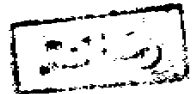


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*Patterns of Discovery in
John Banville's Works
From 1973 to 1989*



*A Thesis submitted to the
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To My Family & My Son



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Preface

John Banville was born in Wexford, Ireland, in (1945). He is a novelist of high imagination who returned to literature itself as a source of imagination and aspiration.

Banville wrote ten novels, and a collection of short stories. His first book Long Lankin was published in (1970), followed by Nightspawn a year later. The third novel, Birchwood was published in (1973) and won two prizes. First, the "Allied Irish Banks" prize, and second, the "Macaulay Fellowship" by the Irish Arts Council. In (1981) he was awarded the "James Tait Black Memorial Prize" for his work Doctor Copernicus; and in (1981) his novel Kepler won the "Guardian Fiction" prize. The remaining novels are The Newton Letter (1982), which concluded the trilogy of novels dealing with historical scientists. Mefisto (1986) is a part of this serial but it differs in some aspects and it is dealt with in the third chapter due to its different motifs. We can consider the scientific works a trilogy rather than a tetralogy. The novel displayed Banville's mastery of language as a great stylist. Banville's trilogy included Doctor Copernicus, Kepler, and The Newton Letter. Throughout these three novels, Banville shows how each one of the

scientists learned and became more enlightened after great efforts and commitment. His novel The Book Of Evidence (1989) won the G. P. A. literary award and was nominated to the Booker prize, and it dealt with a circumstantial criminal. Tracing the sequence of his production revealed more recent novels Ghosts (1993), and Athena (1995); this information was supplied through the Internet, but the texts are not available and the thesis itself ends till (1989).

The introduction of the thesis (chapter 1), deals with the background of Banville, the Irish society, culture, history, and literary tradition. It casts light on the literary movement in Ireland demonstrating some famous authors and the themes they dealt with. Chapter one, also, shows the influence of other novelists on Banville's style and technique.

The thesis, in chapter two, moves on to discuss Banville's works Doctor Copernicus, Kepler, and The Newton Letter. The novels are analysed on both the technical and the thematic level; bearing in mind the common feature of the heroes, who are all scientists of a sort.

Chapter three, continues to analyse Banville's works Birchwood, Mefisto, and The Book of Evidence. These novels have proved to be sharing the same style and craftsmanship that were clarified in the previous chapter, yet, the thematic level is not similar to the

scientists' novels except for Mefisto, which holds the spirit of science and calculations.

In the conclusion, the thesis is summed up trying to focus on the previously discussed points, and to clarify Banville's mastery in handling his works. It also ends the research showing how the novels are coordinated and how do they reflect the character, background, and concerns of the author.

Chapter -1-

Introduction

The Social and Literary Climate of Opinion

"Art, good art, whatever
form it takes, is abiding
and timeless. whatever road
the artist chooses, his stops
along the way are all that
count"

Irish University
Review, p. 12

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ireland had a close relation-ship with England for a very long period of time. It actually started during the twelfth century through an invasion by the Anglo-Normans. After the Norman's invasion Ireland's relation with its neighbours was weak, until the Tudor period to whom Ireland was of great importance. The Tudor had their fears of the Catholic Europe, and Ireland seemed to be their protection. Starting from this point, England began to have the upper hand on every thing in Ireland. In the introduction of Ancestral Voices, by Otto Rauchbauer he describes the state in Ireland:

The main part of Ireland was characterised by a feudal system, which meant that the land owning Protestant Ascendancy consisting of aristocrats and gentry were thinly spread over the country.....it represented a network of families whose income derived from the land that the Catholic Irish worked for them.1

This was the main situation in Ireland; the owners were Protestants who belonged to the English race, while those who worked for them were supposed to own their own land. The land workers, or the peasants, to be accurate, suffered in their low position. The main feature of that age, for them, was poverty. There was no sign of civic life, it was totally banished and nothing was to be mentioned about art, education or any kind of ceremonies and public life. As the eighteenth century progressed, things were getting worse, England, at that time, looked upon Ireland as its feeding land of the future; what blackened Irish conditions more and more was the famine years (1740-1741).

At the end of the eighteenth century, inspite of the minority of the aristocratic Protestant ascendancy and also their abstract culture, they achieved a great deal of prosperity and self-confidence. They created for themselves a position which was neither Irish nor British, and they had their unique position as the elite of the Irish society. Furthermore, an important event took place during the year (1801), which was The Act of Union. The editor of Ancestral Voices said "The Act of Union (1801) put an end to Irish aspirations of independence and locked the fate of Ireland with that of Great Britain."²

After the Union, the economical and social life of Ireland was deteriorating. The Irish had to cope with the lowest standards of living and to bear the British laws. According to the Irish people, these laws were made just to stand by the land-owners. The tenant farmers were eager for any change that could improve their situation, but they could not bear anything to be worse. Joseph Lee in The Modernisation of Irish Society, writes about the British laws and Ireland's economical position:

Ireland suffered severely from the consequences of the touching faith of educated opinion in the economic importance of law and in the power of abstract economic theory.³

Also free trade, at that time, harmed the Irish economical situation. The Irish failed to protect their industry, while, at the same time, Great Britain kept on using Ireland as an economical support. Similarly, the state of education was not in a better position. There were schools for the Anglo-Irish students; who were Protestants. These schools worked on, aiming to erase the Irish language and culture; for the Irish students it was of no benefit except in damaging their own culture

and trying to implant new ideas that could help the Anglicans to keep on controlling the Irish land. This was described simply in The Modernisation of Irish Society:

the government certainly intended the national school system to perform a massive brain-washing operation, obliterating subversive ancestral influence by inculcating in the pupils a proper reverence for the English connection, and proper deference for their social superiors, defined according to the exquisite English concept of class. The subsequent history of Ireland, and of the Irish abroad, however, suggests that the pupils proved, too retarded to recognise their betters.⁴

These different situations encouraged a resisting and opposing movement to de-Anglicise the Irish society. This movement was accompanied by Land Acts (1860-1904) till the result was a break-up of the feudal system. Hence further, these movements and their gained benefits encouraged the Irish people to carry on. In Ancestral Voices "The increasing radicalisation of 1916,

and the Anglo-Irish war (1918-21)"⁵. After that and through out the years till the First World-War, the number of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy was reducing, in addition to the fact that a lot of them served with the British forces.

Beginning from the Anglo-Normans till the end of the nineteenth century, the Big House was one of the major features of Ireland. These Big Houses were first built and designed to be as in the historical survey by Jacqueline Genet in her book The Big House in Ireland "a landmark of English domination and a protection of English identity."⁶. Therefore, it stood for the upper class in the English society represented by the land-owners. These Houses were passed down from one generation to the other till the Irish revolution broke-out to destroy them as a concept that ruled for a long period of time.

In The Big House in Ireland these Big Houses were described in full details:

The rooms were generously proportioned and high-ceilinged. The central features in nearly every room,....., was the fire place: many of these were highly decorative pieces

carved in white marble.....Feeding the fire..... was an endless chore for the servants.....Much of the furniture was made in Dublin, or imported from England.⁷

That shows the richness and luxury where Anglo-Irish, or land-owners lived. At the same time it mentions the servants who had to do the different kinds of house-work; these servants were Irish and this helped them to compare between their master's and their own life and, therefore, stand against the land-owners and Big Houses.

After the Irish revolution and after burning a large number of Big Houses, there were still a lot of them left. The government used them as universities, schools, hotels and different kinds of centres to serve in different fields. The Big House in Ireland summarises the end saying:

The houses and gardens which were once the centres of private fiefdoms are now public parks and museums enjoyed by everyone. The term "Big House" has gone out of general usage and has been replaced by Country