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# THE LIMITS OF JOURNALISM: How fictional narrative compensates for journalism's shortcomings in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*

Ian Kilroy

## Introduction

AS A NOVELIST AND JOURNALIST, John Banville (1945–) straddles two worlds. A former chief-sub-editor with the *Irish Press*, as well as former literary editor of the *Irish Times* (O'Toole 1989: 25), his narrative practice draws on the principals and paradigms of both fictional and journalistic composition. Indeed, it is only with commercial success as a novelist in recent years that Banville has left day-to-day professional journalism behind him, although he still does regularly contribute to newspapers and magazines.

His employment of journalistic methodologies in his professional life is related to his concerns as a novelist. Journalism's search for an objective, verifiable proof is related to the scientific method. It is the impossibility of achieving this truth that has long obsessed Banville as a creative artist, particularly in *The Revolutions Trilogy* of novels: *Doctor Copernicus* (1976), *Kepler* (1981) and *The Newton Letter* (1982). So, while Banville draws on journalism and history to produce some of his fictions, he does not suggest that the novel can offer any kind of mirror of reality (Molloy 1981: 29). He is sceptical of the claims that journalism makes, while simultaneously practicing journalistic discourse. In a way, he is a quintessentially postmodern writer, in that he uses language to interrogate the limitations and shortcomings of language. Indeed, O'Neill argues that Banville is 'at home in the postmodern company of Nabokov, Barth, Borges, Grass, Fowles, Garcia Marquez, and Calvino' (O'Neill, 1990: 222). It is no surprise, therefore, that Banville the novelist appears to be obsessed with the gap between the actual and the represented, between, as Saussure would have it, the signified and the referent.

John Banville's fictional universe is characterised essentially by difference and discontinuity: the gap, that is, between the real (which may be no more than a convenient fiction) and any attempt to grasp it (which must always be a fiction). All of his writing, mirroring this gap, is accordingly deeply stamped by its own awareness of itself as writing, as fiction, as an artefact which could, after all, have been produced in a very different form. (O'Neill, 1990: 207)

This zone, between the real and the fictional, between journalism and the novel, is an ambivalent, liminal space that it is worth attempting to map. Where the boundary lies between each paradigm matters: to prevent journalism drifting into fiction

and fiction moving so close to truth that it causes public outrage at a truth masquerading as fiction.

### ***The Book of Evidence: Fact and Fiction***

Of his 16 novels to date, it is *The Book of Evidence* (1989) that most draws on reportage and modes of journalistic composition. Based on the facts of a well known Irish murder in the summer of 1982, much of the story was indeed ‘produced in a very different form’: namely, as reportage, just a few years before the novel’s publication. Much of the detail of Banville’s narrative recasts the reported ‘facts’ of the murder of a young nurse, Bridie Gargan, by one Malcolm MacArthur, in Dublin’s Phoenix Park, in July, 1982. The actual murder is regarded as a significant Irish controversy during the Haughey era in Irish life, even meriting mention in a compendium of Irish scandals published in the late 1990s (Kerrigan and Brennan 1999: 201–5). The eventual arrest of MacArthur in the Attorney General’s house and the Attorney General’s subsequent resignation ensured some enduring notoriety for the crime.

Following on from *The Revolutions Trilogy*, and its concern with the impossibility of achieving a final truth (D’Hoker, 2002: 23), *The Book of Evidence* is concerned with, as the title suggests, accruing factual ‘evidence’. The novel is totally narrated by the fictional murderer, Freddie Montgomery. The narrative is addressed to the judge and the court, as a defence on the part of Freddie for his crimes. Freddie is, however (in true postmodern fashion), an unreliable narrator. With the narrative constantly drawing attention to its own fictional construction, it presents an idea of representation as being necessarily subjective. As D’Hoker argues, it is the ‘ethical consequences’ of these ‘subjective representations’ that interest Banville in the book (D’Hoker, 2002: 23).

Clearly, it is the objective voice that journalism so values that remains as a polar opposite to Banville’s narrative claims. Journalism strives for verifiable facts. It seeks to put on the public record an account of events that can be largely relied upon. As a narrative mode, it seeks to reinforce its credibility at every opportunity, rather than draw attention to its failings and construction as a representation of the facts. Yet *The Book of Evidence* certainly has an umbilical connection with the facts of the Malcolm MacArthur case. It is certainly a fiction that stems from actual events. But what is that connection? Where does Banville’s fiction conform and where does it diverge from ‘the facts’? To what extent can it be understood in terms of reportage or as *prima facie* evidence? It is worth holding the parallel domains of the fictional and the factual alongside each other in order to make a comparison.

Contemporary newspaper accounts of the murder, arrest and brief trial of the actual Malcolm MacArthur tell the story of an educated, well spoken, 36-year-old man seeing his inheritance begin to run out while living in Tenerife with his wife and son (*The Irish Times*, 13 January, 1983: 1). He returns home to Ireland, intent on making some money through theft and robbery. For this purpose, he buys a shovel and hammer – the hammer as a potential weapon; the shovel to dispose of any corpse that might result from a robbery. Following his reading of an advertisement for the sale of a shotgun, MacArthur decides to rob a car and drive to Offaly to purchase the gun on sale. In Phoenix Park, Dublin, MacArthur finds Bridie Gargan sunbathing near her car. It is a hot summer’s day. He takes her and locks her into her

own car, then bludgeons her with a hammer, leaving her to die. As he drives off, with Bridie dying in the backseat, he is mistaken for a doctor rushing a casualty to Accident and Emergency. He is escorted to St James's Hospital by a passing ambulance (*Irish Times* 15 January, 1983: 5). There, MacArthur abandons the car and the dying woman and makes his way to Offaly, where he finds the man selling the advertised shotgun, farmer Donal Dunne. MacArthur kills Dunne with his own gun and makes his way back to Dublin. In Dublin, he looks up his old friend Patrick Connelly, who is now the Attorney General, and Connelly allows MacArthur stay in his seaside flat, to the south of Dublin city. Here MacArthur is eventually apprehended and arrested, leading to a political and national scandal, due to the involvement of the Attorney General in the whole affair (Brennan and Kerrigan, 1999: 203).

While not quite a facsimile of the facts, Banville's story is remarkably close. While this is something recognised by most commentators on the novel (See Hand 2002:132, for example), some, like Imhof, hardly acknowledge the plot's source inspiration in real events, treating the novel purely as an aesthetic, or artistic artefact.

In *The Book of Evidence*, the fiction itself, Frederick Charles St John Vanderveld Mountgomery is living overseas, in a hot climate, with his wife and son. Like MacArthur, he has an academic background, having studied in the US, and is well spoken. As his inheritance runs out, he gets into trouble for borrowing money he can't repay. He decides to return to Ireland to secure some finances from his mother. However, he soon realises that his mother will be of no assistance. He therefore decides to steal one of his family's valuable paintings that his mother has sold on. In the process of stealing the picture, he comes across maid Josie Bell, whom he drags into the back of a car and murders with a hammer (Banville, 1989: 112–19). The details of Bell's murder bear a striking resemblance to the death of Bridie Gargan: the dying woman's bloody handprints on the car window; the mistaken ambulance driver that escorts the murderer to hospital; the brutal bludgeoning that ended the woman's life (*The Irish Times*, 15 January 1983: 1 & 5). The subsequent man-hunt for Freddie, as well as his hiding out in a prominent person's residence, also draw on the reported facts of the MacArthur case. For example, the witnesses that led to MacArthur's arrest; his public demeanour and pronouncements after arrest; the accused's guilty plea. Indeed, it is an easy exercise to list the full mirroring of the particulars of fact and fiction in Banville's narrative and the narrative of the MacArthur case, as reported in contemporary journalism.

But *The Book of Evidence* remains a fiction; and as such, there are many places where these two parallel narratives diverge. The Dunne murder is omitted from the fictional plot, as are the details of the Attorney General's involvement. The painting that Freddie attempts to steal is central to *The Book of Evidence*, whereas no painting existed in actuality. The scenes of the action are recast and less specific in Banville's account. And that most basic of fictional devices: in the novel, the names are changed.

For contemporary readers of the novel, however, this was clearly a fictional telling of actual events (McMinn, 1999: 101–2). And this connection between the actual and fictional events of the MacArthur case remain in the reading Irish public's mind, with the *Irish Independent* reporting in 2012 that the now free MacArthur's presence at a public interview with Banville added a 'frisson to the evening'.

The double murderer MacArthur, on whom Banville based one of his best known novels, *The Book of Evidence*, appeared to be alone [at the event in Trinity College, Dublin] ... He was beautifully dressed, as ever, although a cravat had replaced the bow tie familiar from the press pictures of him after the killing spree in 1982 (*Irish Independent*, 15 December, 2012).

In this *Irish Independent* article, Banville is quoted as saying MacArthur was kept in jail for ‘an unjustifiably long time’, for what he describes as a ‘heinous’ crime. Although the two men did not meet that evening, it was a curious and compelling example of when fact and fiction come face to face. What makes the boundaries of each difficult to navigate is the constant overlapping of each. Even Banville’s public commentary on the MacArthur case displays an implicit connection that the author of fiction has with the whole real affair. How easy it is to mix up the two – as Banville’s protagonist, Freddie Montgomery, discovered.

### Art versus Reality

It is important to reassert that Banville is not attempting a simulation of reality in his fiction, but rather something closer to a simulacra, as Baudrillard termed it (Baudrillard 1983). Indeed for Banville, as Baudrillard asserts, this simulacra is all that may be possible. So, if *The Book of Evidence* is based on objective, verifiable events of any kind, it is a subjective retelling of those events as a fictional first-person narrative. There is no sense that Banville is engaging in the project of nineteenth century psychological novelists in attempting to comprehend his protagonist’s motivations as a scientific subject (Imhof 1981: 20). Rather, Banville is working from an aesthetic paradigm where contesting truths and partial, as well as provisional points-of-view are the best to be hoped for.

Banville holds that one cannot unlearn ‘the lesson of modernism, that the novelist cannot go back to ‘realism’ and write as if nothing much had happened in the period between, say, James’s *The Ambassador* and Beckett’s *The Unnamable*.’ (Imhof, 1981: 52)

The connection with reality is of no importance whatsoever for Banville the artist. The facts of the case may, as Hand suggests (Hand, 2002: 134), be almost coincidental for the author. As the writer has argued himself in press interviews (*Irish Times*, 21 October, 1989: 25), he is more concerned with ‘the technical problems’ of art – a statement which reinforces his reputation as a master of form, a writer that is anxious to produce a highly wrought, pristine prose, almost Wildian in its prizing of aesthetic beauty over moral responsibility. Indeed, Banville appears even exasperated at the prospect that the novelist may have any kind of responsibility, even when he so closely resembles real events in his fiction, as Banville does in *The Book of Evidence*.

It’s because the novel ostensibly deals with the world in which we live. It’s still, in England, anyway, a novel idea that that novel can be a work of art (*The Irish Times*, 21 October, 1989: 25)

Central to this question is the relationship between art and life. Is the moral freedom of the artist such that he or she can use reality at will, gain purchase from a claim to be related to actual events, and then deny having any responsibility to those events, once the advantage they lend the work begins to hamper it artistically? In this case, the author appears to claim a Nietzschean freedom from morality for the work. Indeed, Canon-Roger cites the many playful references to Nietzsche in *The Book of Evidence* (Canon-Roger, 2000: 36). In the context of this freedom from morality, the plot is, as Hand has suggested, a convenient story through which to explore artistic concerns. It is, in a sense, more real than reality itself, which the novel's protagonist sees as a fiction in any case.

That's what I should do, I should live henceforth among actors, practise among them, study their craft, the grand gesture and the fine nuance. Perhaps in time I would learn to play my part sufficiently well, with enough conviction, to take my place among the others, the naturals, those people on the bus, and all the rest of them. (Banville, 1989: 133)

Reality itself is a kind of stage set for Freddie; he and everyone else being mere actors. In this universe of competing fictions, there is no reality to act as a touchstone. Even the murdered endure deaths that are almost fictional and can be reimagined and retold in endless versions, both official and fanciful (Banville, 1989: 220). Indeed, the dead can almost be imagined back to life, as Freddie thinks he can almost resurrect the bludgeoned Josie Bell (Banville, 1989: 215), with the power of his imagination.

But at the centre of Banville's book is a great paradox. While laying claim to moral freedom as an artist, Banville simultaneously appears to question that claim through Freddie's statement that he murdered Josie Bell because he could not imagine her clearly enough as a real person. For me, Freddie says, 'she was not alive' (Banville, 1989: 215):

This is the worst, the essential sin, I think, the one for which there will be no forgiveness: that I never imagined her vividly enough, that I never made her be there sufficiently, that I did not make her live. Yes, that failure of imagination is the real crime ... (Banville, 1989: 215)

In the novel, Josie's lack of reality for Freddie means that his crime has no reality for him. In a way, she wasn't even a human being. And this is in marked contrast to the painting Freddie attempts to steal: the fictional 'Portrait of a Woman with Gloves'. For Freddie, the painting has a more urgent reality than the woman he kills with a hammer. He imagines a life for the painted woman (Banville, 1989: 105–8), but finds it beyond his powers to fully imagine Josie Bell. There is something cold and shocking about Freddie's perspective that could value art above an actual life.

Banville appears to be undercutting his own position in *The Book of Evidence*. Derek Hand has even posed the question of whether the novel is a kind of 'morality tale', one that 'concerns the need to give attention to the real world, rather than the world of art and the imagination' (Hand, 2002: 140). But in light of Banville's own stated position, as well as his works' constant unmasking of so called fact as fiction,

the weight of evidence appears to be against Banville taking up a moral stance, here as elsewhere. If Banville has ethical qualms about ‘celebrating art at the expense of reality’ (D’Hoker, 2004: 127), then it is ironic that his very enterprise in *The Book of Evidence* could be seen to favour the fictional over the actual, just as his protagonist does. But his is not an enterprise that is lacking in awareness of its own problematic position: the murderous pitfall of believing that everything is mere artifice. If there is an absence of moralising in Banville, there is no absence of moral conscience. And, in contrast to many critics, Kenny even argues that there is still something of an allegiance to aesthetic realism in Banville, even an affirmation of the verifiable, external world that marks him out from the common postmodern thrust.

In contradiction of the frequent critical supposition that Banville’s aesthetic is overwhelmingly a postmodernist one, a precise realist motivation is involved here. The basic impulse of all artists, as Banville sees it, is to ‘actually portray it as it is ...’ This insistence on the solidity of the sensory is far removed from the postmodernist assumption that our predominant contemporary experience of the world is a mediated or virtual one. (Kenny, 2009: 88)

Kenny here is making a claim for Banville very close to that made for the novel by Henry James: namely that the writer is an ethical and moral being because he or she allows us to see reality with greater clarity (D’Hoker, 2002: 26), that realism is almost hardwired to be ethical. And one must remember here, of course, that journalism is, in many respects, a sub-genre of aesthetic realism.

But Kenny’s position is an aberration in critical responses to *The Book of Evidence*. Playfully shifting between the poles of realism and postmodernism, between the moral and the amoral, between reality and art, Banville’s ultimate artistic enterprise of dovetailing the factual into the fictional displays a simultaneity of approach that renders his aesthetic position as slippery as mercury. In other words, there is all the relativism present that is often characterised as a hallmark of postmodernity.

### Official Fictions

In light of this epistemological anxiety over what is knowable, or can be afforded the standing of verifiable knowledge, the status of all forms of journalism must be open to doubt. Indeed, in this whirling world of contesting fictions, even the ‘evidence’ being brought to court is open to suspicion. Constantly, Banville’s narrative undercuts official discourse, official versions of events, drawing attention to their artificiality and inexactitude. Nowhere in his novel is this more evident than when he is portraying and critiquing the claims of news journalism.

News, particularly in the form of print journalism, makes numerous appearances throughout *The Book of Evidence*. This is unsurprising, considering how Banville earned his living during the period of the novel’s composition. The book’s narrator, Freddie, is aware that as it is the ‘silly season’, the month of August in news, where there is little to report, his crime ‘gave them [the newspapers] a glorious, running story’ (Banville, 1989: 95). But despite the insider’s use of news-trade jargon, Freddie highlights the inaccuracies with which he is portrayed: ‘as a reckless thug and a meticulous, ice-cool, iron-willed blond beast’ (Banville, 1989: 95). The ‘thug’ description particularly jars with his refined character, as carefully constructed elsewhere in

the book. And yet after his crime, Freddie again and again returns to the press to offer an accurate account of his pursuit (Banville, 1989: 129 and 160, for example). While in hiding, he hungrily seeks out newspapers to see if the killer has been identified, if he has become the subject of a manhunt. Even after his arrest, Freddie notes the newspapers claiming he 'showed no signs of remorse'; while going as far as giving the reportage credit for being accurate, saying the press was, in this instance, 'on to something, in their dim-witted way' (Banville, 1989: 151).

There exists, therefore, an unresolved tension in the text in its portrayal of news journalism. On the one hand, it is an unreliable fiction; on the other, it offers some kind of objective report of the world from which useful, even factual information can be gleaned. There is no absolutist position, therefore, in *The Book of Evidence* with regard to the status of reporting as verifiable knowledge. But if Banville leans one way or the other in this work, it is toward the side of skepticism, as is evident in the newspaper descriptions of Freddie as offered by witnesses to his crime and subsequent flight:

By now the story had seeped up from the bottom of the front pages like a stain...

There was a photograph of the car ... The boys who had found it had been interviewed. Did they remember me, that pallid stranger dreaming on the bench in the deserted station? They did, they gave a description of me: an elderly man with black hair and a bushy beard. The woman at the traffic lights was sure I was in my early twenties, well-dressed with a moustache and piercing eyes. Then there were the tourists at Whitewater who saw me make off with the painting ... from each of their accounts another and more fantastic version of me emerged, until I became multiplied into a band of moustachioed cut-throats ... (Banville, 1989: 160 and 161).

It is not only that the reporter's account of events is inaccurate, but, in addition there is the added layer of inaccuracy that the reporter's sources bring to bear to start with. The historical artifact offered by journalism is removed from real events in time; it is further removed in the recollection of those events and in the subsequent recording of those recollections. News, therefore, becomes little more than a pale and distant approximation of the source events that happened in some posited, objective world. In other words, news is itself a kind of fiction, with a relationship to objective reality not unlike the novel. The kinds of epistemological claims that news reporting can make are extremely limited in this schema. At best, professional news reporting can express truths on a par with the aesthetic truths that art contains, as suggest thinkers in the tradition of ethical criticism (Nussbaum, 1998). But this truth is aesthetic and moral, in this understanding, and without reference to the *prima-facie*, verifiable truth that journalism and jurisprudence assert for themselves.

Indeed, in *The Book of Evidence*, the 'official fictions' the justice system accepts as evidence are as suspect as the fictions of the press. At every turn in the novel, the forces of law and order manipulate and fictionalize the accounts of Freddie's crime to suit their own agendas. Sergeant Hogg asks Freddie to sign a confession that someone else has made up (Banville, 1989: 202). The police notes taken during Freddie's interrogation are a 'sham' (Banville, 1989: 207). Even the novel's ending

casts doubt on the entire preceding narrative (Banville, 1989: 220): was all of it true or none of it? The police are even portrayed as narrative artists (Banville, 1989: 202), men forging finely wrought fictions that are only loosely based on actual events. The ethical aridity of a world where everything is an equally valid and contesting fiction is frighteningly portrayed in Banville's work. In a way, Freddie and his actions are the logical terminus of the credo of the radical autonomist, expressed most memorably by Oscar Wilde in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: 'Life is the solvent that breaks up art, the enemy that lays waste her house' (Wilde, 1890). For *The Book of Evidence*, that solvent is the actual events of a real murder in the summer of 1982. But there is no simplistic relationship between art and life in this case. The complexity of Banville makes that impossible. Temptations to read the novel as a mere exploitation of reality for artistic ambitions are reductive. Indeed, there is something of an attempt to right the wrongs of the real and flawed in Banville's parallel and fictional world.

### Art Correcting Reality

In the actual trial of Malcolm MacArthur in 1983, the friends and family of Bridie Gargan and Donal Dunne (as well as the Irish public) were denied a fully public trial with publicly heard evidence, as is the norm under the 1937 Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 34). Instead, what occurred was a quick seven-minute hearing, followed by a life sentence, with MacArthur pleading guilty to the crime of murder, a highly unusual occurrence, and his 'hasty dispatch' to Mountjoy Prison to serve his sentence. Because of the Attorney General's involvement in the case, the belief that there was a cover-up in the MacArthur trial was widely held at the time among the Irish public (*The Irish Times*, 24 January 1983: 13). Indeed, Mary McAleese (who was Professor of Law at Trinity College, Dublin, and would later become President of Ireland), asked why the judge did not direct, in the public interest, for a recital of the relevant evidence; something that might have dispelled suspicions that there was a cover-up to protect the Attorney General's reputation (*The Irish Times*, 24 January 1983: 13). However, even this would not have put suspicions to rest, as MacArthur's lawyers had done a deal with the Director of Public Prosecutions (Kerrigan and Brennan 1999: 204). If he pleaded guilty, the charges, apart from the murder of Bridie Gargan, would be dropped, leaving other charges, including the murder of Donal Dunne, effectively *sub judice*. The media could not report the details of these *sub judice* charges, for fear of prejudicing the trial; a trial that would never happen. On this, journalism had its hands tied by the judiciary.

In *The Irish Times*, Mary McAleese was blunt: 'A seven-minute hearing where the bare facts are not even outlined is in danger of looking like summary justice' (*The Irish Times*, 24 January 1983: 13). The basic constitutional requirement that justice be administered in public was subverted. The involvement of the Attorney General was not teased out in evidence in a court of law. And, finally, the media could not even report on the details of MacArthur's crimes, because of them being ruled *sub judice*. In the MacArthur case, the public's right to know was clearly circumvented. Among those most aggrieved by this turn of events were the surviving relatives of Offaly farmer Donal Dunne. They protested publicly and circulated a petition against the deal with the DPP; but to no avail (*The Irish Times*, 29 July, 1983: 7). The surviving relatives of Bridie Gargan, despite the life sentence, also had no reason to be

happy with proceedings. They were offered no rationale for the murder, no motive or explanation. With reportage being muffled, it was up to art to step in, with Banville's *Book of Evidence*.

Despite Banville's suspicion of art's ability to have a truth telling function, it is ironic that *The Book of Evidence* essentially filled this role in a national public discourse that was closed down in the MacArthur affair. It is not unreasonable to see Banville's novel fulfilling an important function in public life in this instance: namely, providing an account of events of public interest where journalism has been silenced. True, what *The Book of Evidence* offers is a fictional account 'inspired' by real events, yet its resemblance to reality would be to the forefront of the minds of its reading public. Here the fictional steps in, in many ways, to fulfill that role assigned art by ethical criticism: to tell a greater truth.

That Banville's text offers an instance of art correcting reality may explain why there was no moral outrage in this instance: as there was, for example, when Edna O'Brien published her novel *In The Forest* (2002), which closely resembles another real-world series of murders. Unlike the O'Brien text, *The Book of Evidence* did not provoke a public backlash of outrage and disgust. Banville escaped accusations that his novel was exploitative, that it cynically plundered raw reality for the purposes of winning a marketable fiction. Indeed, the relatives of the dead in the MacArthur case that had been denied a proper hearing in the Central Criminal Court remained silent on the book's publication. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this may have been because of the novel's function of filling the silence, of carrying on the narrative when journalism could not. Where in the case of Edna O'Brien's *In The Forest*, journalism offered an historical record and public account of certain murderous crimes, in the MacArthur case the crime was followed by an uncanny silence. Banville's book, therefore, takes up a unique responsibility: to present a book of evidence to the Irish public and address the judicial deficit left in the wake of the deal with the DPP and the subsequent *sub judice* ruling on the untried charges. For all its suspicion of journalism, it is ironic that Banville's text in some sense serves a journalistic function.

In a sense, the ethical dimension, or that 'morality tale' that Hand draws attention to, is difficult to deny in Banville. While a commitment to naturalistic realism is absent in the work (indeed, where the work denies that naturalistic realism is possible), it continues to maintain a commitment to a real relationship with objective reality; a relationship to reality that is even informed by ethics. As Banville asserts in an interview with *The Observer* (*The Observer*, 2000), one can only plant a bomb in Omagh if one doesn't see the people walking around Omagh as real. As Banville tells the newspaper, this is a 'failure of the imagination' – the subject he claims for his *Book of Evidence*. This ethical consciousness may be a residue of old fashioned ethical aesthetic concerns in this essentially postmodern writers' work. Certainly it reveals again the complexity of Banville, and highlights his aesthetic ambition for a success of the imagination, where reality can be so well imagined and recreated in narrative that it comes close to achieving the impossible: an approximation of the external world. In this, Banville's narratives 'are sort of phenomenological exercises' (Bookside: Writer in Profile, 1992). While they are always mediated by a particular consciousness, they nevertheless aspire toward a connection with the world external to that consciousness. And, for this author, that connection is always an act of the imagination; an imperfect science that aims 'to make the lack of certainty more man-

ageable' (Banville 1989: 18). As Ricoeur would suggest, while a final, narrated version of a particular history will always be contested and flawed, it does not mean that it is a dishonorable aim that should not be aspired to.

## AUTHOR

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