quite a distance," Gittes off-handedly remarks, fishing for more details as she gathers herself; "No, just riding bareback, that's all," Mrs Mulwray coolly retorts, her hair still unkempt from the morning's exertions. This meeting and the horse-riding trope is presaged in a prior scene where Gittes ingeniously sneaks into Hollis Mulwray's office and fixes his gaze on a framed photograph of Evelyn in full riding gear, patting a large, dark-coloured horse.

This horse-riding connection recurs in relation to Louise in *The Lemur* too. For instance, we're told that Louise's mother, Claire Thorpington Eliot, died in a hunting accident when Louise was two-years-old; "balking horse, broken neck" (8) Dylan Riley, Glass's computer expert and the soon-to-be-victim of a murder, drily recounts as he runs through Bill Mulholland's wives. Further, as family secrets are uncovered and the plot unravels, Louise dismissively remarks, in answer to one of Glass's ever-multiplying questions, that her first husband, Rubin, "didn't demand that [Big Bill] horsewhip me", even though he most likely knew David wasn't his son and she didn't love him (182). Finally, the Italian restaurant in which Evelyn and Glass eat regularly, but which he would never take his mistress to for fear of exposure, is

nicknamed “The Bleeding Horse” (16) by the couple, and this provides a suggestive image, given the struggles Louise has endured to protect her son.

At a structural level, the parallel between Louise and Evelyn is clear. Both hold secrets that could be damaging for their children, who are under threat from their grandfathers and the potential they have to damage the lives of their grandchildren. Both women are also forced into admitting the truth by the relentless pursuit of their stories from the respective detective figures and their lovers, Glass and Gittes. In light of the *Chinatown* connection and its homage to hard-boiled private-eyes, we can also read the Glass character more easily as a detective, though he is far from Gittes or the typical wise-cracking tough guy of Chandler or Hammett. He is panicky and ill-at-ease in his new world as rented biographer to a man he, at some level, has deep suspicions about. In contrast, Gittes is shown to be a success in what he does, running a “respectable business” as he reminds a mouthy banker in an early scene, employing several operatives in his agency, and dressing in a noticeably extravagant and expensive manner. Glass is fretful to an almost child-like degree. Early in the book he rebelliously (at least in his own mind) smokes a cigarette alone in his “no-smoking” office, but immediately works himself into a state of panic over the smoke, the smell, how he will dispose of the butt. The comedy of the scene is complete when he decides to flush the remains down the toilet, only for it come back up, again and again (26-27). This disparity between Glass and Gittes suggests that all may not be as it seems for Glass, that he might see himself a detective in this story, but is he reading things correctly?

Despite this obvious character difference, the crucial connection between *Chinatown* and John is his name: Glass. Throughout *Chinatown*, glass is a recurrent

theme, as Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland have documented in their deconstructive readings of the film (117-145). Most crucially it is present in the slippage between “grass” and “glass” by a Chinese gardener, which helps unfurl the film’s central mystery. When Gittes first visits the Mulwray home, he observes the gardener working on the lawn. Making small talk in stilted English the gardener mutters “bad for the glass”. Gittes absent-mindedly repeats this as he attempts to fish something glistening in the weeds from the tide-pool in the garden, but is soon distracted by Mrs. Mulwray’s arrival from her horse-riding jaunt. The object he noticed is a pair of eye-glasses that turn out to belong to Noah Cross, having fallen into the pool as he drowned Hollis Mulwray. Gittes is not in a position to understand their significance yet, so forgets about them. However, later, when he returns to the garden having learned that Hollis Mulwray was murdered, salt-water in his lungs even though his body was found in a fresh water reservoir, he realizes what the Chinese gardener is saying: “bad for the grass”. The water in the pool is salt-water and is killing the grass. Hollis Mulwray was drowned in the pool, and Gittes wrongly assumes that the glasses are his; they in fact belong to the killer, Noah Cross, and they are bifocals, useful for seeing the world in two different ways.

Further, as Elsaesser and Buckland point out, Gittes uses broken glass throughout the film to conduct his investigations. For instance, he has a tray of pocket-watches stashed in his car, and places one under the wheel of Hollis Mulwray’s car in order to see what time he leaves the beach one night. Similarly, in order to track Evleyn when she leaves to visit her daughter’s safe-house, he smashes one of the tail-lights on her car to track it in the night. The ironic import of these episodes is that, in tracking both Hollis and Evelyn using broken glass, he is following the wrong people,

whereas finding the still intact glasses and discovering their owner will get him closer to the villain. Further, in tailing Mulwray, Gittes has really been serving two purposes; one, to destroy Mulwray's reputation and aid the construction of an unsafe dam, but also to lead Cross to his daughter/grand-daughter Evelyn had endeavoured to keep from him and the horrible truth of her parentage. In trying to protect her daughter, she had brought herself under suspicion. Louise's efforts to protect her son, the result of an unsuitable love affair between her and the business partner her father had come to hate, leads to tragedy, albeit not on the scale of that of *Chinatown*.

What these episodes emphasize in both texts is the uncertainty and ambiguity of language, meaning and truth, major themes throughout Banville's work. Just to focus on the central characters of both stories, we can see a structural overlap between Glass and Gittes on this level, insofar as the pursuit of the truth brings catastrophe on them and those around them. Oedipal readings of mystery narratives are commonplace, and *Chinatown* certainly merits reading through this lens given its narrative content and structure, though it is worth outlining how *The Lemur* follows this structure. Glass is repeatedly warned about investigating his father-in-law, is constantly told by his wife that she does not want to discuss Charles Varriker, and with a flippant glee breaches the peace during family occasions as he follows his suspicions trying to uncover the truth. Similarly, Gittes, despite his pride in being a professional businessman, not just any old PI, allows the personal to intrude, clouding his judgement and pursuing the Hollis Mulwray case, not because he has been contracted to do so by a client, but because he wants to find out who set him up. When the fake "Mrs. Mulwray", Ida Session, visits his office in an early scene he asks her "Have you ever heard the expression 'Let sleeping dogs lie'?", advising her against an

investigation of her "husband's" activities. In a reversal typical of the pattern in the screenplay, he cannot act on the wisdom of his own advice when he discovers she was sent to his office to set him up, despite the real Mrs. Mulwray trying repeatedly to get him to cease his inquiries.

Glass' trajectory also mirrors that of Gittes. As he follows the trail of evidence, piecing together what happened to Dylan Riley, questioning his father-in-law's past and Charles Varriker's place in it, he rediscovers his journalistic drive. This comes most likely at the expense of his already dysfunctional marriage, his wife and step-son's future, the wealth and comfort of a life he could not enjoy with his artist lover, and he has made a significant enemy in Bill Mulholland, having wrongly accused him of murdering Riley and Varriker. Regardless of his personal ennui at the start of the novel, his decline clearly matches that of Gittes, who is confident, successful, and certain of his place in the world at the start of *Chinatown*, but his pursuit of the Hollis Mulwray case leads to disaster, his casual manner and certainties about himself and his world are eroded as he sees the face of true power in Noah Cross.

However, it is worth noting the air of manic glee in Glass's pursuit of the truth, which suggests that, though the reader may view his path as unnecessary, excessively curious and ultimately destructive for those around him, Glass does seem to rediscover his drive for his work and enjoys this destructive pursuit. At the start he admits that he moved to New York to placate his wife, and has lost interest in his work as a journalist, his acceptance of this biography, which seems like a public relations exercise, representing the nadir of this professional decline. Throughout the novel Glass is reminded of this; Riley, his bereaved girlfriend Terri, and Wilson Cleaver, the caricature of a street-wise, politically-aware, black writer for whom Riley was also

working, all draw attention to his fall from jet-setting reporter to a man trapped in a glass tower in New York writing a purposely banal biography.

In this ambiguous relation between the professional and personal, Glass can also be read through the prism that Michael Eaton points to in his short work on *Chinatown*. On this account the film shows Gittes as part of "the problem" that leads to Evelyn's death. His unrestrained pursuit of the truth is analogous to Cross's appetite for power. Both are seeking dominion over nature and over their world. Cross manages this to a greater degree than Gittes, as Cross has the power to enlist the help of powerful institutions such as the police to catch his daughter and recover his other daughter/granddaughter. Gittes' place outside these structures of power, as a (relative to Cross) lowly former cop and private investigator sees him shattered, but it is his personal hubris in pursuing this case, and pursuing Evelyn's secret, that has led to his downfall and her death nonetheless. This dovetails nicely with the finale of *The Lemur*, where Louise argues that, even though David pulled the trigger, it was "all of them" who committed the crime. Just as Gittes drives Evelyn to her death unwittingly, Louise, Varriker, her father, Rubin Sinclair, and John Glass all bear responsibility for the death of Dylan Riley, because their secrets, their problems, their proclivities and their weaknesses had made this child into the amoral, drifting shape-shifter that he is, and the murderer he has become.

This "shared responsibility" finale is interesting because the final chapters explicitly refer to Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* where, famously, all the potential suspects are found to be guilty of the murder. In the penultimate chapter's closing lines David prefigures his mother's explanation of the crime by derisively referring to Glass as "Monsieur Poirot", Glass having wrongly accused

Mulholland of the murder of Riley (172). “And then there were three” David continues following Big Bill’s departure from this scene, leaving Louise, David and Glass together, the utterance being another allusion to a Christie mystery, *And Then There Were None*, a novel where *all* the characters are victims and murderers. “Why are you *doing* this? You don’t *need* to…” Louise plaintively asks, stunned by the gradual unravelling of her complexly arranged web of obscured relations at the hands of her husband’s recently rediscovered journalistic instinct. “*Need*?” Glass cries, bemused, before David dismisses his curiosity with a characteristic disdain: “He’s just a broken-down reporter who’s missed the story entirely… Because you see, *Dad*, it’s *Murder on the Orient Express*. We *all* did it, all of us – including you” (173).

And he has missed the story. The *Chinatown* references throughout the text suggest Glass is in a mystery that ultimately leads back to the all-powerful, saturnine father, devouring his children and grandchildren’s future, but this is not the case. Glass’ deficient vision of a cloudy, cold New York refracted as water starved, desert dry Los Angeles shows that he’s been reading the wrong story all along. Rather than the grandfather, it’s the grandchild who’s the guilty one here. The killer’s mother tries to pin the blame on herself, one more effort to defy the irrepressible march of Glass’ investigative powers returning, but eventually admits that it was David who left the apartment to talk with Riley that morning he was killed, before bewailing the kind of person her son has become due to what she sees as the complex and unloving relationships he’s been burdened with. The references to Christie’s works at the end of the novel should be read as a final reveal, the resolution to the mystery of how this novel is to be read. Returning to Declan Hughes’s criticism, he notes the pinched, prickly language and persona of Glass, which seems to come from another time,

though the story supposedly unfolds in the recent past, where computers and mobile-phones and all the rest play crucial roles in the creation and uncovering of the mystery. This observation is telling because this language and these characters seem more suited to the kind of drawing room, puzzle mysteries as written by Christie during the "Golden Age" of mystery novels. There are other metonymic resonances earlier in the book too, such as Glass's observation that Riley seemed to be affecting a mock-British accent as they discussed the research he was to conduct. John Glass, like Quirke before him, has been watching too many movies. In misreading events he has turned his world on its head, and shows the ambiguous side of cinema that Banville plays with throughout these texts.

A Special Kind of Honey: *The Black-Eyed Blonde* and Hollywood

The imagined Los Angeles in John Glass' mind leads him down strange alleyways and dead ends, his cinematic misreading of New York as *Chinatown* and his father-in-law as Noah Cross wrecking his personal life while seemingly boosting his professional ambition. This sclerotic attitude is reflected in the way the intertextual references leaven the mystery of *The Lemur* with a cultural significance that suggests some overlap or confusion between Black and Banville. One of Banville's more recent works as Black, *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, delves deeper into the Hollywood fascination evidenced by *The Lemur*, playing on the dualities of the cinema in more than just a functional or instrumental way. In this novel, reviving Philip Marlowe, the worlds of cinema and Hollywood serve to underline the divergence between appearance and reality. The cinema is deeply embedded within the aesthetic logic of Marlowe's world, and in exploring and explaining this feature of *The Black-Eyed Blonde* this section

will drill down deeper into the import of the cinema in the Black works in general.

Following the release of *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, which acts as a sequel or conclusion of sorts to Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, Banville acknowledged the value of the fifties as a time and place for crime fiction: "For noir fiction, the fifties are a wonderful period, but it was mean and poverty-stricken, spiritually as well as financially. I was a child in the fifties and it was awful, but to write about it now is fascinating" (Banville *Guardian* 2015). The abundance of references to movie stars of bygone ages makes clear that Banville's spiritual needs were nourished to some extent in the cinema, and that the novel itself is informed as much by this youthful indulgence in cinema as it is the darkness of those times.

The Black-Eyed Blonde takes place sometime after the events of *The Long Goodbye.* In its predecessor Marlowe is enlisted by his friend Terry Lennox to help him make a swift getaway to Mexico following the death of his wife. Terry fakes his own death in Mexico, returning to Los Angeles later with his face reconfigured so as to avoid the interests of police and others who would wish him harm for his wild ways and playboy lifestyle. Terry's ghost haunts this revived Marlowe text from the beginning. In the opening scene, where Marlowe meets the "blonde" of the title, Clare Cavendish, an extravagantly wealthy heiress to a perfume fortune, Terry's story crops up obliquely. Mrs Cavendish is visiting Marlowe's office to contract him to investigate the disappearance of her lover, Nico Peterson. She references her friendship with Linda Loring, and old ex of Marlowe and sister of Lennox's dead wife. These convoluted relationships sit very easily in the Chandlerian world and resonate with Banville's general thematic, where complex stories and an inability to adequately make a coherent story of the world is a recurring preoccupation for his

protagonists. Throughout the text Terry's absence from the story swells as Marlowe muses on Terry's changes in character to accompany his changed appearance. The connection between himself, Linda, her father, and Lennox is returned to several times to emphasise Banville's intent that the novel be read not only as a Marlowe novel, but as a follow up to *The Long Goodbye.* It is no surprise that Terry is in fact the hidden actor behind the whole Peterson investigation, emerging at the end to greet his old friend Marlowe and to meet the fate he perhaps deserved at the conclusion of Chandler's novel.

The emergence of Terry from behind a curtain in the opulent home of Clare Cavendish to greet Marlowe is a resonant and allusive image in the concluding scenes of a novel where the cinema, identified with the long flowing curtains that opened and closed the film feature of his youthful reminiscences, is gradually stripped of its power to create illusions and images of superficial completeness, only for them to fall to pieces under scrutiny. As he waits to meet Terry that night, prior to this climactic visit to the Cavendish estate, Marlowe visits a matinee showing of a Marx Brothers movie, *Horse Feathers*. However, this is purely to kill time, and Marlowe can't help but betray the loneliness that Terry's lapsed friendship and distorted character is emblematic of. He meditates on the women working in the cinema. First there is "the usherette... a redhead with bangs and a cute mouth and friendly eyes" (256). Then "down in the stalls there was another nice-looking girl, posing in front of the screen with a tray of ice cream and candy and cigarettes" (256). She wears "a sort of chambermaid's outfit, with a short black skirt and a collar of white lace and a little white hat like an upturned paper boat" (256). These lingering descriptions of the female staff speak to the sense of loneliness and isolation that the cinema in

Marlowe's world represents. To drive home this point Marlowe continues: "There weren't more than a dozen customers in the place, solitary souls like me, sitting as far apart from each other as they could get" (256). After the trailer and adverts have played the spotlight falls on the ice cream seller again. "She did her pose, flexing one knee and tilting her head and showing us her teeth in a come-hither smile, but all the same there were no takers, and after a minute the spotlight went off with a discouraged click, the curtains opened, and the movie came on" (256-257). As previous chapters have discussed, the voyeuristic aspect of cinematic experience is a preoccupation of late Banville novel protagonists, and Marlowe's framing of the ice cream girl here bear similarly suggestive undertones, the lace brim of her chambermaid-like outfit, the flick of her leg, the "come-hither smile" are all easy to read. Like Alex Cleave, Marlowe's feelings at this moment are imbued with a sense of isolation and loneliness that, while implicit in the fatalistic pessimism that defines much of Chandler and Banville's fifties LA, is not always presented as though it has impeded on the "shop soiled Galahad's" perspective so thoroughly as to cause the following reflections:

> I sat there waiting for the bouncing brothers to work their magic on me, but it was no good. I didn't laugh; nor did anyone else. Funny movies are funny only in a full house. When the place is nearly empty, you notice how after every joke there's a deliberate pause in the action to allow for a wave of laughter from the audience, and since this evening no one was laughing, the whole thing began to seem sad. Halfway through I got up and left. (257)

This episode precedes the final confrontation with his former friend Terry Lennox. Marlowe has pieced together the story behind all the stories he's been told,

and realised that Terry has been the hidden mover behind the pursuit of Nico Peterson, and Marlowe's miserable visit to the movies reads very much like the depressed travails of a betrayed lover.

Though there is no suggestion of a homosexual relationship between them, theirs is an unusual bond in both *The Long Goodbye* and *The Black-Eyed Blonde* given the scarcity of close personal friends in Marlowe's life, and certainly deserves to be raised as a possible issue given Marlowe's marked distrust of women throughout Chandler's novels. Writing in his *Readers Guide to Raymond Chandler*, Toby Widdicombe notes that there is critical tradition regarding the question of Marlowe's sexuality, where, of particular relevance to this discussion, "Michael Mason finds *The Long Goodbye* 'more emphatically, even overtly, a novel of homosexual feeling than any of the others' by Chandler" (31). While other commentators view this as something of an over interpretation of the Lennox relationship - Gene D. Phillips, for instance, arguing that it is the genre of hardboiled fiction that foregrounds male friendship as against heterosexual affairs (28) - it is nonetheless a provocative thought and an aspect of the Chandlerian oeuvre that Banville gestures towards in a couple of scenes.

Most strikingly, a homosexual subculture of fifties Los Angeles flickers in an early episode. Marlowe visits a bar, Barney's Beanery, which displays a sign, "Fagots [sic] - Stay Out", (19) that suggests this is anything but a thriving site of the local gay community, but other aspects of the scene undermine the stated anti-homosexual policy. For one thing, the way Marlowe mines the barman, Travis, for information, takes on something of a sensual, solicitous tone. Marlowe lingers on Travis's physique - "Travis flexed his muscleman's shoulders in a shrug. He was wearing a tight black

sweatshirt, out of which his thick short neck stuck up like a fireplug" (20) - and also notes his suggestive tattoo, an anchor with a red rose entwined around it. There is also an air of wistful (perhaps forbidden) romance about the barman to Marlowe's eye, as "he had a way of standing with his hands spread on the bar and his big square head lowered, gazing out through the open doorway into the street with a far-off look in his eye, as if he were remembering a long-lost love or a fight one time that he won" (20). Marlowe also notes how Travis is "very popular with the 'fagots,' who, despite the warning sign, kept on coming here", before wondering if "maybe there was a reason [Travis] didn't notice women, and that he too didn't much like the sign behind the bar, for his own, private reasons," (21) when asking him about Clare Cavendish and whether he'd even seen her with Nico Peterson in the bar. The scene also opens with Marlowe wondering whether Travis knows his name, and closes with Marlowe leaving his name and number with Travis: "I had passed Travis my card and asked him to give me a call if he happened to hear any news of Peterson. I wouldn't be waiting by the phone, but at least now Travis knew my name" (23). It is tempting to wonder if there is another motive behind Marlowe's eagerness to make this connection with Travis.

There are further elements of the story too that gesture towards some form of gay culture in Marlowe's LA. If Travis, barkeep of the unpretentious Beanery, is a "salt of the earth" type, Floyd Hanson, manager of a much more exclusive social spot, the Cahuilla Club, is his opposite. It is late in the story when his homosexuality is confirmed, though there are hints in Marlowe's early encounters with him, and especially with regard to "the Lost Boys" and the "Captain Hook" title Lamarr, one of the unfortunates working in the Cahuilla Club, gives Hanson. When Marlowe's

connection in the police department, Bernie Ohls, calls him after his adventure in the Cahuilla Club, he describes picking up Hanson as he attempted to flee LA and the police. Ohls tells Marlowe they caught Hanson at his home, packing up things before making his escape: "'Jeez, you should have seen his place,' Bernie said. 'These big framed photos of musclemen on the walls and purple silk dressing gowns in the closets'. He flapped a limp-wristed hand and whistled softly. 'Whoo-whoo!'" (205) Later, when Nico Peterson meets Marlowe and explains what's been going on, Marlowe wants to know how he faked his own death, or rather, why Floyd Hanson helped him to fake it. He explains that he didn't need to pay him, as Hanson had made a pass at Nico when he was younger and he'd used that to blackmail him into helping pull off the stunt (250).

The homosexual undertones serve to illustrate the defining feature of noir fiction, the necessity of secrets and the alternate reality they create. As such, they also point to the importance of cinema throughout *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, where the illusions of the screen are gradually stripped away as Marlowe delves deeper into his investigation. It is not a coincidence that Marlowe's miserable trip to the Marx brother movie follows his discovery that Terry Lennox has been using him, and the woman he has become infatuated with, Clare Cavendish, has been party to this enterprise. Marlowe's attitude to the movie business follows his descent into the mystery Cavendish brings to him in the opening pages.

This opening points toward the cinema as a theme that will recur frequently in the following text. The first paragraph here marks itself out as cinematic by virtue of the focus on Clare Cavendish even before Marlowe has met her or knows she is about to employ him. Marlowe sets the scene, describing the day as a summer Tuesday

afternoon, “when you wonder if the earth has stopped revolving [...] Cars trickled past in the street below the dusty window of my office, and a few of the good folks of our fair city ambled along the sidewalk, men in hats, mostly, going nowhere” (1). These general descriptions are not in themselves cinematic, but take on a more filmic quality in light of what follows. The opening paragraph continues:

> I watched a woman at the corner of Cahuenga and Hollywood, waiting for the light to change. Long legs, a slim cream jacket with high shoulders, navy blue pencil skirt. She wore a hat, too, a skimpy affair that made it seem as if a small bird had alighted on the side of her hair and settled there happily. She looked left and right and left again—she must have been so good when she was a little girl—then crossed the sunlit street, treading gracefully on her own shadow. (1)

Again, these do not seem inherently cinematic, but when it turns out that this woman is walking into Marlowe’s office to open the case that makes up the narrative of the novel, it does take on a more cinematic aspect because this initial view of Clare becomes an establishing shot of her from Marlowe’s window. This focus on a particular woman may seem “natural” given Marlowe’s greater interest in women over the “men in hats, mostly, going nowhere” (1) on the sidewalk outside, but that his eye, as the narrator of the story, alights on her out of everything and everyone that is passing, as though it were a camera in the opening scenes of a noir movie is both a cinematic flourish that is not required for the narrative to begin (Clare Cavendish could just walk into Marlowe’s office, do we need this “shot” of her from Marlowe’s window?) and signals the cinematic content that permeates the opening sections of the narrative. Clare is framed cinematically several times throughout the story by Marlowe, such as when they walk along the beach and he feels “There should have

been music, a big whoosh of soupy violins, and some guy with a vowel at the end of his name crooning about the sea and the sand and the summer wind and you...” (42). This cinematic material comes in several forms, but can be characterised in general as pertaining to the nature of LA, Hollywood, its surrounds and the industry built up around the southern California entertainment business.

Clare Cavendish becomes the central focus of this cinematic spectacle. She is a figure that, the more she appears, the less clear she becomes. Initially she seems to fit the role of femme fatale perfectly, but the opening meeting between detective and client is most notable in hindsight for Marlowe because this is an act, withholding relevant information from the private eye who is supposed to be helping her and also lying about her motives; even though she asks Marlowe to find “her lover” Nico Peterson, she does not tell him that she knows he is, according to official records, dead already, killed in a hit and run car accident, and that she was at the scene of his apparent death moments after it happened. As his investigation progresses Marlowe realises that her cool exterior and casual references to adulterous behaviour in this first scene have been an act, as he cannot believe that Nico Peterson and Clare were lovers prior to his disappearance. Nico is a low-life, working on the fringes of the film industry and a living a dissolute, disreputable life, someone who the moneyed, refined, beautiful, wealthy Clare would not move in the same social circles as or be involved with in any business dealings. This realisation that all is not as it seems does not mean that Marlowe, becoming a typically Banvillian narrator under the gaze of a beautiful woman, enjoys any greater insight into Clare’s ambiguous character. Even when they enjoy their brief affair, the sense of mystery about her true motivations with him only grows. The more he tries to understand her, and the mystery she brought to him, the

less anything makes sense.

This opacity, along with her framing in cinematic terms from the very opening paragraph and the coincident slide of her character in the eyes of Marlowe alongside his disillusionment with the cinema generally suggests that she ought to be read as representation of the cinema in this story. Her ambiguous relationships and curious behaviour are regularly marked as cinematic by the framing and content of her meetings with Marlowe, and an examination of these will show that the sensuality and ambiguity of cinematic images discussed in previous chapters here informs the creation of Clare Cavendish as femme fatale in Banville's Marlowe tale.

Their first meeting is not just framed in cinematic terms by the way she enters his office, as their talk turns to the movies as Clare explains the job. Nico is trying to make it in Hollywood as an agent. She explains how "if you ask him, he'll tell you he's an agent to the stars. The people he had to see so urgently were usually connected to one of the studios", before throwing out a possible lead for Marlowe, Mandy Rogers, one of Nico's "starlets", who she describes as "Jean Harlow without the talent" (5). Harlow, a sex symbol of Hollywood's early years, fits into the blonde bombshell stereotype discussed in relation to Marilyn Monroe in the previous chapter, and defined by Annette Kuhn as "a blonde with explosive sexuality and is available to men at a price" (47). "Jean Harlow had talent?" (5) Marlowe replies, his savvy pop cultural joke eliciting a smile from the mysterious Cavendish.

This reference is one of countless references to movie stars throughout that imbue the text with a both a sense of place and gesture towards the darker side of the industry. Harlow, for instance, died at the age of twenty six, and her passing gave rise to outlandish speculation and innuendo, ranging from rumours that her mother refused

to allow her to be treated for her illness due to religious beliefs, to the suggestion that her malady was related to venereal diseases. This gossip, as well as the unfounded murmurings that she was responsible for the murder-made-to-look-like-suicide of her husband Paul Bern, give a flavour of the kind of associations and stories that the back drop of Hollywood give to Banville's Marlowe. When Marlowe visits a bar early in the novel, he recalls on entering how the barman would tell a story about "Errol Flynn and something he did here at the bar one night with a pet snake he kept in a bamboo box, but I can't remember the punch line," (20-21) Flynn's reputation for sexual experimentation being the punch line to Banville's joke here. There is also a darker side to the on screen swashbuckler and off screen hedonist, where a trial for statutory rape (acquitted on all charges) and rumours of other affairs with underage girls ruined his career and left a trail of destruction in the lives of those around him.

The irony of these references is that the lives of those who appear on the cinema screen provide storylines that eclipse the content of the movies they starred in; Hollywood, in its early years, is already very effective at rewarding and ruining those who "make it", as well as those who don't. Several episodes during Marlowe's investigation drive home this point, where the cinema's ability to mask reality is made clear through the overt framing of these characters as cinematic and their significance to the tone of Marlowe's digressions and place in the plot.

His meeting with Mandy Rogers initially appears to be a dead end in terms of his search for Nico Peterson, but by the end of the text her references to Peterson's visits to Acapulco in Mexico actually point to his involvement with Terry Lennox and his drug dealing associates south of the border. "You've been a real help, Miss Rogers," he tells her, giving her his "liar's smile" (103) as he prepares to leave in

frustration, but it's true that she has provided a significant lead as to why Nico has disappeared (to escape his "friends" from Acapulco, who want the heroin he stole once smuggled over the border back) and to Terry Lennox's role as puppet master behind the plot. Full of irony, Marlowe, lowering his voice "as though confiding a trade secret", tells her "in my business [...] there's nothing that's not important, nothing that doesn't help to build up a picture" (104). The choice of the picture as metaphor here is telling, Marlowe's "business" is also a picture business, just like Mandy's. At the time this is a joke for Marlowe and the reader, his meeting having seemingly served no purpose, but in fact what he says is true. The whole episode does serve the purpose of building up a picture, not just of the circumstances surrounding the Peterson case, but of the world in which it happened, of Hollywood, of low level "agents", the "aspiring stars" they trade in, and the economic and psychological realities of the business of entertainment. This is as much a self-conscious statement by Banville on the process of writing his crime fiction as it is an ironic statement on Marlowe's investigation.

This surreptitious, meta-fictional gesture towards the construction of the plot in this meeting amplifies the significance of the episode, which is already heavily overlaid with thematic and tonal import. This is already established through Clare Cavendish, who is framed as a femme fatale in the opening pages of the novel. Her vampish, sexually confident and mysterious presence in Marlowe's office being a character she adopts, as it later transpires her daringly casual admission of marital infidelity with Nico Peterson is a fiction, and her manner in this encounter is an act designed to pique Marlowe's interest in the case. Further, Chandler's seven Marlowe novels, to varying degrees, involve a femme fatale type character engaging Marlowe

at some point. As such, Banville is self-consciously creating the Cavendish character as someone who is herself self-consciously acting a part to lure Marlowe into Terry Lennox's plot based on information, that Marlowe cannot resist a mysterious blonde in need of help, Lennox has provided.

Mandy Rogers's appearance further emphasises the hall of mirrors-like world of Hollywood Banville is creating for Marlowe to get lost in. Marlowe connects with Mandy through Hal Wiseman. Wiseman is presented from the very first as thoroughly filmic, Marlowe reaching for movie stars Edward G. Robinson and Wallace Beery to describe his physical appearance. Marlowe tells us he is "chief security officer" at the fictional Excelsior Studios, which means he cleans up any potential scandals involving stars contracted by the studio before they become public knowledge, or, as Marlowe puts it, Wiseman spends "his time babysitting starlets and keeping the younger actors on the straight and narrow, or on the not too crooked and not too wide, at least" (94).

Wiseman is also Marlowe's way in to the movie world of would-be agent Nico Peterson. Banville enjoys playing with names in his novels, and Hal Wiseman seems an instance of nominative determinism, where the accrued wisdom of his time working in and around Hollywood has infused his perspective on the world with a healthy degree of cynicism, verging on disgust, that sits easily in a Marlowe's world. His visit to the studio to meet Mandy is arranged by Hal, and it provides the first glimpse behind the curtain of Hollywood's hidden operations.

This downbeat, cynical tone reverberates through his visit to the studio. Marlowe's initial impression of the studio lot is the first marker of this, and it continues through his interview with Rogers and each encounter or observation throughout his tour, serving to strip away any sense of mystery or magic about the

film business. He notes the odd sights you see once you cross the barrier on the studio lot: “You feel like you’re in a waking dream, meeting cowboys and showgirls, ape-men and Roman centurions, all of them just walking along like any other bunch of workers on their way to the office or the factory” (97). The strange air is heightened by rain on the lot when Marlowe visits, meaning all these characters wander around with umbrellas in addition to their outlandish costumes. “Was that James Cagney we just passed?” he asks Hal. “Yeah. He’s on lease from Warner Brothers, doing a fight picture for us. The movie is crap, but Cagney will carry it. That’s what stars are for” (97). As if the sight of Roman centurions sheltering from the rain in a car park didn’t undermine his sense of cinematic wonder, Hal is there to cut through any illusions he holds about the business. James Cagney’s movie is “crap”, but that’s not what matters, he’s a star, it’ll make money, the business side of show business is ultimately what matters here.

In case the point is lost, Marlowe describes him as “blasé” before saying “you’ve seen it all and don’t care for any of it anymore” (97). Wiseman replies “You see how you’d feel, wiping the puke off the back seat of your car at four in the morning after you’ve sprung yet another star of the silver screen out of the drunk tank and dumped him at his mansion in Bel-Air,” (97) before another screen star, Tallulah Bankhead, is referenced, Hal complaining of her, adding that “the dames are even worse”. Again, Banville here is playing on Hollywood legend, the actress being as famous for her sexual libertinism and enjoyment of alcohol and drugs as she was for her roles on screen.

Further, there are the brief moments where his interview with Rogers drifts from the Peterson case to her personal life, beneath the veneer of show biz. He asks

her where she's from, a leadenly ironic Hope Springs, Iowa, being the answer. Mandy's bleak observation being "Hope Springs is the kind of place people leave" (101), people leave the place where hope springs to come to Hollywood, where hope withers up, is rendered unrecognisable by phony acts and plastic augmentation, or just dies. The boy who collects Marlowe's car and asks him if he wants a drink during the interview is similarly framed in terms of the "hopeful" hopelessness of Hollywood, where Marlowe marvels at his "big smile" before wondering if "his old ma in Peoria or wherever had sacrificed her life's savings for [it]" (98). And later, a guy who "could've been his brother" serves them coffee while trying to catch the eye of Mandy, prompting Marlowe to muse on his own sense of dejection at this whole episode and the glimpse behind the curtain it affords him: "I could have worked up a thought about the movies being a machine for devouring the young and the eager, but instead I asked for a cup of coffee" (100). Such is Marlowe's weariness and disillusionment at these scenes of eager, youthful hope lining up for the slaughter house of experience that he cannot bring himself to fully voice the sense of grim inevitability at their fate.

These references are carefully placed throughout this passage to draw attention to the seedy underside of the film business, the disjuncture between that which is on screen and that which lies behind those images. The stars they reference are examples of those who have already been through the Hollywood wringer, their murkily public private lives consumed by a nascent mass media and public. The other side of this relationship is those who are transfixed by the images on screen to such an extent that they want to become someone whose life and work is talked about in this way too.

This observation sets the tone for his subsequent meeting with Mandy Rogers,

where her every move and utterance is filtered through the lens of playing a role as switching between different characters, her "true self", and the truth value of her statements, remaining obscured by the performance. Hal arranges this meeting, so Marlowe already assumes he is the director of the scene about to play out, with his aim being to avoid any controversy, and he immediately assumes that Mandy has already begun playing the role Hal demands:

> Mandy Rogers sat at a table by the window, posing with a hand to her chin and gazing out soulfully at the sad gray day and thinking great thoughts [...] She made a show of tearing herself away from her reverie and turned her saucer eyes up to me and smiled. (98)

All of this is a studied performance, and seemingly (at least to Marlowe), a not very convincing one, her would-be thoughtful "pose" staring out at the gloomy day striking a false note for the private eye, her distracted manner a little too insistent, and then her eyes and smile, supplicant beneath him, take on a coquettish quality as she attempts to defuse any potentially problematic issues that may arise in relation to herself, her associate Nico Peterson, and the studio. Mandy's suggestive manner prompts Marlowe to muse on the nature of "film people", noting how even a performer as low down the ladder of the industry as Mandy has,

> a special something [...] They spend so much of their days looking into things - cameras, mirrors, the eyes of their fans - that they get a smooth, all-over glaze, as if they'd been smeared with a special kind of honey. In the female of the species, the effect can take your breath away when you get treated to it up close. (98)

Mandy holds Marlowe's hand as they greet one another, and Marlowe is dumbstruck, Hal joking that he looks like he's going to faint. In this air of wonderment at "the female of the species" it is difficult not to hear the voice of a Banvillian male protagonist from his other novels rather than the detective. Marlowe, with another cinema reference, tries to talk himself around, saying Mandy is "no Rita Hayworth", being "on the short side, not exactly slim, a bottle blonde with a butterfly mouth and a chubby little chin." But she is dressed to impress Marlowe "wearing a scarlet dress that was tight and low in the bodice and full in the skirt. Only in a film studio could a girl get away with a dress like that in the middle of the afternoon" (98-99). In playing Marlowe like this, Hal Wiseman is using the young actress the way Terry Lennox use Clare Cavendish in the wider plot of the novel. As Marlowe learns later, Terry knew his type and knew he would allow himself to be led into the mystery by Clare Cavendish's femme fatale act.

Mandy moves from femme fatale to a school girl-like naïf throughout her conversation with Marlowe. The bottle of Coke she drinks from, straw poking out from the top, is a prop for her faux-innocent act, coyly sipping from the bottle as though she were just another teenager hanging around the local diner or drug store. Next she rustles her hair flirtatiously, turning from "bobbysoxer to big-eyed siren", making a ridiculous show of thinking hard over Marlowe's questions, and all while talking to Marlowe about how "sweet" he is and how interesting his job must be (100). Marlowe imagines her as "the rancher's daughter, dainty one minute and feisty the next, in a gingham skirt and button boots, with a big bow in her hair" in some western movie; her eyes widen and her mouth making a Marilyn Monroe-like "O" shape when Marlowe asks her whether she went to Mexico with Nico (101-103). "Of

course I didn't! I suppose you think I'm the usual Hollywood tramp, ready to go anywhere, with anyone," (103) is her shocked reply. And finally, as he's about to leave he asks her if she'll talk to him again, pretending that the interview has been helpful to his case, and:

> she remembered who she was supposed to be, and moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue and leaned her head back lazily, showing off her snowy throat; I guessed Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*, which was one I had seen. (104)

As Marlowe puts it, "Since I'd first set eyes on her, five minutes or so previously, she had tried out half a dozen parts" (100).

In terms of the plot, this episode only gains significance in retrospect, the would-be movie star contributing to the "big picture" of Marlowe's investigation with her references to Nico's friends in Mexico. It is at the level of mood milieu that the real significance lies. Hal Wiseman's cynicism gives one insight into the business behind the camera, and Mandy's performance another. When Marlowe asks her about Nico Peterson, her "agent" who secured roles in productions for her, she genuinely has very little to say about him. "He was just a guy on the make. I liked him, I suppose—not in that way, of course. I mean, he wasn't even a friend, just a business associate" (103). There's little connection between people in this part of LA beyond their shared business interests. The enticing performance of Mandy, and of Clare before her, is just business too.

There are deeper connections in this world, of course, such as family, but even these ties do not escape the duplicity of Hollywood and cinema. The cinematic

references around David Sinclair in *The Lemur* mark him as a killer, and similarly here, the cinematic references around Everett Edwards, Clare Cavendish's half-brother, flag his significance from his first appearance. Marlowe arrives at the Cavendish family home where Clare, her husband, her mother and Everett have enough space to live separate lives on the same giant estate. As Marlowe makes his way to the mansion he comes across the sportily attired Everett Edwards the Third. "You mean there have been two of you already?" (29) Marlowe quips on hearing this title, and this intimation of Everett as being a copy, a fake, a version of a previous person, is built up through their dialogue in the scene. Marlowe notes his theatrical manner and his jokey way, how childish he seems though Marlowe guesses he must be in his late twenties. Further emphasising his performing talents, he quotes from *Doctor Faustus* on hearing Marlowe's name, and Marlowe can't help but see him as trying to act like a tough guy. Later, when Marlowe talks to Clare, she makes the cinematic aspect of Everett clearer. Seeking to relieve the tension that has built between them as they stroll along the private beach on Cavendish's estate, Marlowe reaches for Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara, explaining that he does not want the kind of drama Clare Cavendish seems intent upon drawing him into. As an adaptation, *Gone with the Wind* is not just a cinematic reference, but the mention of Rhett Butler causes Clare to disappear into her own thoughts for a moment. Rhett is also her nickname for her half-brother, Everett, and she laughs, "I can't imagine anyone less like Clark Gable" (45). Her sudden thoughtfulness at the mention of her brother takes on greater significance as the story unfolds, for he is a heroin addict and Terry Lennox was the friend who got him hooked. Terry's death at the hands of Everett is the final act of his performance.

Marlowe's illusions about Clare Cavendish are shattered by the finale. These illusions are partly based on the cinematic reading of Clare from the opening scene of the story. Marlowe certainly does not seem out of place in the Banvillian universe of misreading narrators. In the diminished cinema of these crime novels, we see the movie business emerge as a place where very little hope springs. *The Lemur* shows John Glass believing in movie ideas and clichés that ruin his relationship with his wife and those around him. In reading his own circumstances as though he were in *Chinatown,* Glass manages to completely miss the mistakes he is making and the destruction he is headed for. And for the characters around Quirke, the cinema is fantasy in the worst possible sense, leading them to believe and expect things that do not happen in their world. As such, the crime writing of Benjamin Black represents a dark meditation on the cinema.

Epilogue:

Reel-to-Real

As a writer of novels, John Banville's reputation has developed through several stages in popular literary discussion. From the playful opacity of early works combining modernist/post-modern elements in deconstructing literary conventions, to the tales of the astronomers who, in a literal sense, rewrote humankind's understanding of itself when they read beyond the starry nights of mid-millennium Europe, and onto his later, more psychological and allusive works, some ideas have developed around his work that, while sprouting from a seed of unquestionably germane truth, have long since petrified into a forest of facile cliché. His novels are "difficult", "cold", "intellectual", he is a "writer's writer", more concerned with art, with language and the craft of writing than "Life", "The Human" and other such dubious generalised terms. Such handles are obviously a necessary evil when discussing an artist's work for a wide public audience, but they can also act as a smokescreen or distorting force on the work itself, generating an image for the work which is less warranted or truthful than one might wish it to be. Reading many reviews and interviews that accompany the publication of his novels, a casual reader might develop the impression that, rather like physical exercise, these novels are "good for you" though you may not enjoy them, see the benefits yourself, and can often find yourself suffering severe discomfort or pain as a result of them.

It has to be said that such views of Banville's literary work have also partly been determined by the writer himself. Banville has actively contributed to the

framing of his work in such terms through countless interviews and public performances, as well as his own review writing and criticism. For instance, his opening comment when interviewed live on the BBC following his Booker prize win was that he was glad that "a work of art" had won the prize this time doesn't lend itself to softening his image. He has admitted since that this comment was a swipe directed towards critics of the novel *The Sea* more than any personal expression on the merits of his novel, but ironic comments are a common feature of his public persona, where his interviewer, the listener and the reader may often find themselves, like one of the narrators in his novels, the butt of a joke they do not realise is being made. Listening to interviews with him concerning his own work and that of those he admires, it is often tempting to wonder how serious he is in his apparent "seriousness", especially for someone who clearly enjoys playing up to, and making up, images in his literary work.

It was with this impression in mind that this study began. The claim here is not that Banville's work is any more filled with joy because of the cinematic features traced, or that they are any more "human" due to it (an aside; his works are and always have been, contra conventional wisdom, eminently humane in my own view), but rather that there are other levels to his work, and that the short-hand descriptions and commonplaces regarding it are worth trying to go beyond. The question was posed at the start of this study, why we should consider John Banville's work in relation to the cinema, and even in posing this question and trying to answer it, this study has attempted to break with the conventional wisdom around Banville's work.

Each of the chapters have been an attempt to justify the in-depth consideration of cinematic features of his work, and were undertaken with several related goals in

mind. As has been demonstrated throughout, the simple answer to the opening query is that there is just so much cinematic material to be discussed, but of course there is a second, implicit question; why cinema in the context of wider Banvillian studies? If there is so much there, surely there's a reason it hasn't been done already? With a writer like Banville, whose work involves numerous different writing "personae" - not only is he a novelist, but he is also a critic, a writer for stage, cinema and television, and has written essays, travelogues, and personal pieces about his memories and history - the decision to focus on one aspect of his work is far from easy to make, and must be justified by the material and the critical relevance of the material to wider discourse around his work. The analysis in this study, looking at philosophical, gender and generic aspects of the works, has been undertaken with the awareness that this cinematic framing represents a very different approach to Banville's work. In this regard, if some of the work tends towards labouring points at times, this is because the thesis could not be taken for granted, and showing the material is present in Banville's work is a significant part of building the case for cinema-inflected readings of his work.

A related aim in this regard was the conscious decision to try to bring in more of Banville's marginal work than is usually considered in academic studies of his work. This imperative has continued to guide the study to the end. Banville's prolific level of production over the later period of his career demands that those seriously interested in his work attempt to answer some fundamental questions regarding the range of his writing, much of which has not been tackled in as thorough a way as it could be. There is just so much more to Banville's work than his novels, yet his novels garner almost all critical attention. This study has tried to strike a balance between

extremes in this regard by considering the development of the Benjamin Black persona and Banville's growing interest in other modes of writing more generally (such as script-writing and adaptation) in the context of his earlier work generally and, with greater specificity, his late period novels under the Banville name.

The project had initially been designed to incorporate pieces on his review work, his stage plays and other writing as well, but as it progressed it became clear that one way to connect a diverse range of his work was through the recurring role and space of the cinema in Banville's work. The cinema also becomes a recurring feature in his late period novels, works that have not enjoyed the same level of critical attention as earlier works, so it seemed an ideal concept by which to bring together work that may, on the face of it, seem dissolute, dispersed and seemingly unconnected. Also, Banville's more "personal" writing of recent years has averred to the cinematic influence on his imagination, and while caution is always advisable when considering Banville's public pronouncements given his playful and sometimes provocative attitude, the material gathered and examined here bears out the his youthful reminiscences and the influence the cinema has had over his childish imagination.

The refined focus of the final work is designed to deepen the investigation of Banville's work without diminishing the initial spark for this project. The desire to look at more marginal material has continued to guide this project at both at the level of critical praxis and in terms of the material considered. Hence, the in-depth close reading of key passages and moments in his works for page and screen at the "micro" level, and, in a "macro" sense, the attempt to bring in the Benjamin Black novels and draw upon Banville's script-writing for the cinema, works that have not been

extensively considered in the literature around his work, but which demand to be referenced given their growing number over the later period of his career.

And once the cinematic references begin to stand out in the works, the imagery of the cinema as a space begins to make so much sense in terms of the recurring themes of Banville's novels in general. Indeed, the hope here is that this work makes it difficult to imagine a more Banvillian image than the shimmering screen of the cinema, insofar as the cinema's pictures appear so bright and clear that their subject matter seems present, their circumstances "real", their world a given, yet this is not the case. Much like the words of Banville's narrators, that which is depicted on screen, so seemingly present, is in fact skilfully rendered artifice the value of which is ambiguous or obscure in many instances, and often thinner and flimsier than the material on which they are projected, or, indeed, the pages words are printed on. The pattern traced in the fictional works discussed here, the male narrator misreading the world, is another way of telling a story about a boy in love with images on screen. The cinema encapsulates the tension between appearance and reality inherent within Banville's work, his narrators trying to make their way from a deficient and damaging sense of themselves, those around them and their wider world, to some form of greater accommodation and easier relationship with the image of things.

This is a point worth dwelling on. In broad terms, the cinema in his work functions to emphasise the disparity between appearances and reality, but what is crucial to understand is that it also draws attention to what is cinematic in reality. Or, putting it another way, reality and appearance are not to be treated as contraries in this scheme. It is suggestive to think of the relationship between Benjamin Black and John Banville in this context. While Banville is "real" and Black is not, Black clearly exists

in some sense, even as just a marketing creation if nothing else, in Banville's writing and in Banville's fiction about himself. And then the question comes as to what about Banville isn't real? And, indeed, what are the boundaries between the reality and nothing? The language of cinema elides its own artifice in the same way that words efface their contingent existence, seeming to name, to control, to limit the world but really just amounting to a surface covering of utilitarian handles for things. Their seeming solidity, just like cinematic images seeming coherence and completeness, actually mediates between us and the world in such a way as to call into doubt the difference between the mediated and the mediator.

This is the tension inherent in Copernicus's ambivalence, in Freddie Montgomery's infatuation with Frans Hals' *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves*, and Alex Cleave's relationship with Chloe Grace and her death. Banville's novels swing from the nature of the universe and humankind to the explorations of inner workings of disrupted minds. The science novels look at the medieval skies and the story that was told about the relations between the spheres as they moved across our line of vision from our earthbound view. *Doctor Copernicus* and *Kepler*, in their different ways, bring about a radical redrawing of this situation. No longer are we to look at the skies, we are to look at the mathematical calculations that forecast and track our movement within a broader universe. This new story, however, raises as many questions as it answers, and is the picture, the surface, all that more substantive or meaningful than the one it succeeds? Banville's novels have examined questions about the value of truth and knowledge throughout his career, and whether worries over epistemological certainty ought to be the defining feature of what we understand truth to mean. Nowhere is this more striking than in his early novels, where ironic contrast

lies between the revolutionary scientific work of these men and the contingency of their temporal circumstances and lives. The implication of this is that the theories, the ideas, hung by the gossamer thread of life with all its potential for absurd, ridiculous, chance occurrences, its ultimate lack of overall design or teleological end.

In chance lies ambiguity and doubt, the uncertainty is amplified in *The Newton Letter* and *Mefisto*. In these works, the elliptical, repetitive stories, referencing earlier Banville works like *Birchwood*, as well as their own internal features, depict a world where progress and the future as a place of multiple possibilities exists, but is not at all guaranteed or assured. *The Newton Letter* ends with its anonymous narrator expecting to become a father and deciding to drop his studies, and on the face of it this represents a happy ending of sorts, but there is a sense in which it is rather the realisation that he cannot control life, words, writing, that is the source of his relief and vague happiness here. The abandonment of writing allows for the enjoyment of life.

Accepting that words are unstable, transient, this is as close to control as he can get, and the end of each of Banville's "confessional" novels brings the promise of some form of reconciliation with the world for his troubled narrators. The end of their writing, and their writing through the experiences they've recounted, bringing with it a prospect of a more peaceful future, though there are no guarantees. *The Sea*, for example, closes on Max finally recalling and accepting the moment of his wife's death, combined with a memory of one of the last days of his summer with Chloe. He recalls standing in the sea, and,

> As I stood there, suddenly, no, not suddenly, but in a sort of driving heave, the whole sea surged, it was not a wave, but a smooth rolling swell that seemed to

> come up from the deeps, as if something vast down there had stirred itself, and I was lifted briefly and carried a little way toward the shore and then was set down on my feet as before, as if nothing had happened. And indeed nothing had happened, a momentous nothing, just another of the great world's shrugs of indifference. (263-264)

The world moves, and it doesn't. A momentous nothing has taken place, whatever that might amount to. Max has survived the trauma of his wife's death through the exorcism of his long repressed memories of the Graces, the summers of his childhood, his relationship with his parents, and he is now trying to reconcile with his daughter. But this is contingent, one more ripple in the ocean of time, he has been lifted up by the sea and planted back down once more, and the significance of this episode is still dependent on what comes next in his life.

Ultimately the cinema is another means of exploring these recurrent themes of uncertainty and dislocation, and the related thread of memory's temptingly vivid precision and utter unreliability. Cinema's solidity, it's "thereness", is such a powerful analogue to memory, in that the camera seems so omniscient, to be impossible to dupe, and yet the repositioning from another angle, or the failure to load the next reel in the cinema, reminds us of its partiality and artifice. Claire's image of the film set from magazines when Christine dies in *Christine Falls* suggests itself here once again. The doubts of Banville's narrators have a philosophical and literary significance beyond the bounds of their stories, and the hope here is that, by opening up the cinema as a potential frame of reference for future studies of Banville, that new questions and further possibilities will be explored.

This thesis has touched on psychoanalytic and gender theory related to the

cinema and visual perception in general, but, with the awareness of the groundwork needed to simply introduce the cinema as a relevant frame for Banville's work, there are numerous possible avenues by which the thoughts and material discussed in this work might be further explored. One absence is the cinematic theory based on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic work which dominates much cinematic discourse. This has been a conscious decision, not only because of the wide-ranging prevalence of Lacanian inflected readings in cinema studies, but also because Banville's writing dictated a different approach in setting out the terms by which his could be discussed in relation to cinema. Not just this, but the sphere of gender and cinematic theory has also developed beyond the limited bounds covered here, and it is acknowledged that there is plenty more that could be covered in this regard.

The discussion of Banville's cinematic writing could also bear further reading in relation to Nabokov, but the constraints of space and time here have limited such work to a section in this study. Further work around Banville's journalistic and review work would also be fruitful in this regard, and more widely, a considered analysis of Banville's writing for magazines, newspapers and assorted publications remains to be undertaken (another early ambition of this work that fell away as the project progressed). Acknowledging the limitations of the current study is one way in which to point to further projects, and the priority here is to be provocative, to open up new spaces for consideration. If this endeavour should amount to nothing, the hope is it is another momentous nothing.

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