Contemporary Literary Criticism

CLC 314

Volume 315

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers

Jeffrey W. Hunter
PROJECT EDITOR

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Preface

Named "one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years" by *Reference Quarterly,* the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*) series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC,* therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today's reader.

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Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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John Banville
1945-

(Has also written under pseudonym Benjamin Black) Irish novelist, playwright, and short story writer.

The following entry presents an overview of Banville's career through 2010. For further information on his life and works, see *CLC,* Volumes 46, 118, and 224.

INTRODUCTION

Banville is widely regarded as an erudite Irish novelist who writes highly stylized prose concerning perception, the boundaries between perception and reality, and the themes of loneliness and isolation. He is known for employing the postmodernist convention of metafiction, but his writing often includes elements of magical realism and existentialism. He rejected the tenets of the realist novel from his earliest works, *Long Lankin* (1970) and *Nightspawn* (1971), and has continued to write technically and stylistically ambitious novels and plays that challenge the ideas of realism and conventional narratives.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Banville was born in Wexford, Ireland on December 8, 1945. He was the youngest of three children born to Agnes and Martin Banville; his brother and sister, Vincent and Ann Veronica ("Vonnie"), are also writers. Banville attended Christian Brothers' primary school before going on to St. Peter's College in Wexford. Rather than attending university, Banville went to work for the Irish airline Aer Lingus, which afforded him many travel opportunities. In 1988, Banville secured employment as a sub-editor for the *Irish Press,* where he stayed until 1995. After the demise of the *Irish Press,* he went to work as the literary editor for the *Irish Times,* where he stayed until 1999. He has also been a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books* since 1990.

Banville published his first book, the short-story collection *Long Lankin,* in 1970. This title, along with his second publication, *Nightspawn,* established Banville as an up-and-coming Irish writer. He won several awards for separate volumes of his "scientific tetralogy," and has since been awarded the Man Booker Prize for Fiction (2005) and the Franz Kafka Prize (2011).

Since 2006, Banville has been publishing crime novels under the pseudonym Benjamin Black. The series features a man named Quirke who is a pathologist at the Hospital of the Holy Family in Dublin. The novels are written in the style of Georges Simenon, a Belgian mystery writer best known for his character Inspector Jules Maigret. Banville has said that he views his work as Benjamin Black as a diversion, focusing more on craft than art. About Black, Banville remarked in a 2009 *Paris Review* interview, "If Benjamin Black is going to earn some money so that John Banville can have freedom, then this is no more difficult than working in the newspapers." Banville's writings published under his own name have been compared to that of fellow Irishmen James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, whom he cites as mentor figures.

MAJOR WORKS

Banville first gained widespread recognition with his third book and first in the scientific tetralogy, *Doctor Copernicus* (1976). The work is a historical novel which takes as its protagonist fifteenth-century Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, best known for his conceptualization of a heliocentric universe. The fictionalized biography examines the life of Copernicus as well as the era during which he lived. Thematically, the novel deals with tensions between science and imagination. In the story, Copernicus formulates his theory of a universe in which the Sun, rather than the Earth, is the center, but then struggles to make the math fit his design. He calculates a universe represented by complex circles within circles, and locates the center of the orbits at an empty point in space. The details of his system, originally penned in 1503, were not published publicly until 1543, and the astronomer reportedly saw them for the first time on the last day of his life.

Kepler (1981), the second novel in the scientific series, is often discussed in tandem with *Doctor Copernicus.* Like *Copernicus, Kepler* is a fictionalized biography.

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The protagonist is Johannes Kepler, another Renaissance astronomer and mathematician. Kepler was born nearly three decades after Copernicus died, and he was tormented by Copernicus' elaborate system of circles and orbits. He spent his life reconfiguring the orbits' geometry and devised an elliptical orbital scheme, based on three principles, that eventually became the basis for Isaac Newton's theory of universal gravitation. The novel explores themes similar to *Copernicus,* including the desire to construct systems and to divine order from chaos. The story is told in five chapters, each identified by the title of one of Kepler's books. Kepler is followed in the novel from February 1600, when he and his family arrived in Prague at the castle of the Imperial Mathematician, Tycho Brahe. The story is not told in a linear fashion, but rather in fragmented episodes from which the reader gleans the arc of the narrative.

With *The Newton Letter* (1982), a re-visioning of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1809 novel *Elective Affinities,* Banville examines the nature of relativity applied to human relationships. The story's narrator, an aspiring biographer of Isaac Newton, is gradually revealed to be merely one variable within a previously unrecognized design. *Mefisto* (1986), the final book in the scientific tetralogy, established Banville squarely as a postmodernist writer. The novel contains many metafictive elements, as well as numerous narrative voices instead of a singular omniscient point of view. The themes in *Mefisto* are akin to the thematic concerns in the previous three books, as is the plot structure. Gabriel Swan, the protagonist in *Mefisto,* like Copernicus and Kepler, struggles to reconcile science with life. In the first part of the novel, "Marionettes," Gabriel narrates his early life, lamenting his struggle to find order in the world through mathematics. He is desperate to quantify the vastness of human experience and emotion, calling into question the nature of truth. The second section, "Angels," resurrects Faust's Mephistophelean mythology through Felix, the devil character that Gabriel suspects is his dead twin. The novel marks a watershed in Banville's development as a writer and the emergence of his affinity for the grotesque.

Winner of the Man Booker Prize and named the Irish Book Awards Novel of the Year, *The Sea* (2005) was a departure of sorts for Banville. Widely seen as his most personal and most accessible novel, *The Sea* explores themes that have preoccupied Banville since *Long Lankin.* Guilt and absolution are central to much of Banville's work and figure in this novel as well as the scientific tetralogy. *The Sea* is also about loss and the impermanence of life. Max, a recent widower in his sixties, returns to a seaside retreat that reminds him of his first love and brings him back to his childhood. Reflecting on his life, the truths of his past reveal the truths of his present, and he confronts many of his difficult relationships.

After *The Sea,* Banville's career took an unexpected turn. Writing under the name Benjamin Black, he began publishing a series of crime novels. The books are more mainstream and accessible than Banville's other, more erudite work. The protagonist in the Benjamin Black novels is Inspector Quirke, who, according to Banville, is "rather stupid, like the rest of us. He misses the point of things, he stumbles over clues, misreads people. He's far too dim to be a Philip Marlowe. But this is what I treasure in him—his human frailty, and the curious kind of dogged honor he can sometimes display." While originally written for financial reasons, Banville has acknowledged in interviews that he enjoys the Benjamin Black novels more than his other work.

Banville's first novel written under his own name since winning the Booker Prize, *The Infinities* (2009), represents a return to literary themes and ideas. Familiar concepts are revisited and the protagonist, Adam Godley, is a brilliant mathematician. The story takes place over a single day at a house in the Irish countryside. Adam has suffered a stroke and is in a coma on the top floor while his wife, son, and daughter occupy the rest of the house, awaiting his demise. The story is narrated by the Greek god Hermes, and other mythical beings populate the novel. The major life accomplishment for Adam was making the concept of infinity workable, and the novel posits an infinite number of possibilities for the world.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

From Banville's earliest works he has been recognized as a writer of great talent and intellect. Although his earliest work was sometimes criticized for its verbosity and apparent self-indulgence, with his third book, *Birchwood* (1973), critics found an intricate story and the beginnings of Banville's development of bizarre and grotesque characters in a Gothic fantasy. The novel earned Banville an Irish Arts Council Macaulay Fellowship, as well as an Allied Irish Banks Prize. The scientific tetralogy has been widely praised for Banville's clearly painstaking research to accurately represent the worlds that his characters inhabit. Banville has frequently been compared to writers such as Joyce and Beckett, and many critics have identified the influence of Vladimir Nabokov. *Spectator* reviewer Justin Cartwright described *The Infinities* as "densely loaded with Nabokovian slyness." Some critics, however, find Banville's loquaciousness off-putting, if

not overwrought. Even so, most qualify the criticism, with observations such as Tom Deignan's, who said, "He is more respected than read, a writer's writer, whom even admirers admit can be difficult." Betty Smartt Carter also commented on Banville's vocabulary, noting, "Such discoveries [of words] mostly delight me, but others find Banville's writing pretentious and remote." Banville has nonetheless become one of the leading voices in Irish literature who writes, as described by Joakim Wrethed in the *Journal of Irish Studies,* "beautifully crafted prose, with an occasionally almost more than poetic intensity."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Long Lankin (short stories) 1970
Nightspawn (novel) 1971
Birchwood (novel) 1973
Doctor Copernicus (novel) 1976
Kepler (novel) 1981
The Newton Letter (novel) 1982
Mefisto (novel) 1986
The Book of Evidence (novel) 1990
Ghosts (novel) 1993
The Broken Jug (play) 1994
Athena (novel) 1995
The Untouchable (novel) 1997
Eclipse (novel) 2000
God's Gift: A Version of Amphitryon by Heinrich von Kleist (play) 2000
Shroud (novel) 2002
Prague Pictures: Portrait of a City (novel) 2003
Love in the Wars [adapted from *Penthesilea* by Heinrich von Kleist] (play) 2005
The Sea (novel) 2005
* *Christine Falls* (novel) 2006
* *The Silver Swan* (novel) 2007
* *The Lemur* (novel) 2008
The Infinities (novel) 2009
* *Elegy for April* (novel) 2010
* *A Death in Summer* (novel) 2011

*These novels were written under the pseudonym Benjamin Black.

CRITICISM

Elke D'hoker (essay date 2004)

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[*In the following essay, D'hoker analyzes dual representations of self manifested in single characters in Banville's work, focusing on the Freddie character in* The Book of Evidence.]

> *I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.*
>
> Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

The foregoing investigation into Freddie's representations of others has lead to the paradoxical conclusion that the ego is exceedingly central after all. Even when describing others, Freddie is primarily interested in himself. Because of his extreme self-absorption, Freddie's ego puts an emphatic stamp on his narrative and world-view. Still, this self is far from a uniquely defined or stable entity in the art trilogy. On the contrary, the images and pictures the reader receives of Freddie—and of Victor Maskell, Alex Cleave or Axel Vander for that matter—are usually contradictory, confusing and blurred. Since this lack of unity also worries the protagonists themselves, the plot of these novels is to a large extent determined by their stubborn quests for wholeness and identity. In a similar way, the issue of self-representation determines form and structure of the novels, as the first-person narrative mode seems to offer the possibility of meaning and control not available in real life. In short, the question, how is the self represented in Banville's novels? opens up three distinct perspectives, which will be discussed separately in what follows. In Chapter 7, both the content and the plot-related consequences of Freddie Montgomery's self-representations will be discussed in the light of the ethical views forwarded in the art trilogy as a whole, while Chapter 8 investigates the narrative dimension of the protagonists' self-representations in relation to ***The Untouchable.*** For even though the autobiographical mode shapes every Banville novel since ***The Newton Letter,*** Victor Maskell's confession in ***The Untouchable*** will be discussed as an exemplary case because it interestingly adds the skilled duplicity of the master-spy to the inherent ambiguity of the autobiographical genre. Given the duality and duplicity of self-representations on all of these levels, a focal point of analysis readily presents itself in the form of the *Doppelgänger* or double. This archetypal figure has a long and diversified heritage in literature, theory and psychoanalysis and might therefore provide a fruitful way into the Gordian knot of selves, others, twins and *alter egos* in each of Banville's novels.

In his impressive study *Der Doppelgänger,* Otto Rank describes how the figure of the double makes its first appearance in primitive legends and folktales where, in close connections with the soul and the shadow, it is hailed as a protection from death, an insurance

against immortality. Gradually, however, the tables are turned and the double becomes a harbinger of death, the very mark of human mortality. This ambiguity *vis-à-vis* death further characterises the appearance of the double in the course of literary history: in the Romantic period, the double becomes a hallmark of fantastic literature together with such other death-like figures as ghosts and devils; and in the nineteenth century, the *Doppelgänger* is used to visualise the human split between mind and body. In the psychoanalytic theories of Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud, subsequently, different manifestations of the double find a partial explanation in processes ascribed to the ego's unconsciousness. In Freud's "On Narcissism", for instance, the double is considered a feature of narcissism, both as a normal stage in the child's development and as a pathological adult state. If the child construes the outer world as part of the self so as to ward off destruction and death, the narcissistic adult replaces the other by the self as an object of affection for highly similar reasons. In both cases, the other is construed as part of the self, thereby readily granting the self illusions of mastery, unity and immortality.

Yet, to this creation of the double in response to a narcissistic fear of death, Freud adds in other essays the obverse process whereby the ego develops a super-ego, which stands apart from the self, criticising and censoring it. In this process of splitting, part of the self is construed as an other. In this way, the fundamental duality of the self, consisting of mind and body, comes to the fore and the threat of human mortality is more strongly felt. However, both mechanisms at work in the creation of the double cannot always firmly be distinguished. The double created as a wish-defence against destruction often reappears as a threatening other who further alienates and undermines the self. Even though this instability seems to make the double a figure of deconstructive resistance against hierarchical binaries or clear-cut oppositions, several critics have expressed doubts regarding the viability of the double in contemporary literature. The *Doppelgänger* would have become too much of an empty stereotype, psychoanalysis would have taken away all mystery, or narcissism would simply have become the normal *modus vivendi* in postmodern culture.[1] As the following analysis proposes to show, quite the opposite is the case in Banville's novels. They host a wonderful collection of doubles in all types and varieties and exploit the inherent duplicity of the double to the full.

Seeing Doubles

For a first manifestation of doubling in the art trilogy, let me quote the Romantic writer Jean Paul who defines *Doppelgänger* as "Leute, die sich selber sehen". Andrew Webber further explains this: "The autoscopic, or self-seeing, subject beholds its other self as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other self."[2] In the art trilogy, these autoscopic instances of doubling are numerous. "I saw myself, Freddie records upon his first visit to Whitewater, "as if from one of those sunstruck windows, skulking along here in the dust, hot, disgruntled, overweight, head bowed and fat back bent, my white suit rucked at the armpits and sagging in the arse, a figure of fun, the punchline of a bad joke, and at once I was awash with self-pity". On another occasion he remarks, "I saw myself in their eyes, a big, confused creature, like a dancing bear, shambling along at the steel-tipped heels of Cunningham's friendly boots" (***Book,*** [***The Book of Evidence***] 80, 206). In ***Ghosts,*** the narrator remembers his first encounter with Sergeant Toner in autoscopic mode: "For a moment I saw myself as a person of consequence; a serious person, deeply flawed and irremediably damaged, it is true, but someone, all the same: definitely someone." And notwithstanding a, perhaps telling, typing error, the following exclamation also belongs to the list: "For an instance I say [*sic*] myself as if lit by lightning, a stark, crouched figure, vivid and yet not entirely real, an emanation of myself, a hologram image, pop-eyed and flickering" (***Ghosts,*** 37, 179).

Characteristic of these and many other similar remarks is the introductory "I saw (see, could see) myself, which installs a curious distinction between the I who perceives and the I (myself) who is perceived. The subject beholds its other self as object, which becomes the *Doppelgänger* of the beholder. In Banville's novels, moreover, the beholder is even further alienated by interjections such as "through her eyes", or "as they would see me", which locate the perception in a third position. The perceiving subject places itself in the position of another and becomes in turn a *Doppelgänger,* both to the other and to the self. Sigmund Freud gives the following summary of this situation:

> The ego is in its essence a subject; how can it be made into an object? Well, there is no doubt that it can be. The ego can take itself as an object, can treat itself like other objects, can observe itself, criticise itself, and do Heaven knows what with itself. In this, one part of the ego is setting itself over against the rest. So the ego can be split; it splits itself during a number of its functions—temporarily at least.[3]

Clearly, these autoscopic visions form a first indication of Freddie's fundamentally split personality. In seeing himself, he separates himself into subject and object, perceiver and perceived, and, quite often, mind and body.[4]

When we consider the content of Freddie's autoscopic visions, we are confronted with a startling variety of images. Within a few pages of ***The Book of Evidence,*** for instance, Freddie successively sees himself as a disgusting figure, a frog prince, a circus-bear, a gifted orator, a painter, a cultured killer, a psychopath, a hologram image, etc. Very often these images are blatantly contradictory:

> I gave her one of my special, slow smiles, and saw myself through her eyes, a tall, tanned hunk in a linen suit, leaning over her on a summer lawn and murmuring dark words. . . . Suddenly I had a vivid, queasy sense of myself, not the tanned pin-up now, but something else, something pallid and slack and soft.
>
> (***Book,*** 46)

The split in this passage—between the handsome Don Juan and the fleshy animal—is part of a consistent pattern of superior versus inferior self-images in ***The Book of Evidence.*** To give but one example: about his life on a Southern islands, Freddie recalls how they "presided among this rabble . . . with a kind of grand detachment, like an exiled king and queen". Yet, immediately afterwards he debunks his feelings of superiority with an expression of disgust at his being "a paltry, shivering thing, . . . afraid, racked by doubts and dying" (10-11). It is interesting to note, furthermore, that the same scene can achieve two distinct and contradictory representations in Freddie's narrative. Describing his capture at the beginning of ***The Book of Evidence,*** Freddie pictures himself as important, in control, standing above the animal hordes who "clawed at each other to get a look at me" (3). Yet, when the same scene is repeated near the end of the novel, an inversion of images has taken place. Freddie represents himself as weak, frightened and largely inferior compared to the ordinary decent people shouting abuse at him in the street. Styling himself as a film star or notorious criminal in the first instance, he is but "a child, or a very old man" in the second (211).

Throughout his narratives in fact, Freddie tends to distinguish himself from different groups of society. For instance, although he invokes the first person plural when talking about the prison inmates, he suggests at the same time that he stands apart from them, either above ("they seemed to feel that I was special") or below ("It may be of course, that this solemn mien was only a way of hiding their hatred and disgust") (***Ghosts,*** 21). Elsewhere he associates himself with the judge—"people of our kind" (*Book,* 49)—with the intellectual elite, and with the outcasts—"I have a distressing weakness for the low life" (***Athena,*** 135).

These double feelings of superiority and inferiority, of being high above or far below the rest of mankind constitute, according to Karl Miller, a "dialectic [that] is pervasive in Romantic writing":

> The Romantic writer who endeavours to say goodbye to his fellow creatures may also be aware that the attempt to rise above humanity, while it may lead to some spiritually-privileged condition . . . may just as well lead to an irrecoverable fall, to the condition of the outlaw, the monster and the beast.[5]

The suggestion that the fall typically implies a plunge into the physical is confirmed by the preceding examples. Freddie's negative self-images are linked up with a disgust at his bodily self, whereas his superior self-representations relate to his intelligence or wit. This body-mind dualism, a familiar feature in all of Banville's novels, appears to be a classical example of splitting: "Body-mind dualism suggests, among other things the dissolution of the body image which is often encountered in people suffering from autoscopic hallucination" (Rogers, 10). On the basis of the few examples adduced above, one could surmise that one of Freddie's contradictory attitudes—the superior one, perhaps—is a pose, a mask he likes to assume, whereas the second one, which shows him weak and frightened, presents us with Freddie's "real" self. Alternatively, one could argue that Freddie is hiding his real, emotionless and superior self behind a mask of humble and self-conscious inferiority in order to engage the sympathy of jury and readers. Freddie himself often invokes these real-fake or true-false oppositions as he worries about the precise nature of his true self. Yet, whether these distinctions are tenable at all will have to be verified through a close reading of the passages concerned.

Real vs. False Doubles

Some half-ironic references to his "real self" notwithstanding, it is mostly in the less marked diction of inner and outer that Freddie comments on his split identities in ***The Book of Evidence.*** His life as a student, he recalls as follows, "I laughed and whooped and boasted with the best of them—only inside, in that grim, shadowed gallery I call my heart, I stood uneasily, with a hand to my mouth, silent, envious, uncertain" (16-17). And about his wife Daphne, he writes that they understood each other, but did not share "the essential secretness of our inner selves" (9). That inner self is subsequently revealed as a kind of Freudian super-ego: "I had inside me too an exemplar of my own, a kind of invigilator, from whom I must hide my lack of conviction . . . that stern interior sergeant."[6] Yet, Freddie reverses the inner-outer dynamic immediately afterwards, wondering,

> But why the past tense? Has anything changed? Only that the watcher from inside has stepped forth and taken over, while the puzzled outsider cowers within.
>
> (17)

Indeed, his inner self has now taken the place of the outer self, a gesture which, according to the inside-outside logic, undermines its credibility as "real self" substantially, since it is the poor "puzzled outsider" who has now the highest claim to being the real one. Entirely different interpretations of the inner-outer divide are hinted at when a, outwardly bored and irritable Freddie remarks, "deep inside me somewhere, hardly acknowledged, grief dripped and dripped" (45). Some pages further on, the same formula is used to oppose horror and exultation: "despite the horror . . . deep inside me something exulted" (54). The confusion resulting from this is more explicitly addressed when Freddie tries to decide whether he is feeling "utterly unlike [him]self" because of the strangeness (read: insincerity) of his inner or outer self:

> it was as if I—the real, thinking, sentient I—had somehow got myself trapped inside a body not my own. But no, that's not it exactly. For the person that was inside was also strange to me, stranger by far, indeed, than the familiar, physical creature. This is not clear, I know. I say the one within was strange to *me,* but which version of *me* do I mean?
>
> (95)

After this sample of inner selves, the reader of ***The Book of Evidence*** certainly shares Freddie's confusion. Is Freddie's real self a stern sergeant or a dangerous brute, a "child" or an "ogre"? Is it grieving, exultant or afraid? No definitive answer can be given to these questions as the precise identity of Freddie's inner self is, even to Freddie himself, far from clear. To make it worse, the equation of inner self with true or real self has also crumbled as Freddie's conflicting selves are engaged in a struggle for hegemony. All we can conclude is that Freddie suffers from more than one split identity and that in this profusion of doubles his real self has been lost. Still, in spite of all this diversity, there is one inner self who is referred to more or less consistently in ***The Book of Evidence,*** so that most critics identify him as *the* double of Freddie Montgomery. Whether the infamous "Bunter" does indeed personify Freddie's true self, remains to be investigated.[7]

When referring to Freddie's evil double, critics tend to repeat Freddie's own inner-outer logic, witness the following description:

> Looking back on his solitary childhood, he [Freddie] now sees the tragic dualism of his personality: outside, the cultured intelligent son of the Big House, but inside a violent sadistic brute trying to be free, a monster he names "Bunter".
>
> (*Supreme Fictions,* 107)

Therefore McMinn suggests that Bunter is Freddie's real self, whereas the gentleman-self is only a mask assumed in order to hide that inner self. Yet, as we have seen before, there are some problems with this dualistic logic. For Bunter is not the only real self crouching inside Freddie. Other candidates have been discussed already: the "interior sergeant", the weak and frightened insider or the sad and humble self. Additionally, there is the question as to what remains of the inside-outside logic when Bunter takes over, as Freddie puts it, and the outer man—McMinn's gentleman, but again there are other candidates—cowers within. The confusion about this process of doubling is ironically mirrored in Imhof's account of the psychological mechanisms behind the creation of Bunter, "Freddie *invents* his *alter ego,* Bunter, the Mr Hyde to his *consciously adopted* stance as Dr Jekyll" (*Introduction,* 178, italics added). For even while recognising Bunter as Freddie's derivative (because invented) self, Imhof suggests that Freddie's cultivated stance of Dr Jekyll is only pretence, a mask "consciously adopted". Hence, in manifest contradiction with the psychological mechanisms through which he claims Bunter is created, Imhof also subscribes to the inside-outside logic according to which Bunter is Freddie's real self hidden behind a gentleman's mask. Considering precisely these psychological processes, moreover, it will become clear that Freddie's *alter ego* is not the result of the imagination, nor of "sublimation", as Imhof suggests as well, but of a splitting process whereby an unwanted aspect of one's personality is cast off and objectified.

Otto Rank already stressed the importance of the ego's conscience in this process, arguing

> ein mächtiges Schuldbewusstsein . . . den Helden nötigt, für gewisse Handlungen seines Ichs die Verantwortung nicht mehr aufzunehmen, sondern einem anderen Ich, einem Doppelgänger aufzubürden, der entweder im Teufel selbst personifiziert ist oder durch die Teufelsverschreibung geschaffen wird.[8]

Freud further investigated this process in his article "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence", where "ego-splitting" is described as a defence mechanism, adopted in order to escape psychic conflict arising from contradictory or incompatible reactions or attitudes. Joseph Francavilla aptly summarises Freud's argument:

> The psychic conflict of such incompatible attitudes or unrepressible impulses (e.g. *the urge to kill,* to self-destruct, to torture oneself, to hate friends, siblings,

> parents, etc.) forces part of the ego to become exteriorized, thrown outward, in order to protect the self. In a sense this action not only temporarily avoids the pain of conflict, it also allows the unmanageable attitude or unrepressible impulse to be indulged in by proxy, as it were, disowned by the primary self.[9]

It is interesting to note how these psychoanalytic explanations endorse a unified paradigm of the subject, which considers every split an abnormality waiting to be cured. Additionally, the early psychoanalytic description of splitting subscribes to a fixed hierarchy in which host and double, or original and derived self, can clearly be discerned. This is the case in ***Mefisto,*** which stages Felix as the split-off evil self of Gabriel Swan. Yet, the hierarchy between host and double is not always easy to maintain, as the confusion concerning Freddie's real inner selves has already demonstrated. Whether it holds true for the more substantial splitting case of Bunter will be discussed in what follows.

It is quite obvious, first of all, that Bunter does represent destructive drives and desires which Freddie wants to repress as unacceptable and dangerous. At a certain moment, however, these noxious feelings have become too strong to be repressed and are therefore cast off by the ego and projected onto another self or *alter ego.* Following this Freudian logic, Bunter is a derivative self, preying on Freddie's real self. In ***The Book of Evidence,*** however, this picture is complicated, firstly, by Freddie's explicit comments on the, normally unconscious, process of splitting or decomposition. Freddie calls himself "bifurcate" and quite consciously blames his crime on this other self. These and other thematisations tend to make the reader wary of the narrator's claims. Is he poking fun at the reader, trying to excuse himself, or merely being honest? Unlike Felix, moreover, Bunter is no fully-fledged separate character in Freddie's narrative. He remains firmly within the narrator's control. Finally, the strange inside-outside logic to which Freddie's split self is subjected reverses the traditional hierarchy of selves. If according to Freudian theory, Bunter is Freddie's secondary or false self, in Freddie's own narrative, the tables are turned and Bunter becomes the original or true self, all too long locked up. In exteriorising his destructive drives Freddie transfers all responsibility onto his *alter ego* and thereby effectively rids himself of all guilt. Yet, by making Bunter his true inner self, conversely, Freddie takes all responsibility upon himself again. This paradoxical situation may account for the reader's uncertainty as to whether or not Freddie is trying to excuse himself and to shirk his responsibility. In short, the confusion concerning Bunter's precise status merely enforces the earlier conclusion that no fixed binary system can be found amongst Freddie's many different selves and doubles.

In general, the case of Bunter shows the fate of all splitting processes. For it is clear that every *Doppelgänger* is capable of turning the tables and making the host into a double (to the double), or a stranger (to itself). In this way, the double effectively undermines the hierarchies—of inside and outside, original and secondary, true and false—which his being brought into existence in the first place. This ambiguity can further be associated with the ambivalent relation of the double with death. While often created to protect the self from destruction, the double also exposes a lack in the self, making it aware of its finite nature. As Banville's novels show, host and double or original and secondary selves simply become interchangeable doubles, all equally suffering from an irrecoverable feeling of lack.

Ghosts and Doubles

"The basic devices of all fantastic literature are only four in number: the work within the work; the contamination of reality by dream; the voyage in time and the double", Borges argued in one of his essays.[10] That the reverse is not always true is demonstrated by Bunter who does not add any fantastic flavour to ***The Book of Evidence.*** He is presented too self-consciously as the ironic result of a psychological process to inspire any fear at all. A far uncannier figure is Gabriel's split-off self in ***Mefisto,*** and ***Ghosts,*** too is a novel deeply steeped in the fantastic. Although Freddie's *Doppelgänger* makes frequent appearances in this novel, he is no longer called Bunter. Instead, various hints and similarities install a similarity with the Mephistophelean Felix from ***Mefisto.*** Still, neither Felix's mephitic qualities, nor the gothic setting of ***Ghosts*** seem sufficient explanation for the fantastic quality of the novel. In fact, the gothic references to mirrors, ghosts, devils and haunted houses are often exaggerated to the point of self-deflating parody. Moreover, in theoretical works on the uncanny or the fantastic, we often find not so much a lists of features responsible for creating a fantastic work, but a feeling produced in protagonist and reader alike. In Freud's essay on the subject, for instance, the uncanny is associated with uncertainty, doubt and hesitation, for instance as to whether something is alive or dead, natural or supernatural, real or imagined.[11] In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique,* Todorov also defines the fantastic along these lines, "le fantastique est fondé essentiellement sur une hésitation du lecteur—un lecteur quis'identifie au personnage principal—quant à la nature d'un événement étrange" (165). In these sceptical times, this uncertainty concerning the supernatural

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