Representing Minds: First-Person Narration in Irish Fiction:

Joyce, O'Brien, Banville

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Abstract

This MA thesis draws on four novels to examine techniques for representing consciousness in Irish fiction from 1922 to the present: James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* (1960-64), and John Banville's *The Infinities* (2013) and *The Singularities* (2022). These novels create a historical continuum, beginning with the neorealism of *Ulysses*, continuing with the modernism of *The Country Girls Trilogy*, and ending with the tricky postmodernism of *The Infinities* and *The Singularities.* To understand how these novels represent consciousness, I apply a feminist narrative methodology. In a sense, feminist narrative theory shares features with the rhetorical and anti-mimetic approaches put forward in cognitive narratology. I use Alan Palmer's "attribution theory" to show how narrators, characters, and readers attribute states of mind to themselves and to others, with implications for how fictional minds perform within the storyworlds of these four texts. Processes of attribution supply a productive way to classify numerous stages in the representation of the mind in narrative fiction because they permit us to fix a specific parameter or heuristic for investigation to contrast texts from distinct periods and in different styles. This thesis considers the mind treated as a theme in the narrative, the nature of the fictional minds constructed by texts, and the content of those minds. My inquiry focuses on first-person unreliable narrators. The characters' preoccupations in these four texts are understood by unreliable homodiegetic or first-person narratives, which can represent states in and through language, although never infallibly.

Résumé

Ce mémoire de maîtrise puise dans quatre romans afin de représenter la conscience dans la fiction irlandaise de 1922 à aujourd'hui, soit *Ulysse* de James Joyce (1922), « La trilogie: les filles de la campagne » de Edna O'Brien (1960-64), et *The Infinities* (2013) et *The Singularities* (2022) de John Banville. Ces romans s'inscrivent dans un continuum historique débutant par le néoréalisme d'*Ulysse*, passant par le modernisme des « Filles de la compagne » et se terminant par le postmodernisme de *The Infinities* et *The Singularities.* Afin de comprendre comment ces romans représentent la conscience, je fais appel à une méthodologie narrative féministe. D'une certaine manière, la théorie narrative féministe partage des aspects avec les approches rhétoriques et anti-mimétiques proposées par la narratologie cognitive. J'ai employé la théorie de l'attribution d'Alan Palmer afin de démontrer comment les narrateurs, les personnages et les lecteurs s'attribuent des états d'esprit autant à eux-mêmes qu'aux autres, avec des répercussions sur l'apport de l'esprit fictif dans l'univers des récits de ces quatre textes. Les processus d'attribution constituent un moyen efficace de classer les nombreuses étapes de la représentation de l'esprit dans la fiction narrative puisqu'ils nous permettent d'établir un paramètre précis ou heuristique pour l'étude du contraste entre les textes provenant de diverses périodes et dont les styles sont distincts. Ce mémoire tient compte de l'esprit traité comme un thème dans la narration, de la nature des esprits fictifs construits par les textes, ainsi que du contenu de ces esprits. Mon étude se concentre sur les narrateurs présents non-fiables. Les personnages de ces quatre œuvres transmettent leurs préoccupations par le biais de narrateurs non fiables présents, ou homediégétiques, proposant ainsi une représentation littéraire de leur état d'esprit de façon presque infaillible.

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Introduction: Representing Minds: First-Person Narration in Irish Fiction

Every year, on June 16, the exact date that marked Leopold Bloom's fictional walk around Dublin in 1904, literary wayfarers visit the city to pay homage to James Joyce. They stop at Davy Byrne's pub to sing Irish anthems and songs from *Ulysses.* The wayfarers stage a reading of Molly Bloom's monologue: "all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (933). Molly's finale throws a spotlight on the representation of consciousness.

Dorrit Cohn suggests that the "Penelope" episode "stands apart from its context, as a self-generated, self-supporting and self-enclosed fictional text" (Cohen 218). Joyce himself emphasized its extra-mural status when he commented on the conclusion of *Ulysses*: "It [the "Ithaca" chapter] is in reality the end as "Penelope" has no beginning, middle or end" (Gilbert 172). The cylindrical picture Joyce used to describe "Penelope" in a prominent letter to Frank Budgen further underscores its self-enclosure: "It begins and ends with the female Yes. It turns like the huge earthball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning" (Gilbert 170). Yet, most importantly, the form of the "Penelope" episode is noteworthy because it is the only moment in the novel where a figural voice annihilates the authorial narrative voice throughout a whole episode (Hart, Hayman 265). Cohn argues that "No matter how closely the content of Molly's mind may duplicate, supplement, and inform the fictional world of *Ulysses* as a whole, the single-minded and single-voiced form of "Penelope" justifies its consideration as an independent text, a model for the singular narrative genre entirely constituted by a fictional character's thoughts" (Cohn 218). Indeed,

Joyce places Molly's solitary thoughts on display. He created this very special creation as a self-promoting fictional episode to showcase the very form of his art.

This MA thesis focuses on four novels to examine techniques for representing consciousness in Irish fiction from 1922 to the present: James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* (1960-64), and John Banville's *The Infinities* (2013) and *The Singularities* (2022). I draw attention to Wayne C. Booth's concept of the "unreliable narrator" to question how and to what extent a reader's relationship to unreliable narrators, like relationships with other human beings, remains complex and why authors use this entanglement to create a realm of emotional and ethical effects. I will examine the effects of narrative as James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz do concerning a feedback loop between authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response. Booth argues that exercising authorial agency requires compulsory sacrifices; the choice to do one thing indeed obstructs the ability to do other things (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 30). To widen the frame of discussion, I examine the structuralist approach developed by Algirdas J. Greimas, who programmatically replaced the analytical category of characters with the notion of "actants." The preoccupation of the characters in these four texts is underscored by unreliable homodiegetic or first-person narrative, which can represent mental states in and through language, although never infallibly. Because many of these novels speak in female voices, I apply a feminist narrative methodology to ask three questions: Who is speaking? To whom? In what circumstances? Speaking as an anti-essentialist feminist, I will keep in mind that literature has contact with the material world and that these Irish texts account for real people's gendered presumptions and behaviours as much as mirroring them. Finally, I use Alan Palmer's *attribution theory* to show how narrators, characters, and readers attribute

states of mind to themselves and others, with implications for how fictional minds perform within the storyworld of these four texts. My decision to apply Palmer's *attribution theory* rests on the fact that processes of attribution supply a productive way to classify numerous stages in the representation of the mind in narrative fiction because they permit us to fix a specific parameter or heuristics for the investigation to use as a kind of lens that can uncover both similarities and contrasts. Palmer's attribution theory rests on the concept of *theory of mind.*

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Booth explores the difference between dramatized and undramatized narrators (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 33). Focusing on a specific context, he counters the common belief that "showing" is superior to "telling." Booth's most noteworthy contribution is his development of the concept of the "unreliable narrator." Booth's primary conception was straightforward: a narrator is "reliable when he or she speaks for or acts by the norms of the work (which is to say, the implicit author's principles), unreliable when he does not" (Herman, *Narrative Theory,* 33). Since Booth's formulation, rhetorical narrative theorists have revised his theory.

James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz suggest that a character can move between "restricted narration" and "unreliable narration." They provide a classification of six types of unreliability – misreporting, misreading, misregarding, underreporting, underreading, underregarding – that derives not from the study of effects but from an analysis of two primary variables of the communicative trade-off among implied novelist, narrator, and, authorial audience (D'hoker, Martens 11-12). Restricted narration and unreliable narration appear when narrators carry out three primary duties: they communicate (along the axis of characters, facts, and events), interpret (along the axis of perception or knowledge), and

appraise (along the axis of ethics) (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). Phelan and Rabinowitz maintain that when a narrator performs only one of the three duties and the author uses that restriction to convey something that the narrator is unaware of, the implied novelist is using restricted narration (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). In the most common type of restricted narration, the implied novelist will have an innocent narrator reliably recount the occurrences but not try to interpret or appraise them, and in so doing, communicate an interpretation or assessment that is beyond the competence of the innocent narrator (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34).

When a first-person narrator inadequately performs any of three duties (as against how the implicit novelist would perform it), we have unreliable narration (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). First-person narrators can be inadequate in two practices: by misrepresenting things and occurrences or by their continuous shortcomings. First-person narrators can be unreliable by miscommunicating, misinterpreting, and misevaluating (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). Thus, in the axis of communication along which the unreliability happens, the authorial audience needs to refuse the narrator's perspective or complement it (D'hoker and Martens 12). We will see in the three chapters how the Irish novelists guide their audience via innuendos about the first-person narrator's unreliability and how these novelists also guide us through other innuendos, leading us to recognize that the narrator nevertheless captures some underlying truths about life and about other character's role in that life.

James Phelan goes further within the rhetorical approach to narration with the unreliable narrator concept by elaborating a distinction between "estranging unreliability" and "bonding unreliability." He argues that "estranging unreliability" is "unreliable narration

that underlines or increases the distance between the narrator and the reader," whereas "bonding unreliability" is "unreliable narration that reduces the distance between the narrator and the reader" (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). At the outset of Booth's work, the default place was that unreliability distances us from the narrator; to be unreliable is to be somehow lacking. Booth insists that the unreliable narrator is morally inadequate. Phelan argues that readers' relations to unreliable narrators, like our relations to other humans, are more complex than this type of critical transparency would suggest, and novelists use this elaboration to build a gamut of emotional and moral effects (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 34). The "bonding/estranging" differentiation recognizes that, with unreliable narration, this scope stretches from affective and moral abhorrence at one end to affective sympathy and ethical high regard at the other. Phelan argues that "recognizing bonding effects illuminates the importance of a different kind of communication accompanying the behind-the-back connection of unreliability: a communication between readers and a narrator who would never be mistaken for the implied narrator's surrogate" (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 35). I will apply Phelan's distinction between "estranging unreliability" and "bonding unreliability" for first-person narration because it addresses the complex workings of narrative communication and the representation of the mind.

Structuralist approaches, however, pursue the underlying structures of textual meaning. Structuralists consider the literary character as a surface phenomenon whose "true" function is to be found in the semantic or symbolic structures "beneath" the textual surface. Ian Buchanan argues that "narrative analysis occurs at a level below that of character and [...] character type," which was the "actant model" developed by Algirdas J. Greimas (Buchanan 3). In *Structural Poetics* (1966), Greimas programmatically replaces the analytical classification of "characters"

with the idea of "actants" while thinking beyond the common rational and defining it as "an isotope of the action" (Buchanan 3). Greimas was inspired by Vladimir Propp's influential work on Russian folktales, and he saw the scientific significance of literary figures not in independent characteristics or textual strategies of characterization but in their structural function within the plot. This view of characters as products according to "what they do [...] not what they are" opposes a lengthy tradition of theoretical efforts reaching back to Aristotle's *Poetics* (Chatman 111, cf. Pfister 160).

Phelan and Rabinowitz suggest that "a purely formal description, such as Propp's account of the grammar of Russian folktales, can illuminate without discussing authorial participation" (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 30). Greimas ventures beyond the typical analytical trust in the precedence of plot over figure intrinsic to this tradition. He strives to describe the universal mechanism of storytelling, namely "narrative in which characters use as expression amid an underlying narrative grammar," which was further developed in a model (Eder, Schneider, and Jannidis 21). Regarding universality, Greimas recognizes six common actants to all narratives: the subject/object, the sender/receiver, and the helper/opponent. In Greimas' theory, a single character does not automatically embody these actants since any character may stage countless roles, and any "role may be distributed among multiple characters" (Eder, Schneider, and Jannidis 21). Human beings within the fictional members of a narrative are only related insofar as they embody or represent the underlying narrative grammar of the text. Indeed, this approach involves a rigorous interest in the systematic irrelevance of individual traits and the mimetic dimension of fictional beings. I will keep Propp's pioneering and seminal work in mind but will focus on the continuing-consciousness paradigm to make the centrality of the fictional minds explicit.

Even though the poststructuralists challenge numerous doctrines of structuralist thinking, they insist that "in serious literary study, one must properly shift focus from mimetic to formalist or thematic concerns" (Knapp 349). Poststructuralist thinkers began taking account of a traditional belief in human identity and subjectivity. The human subject is no longer an independent, self-governing existence but the consequence of discursive forces, a "mere tissue of textualities" lacking any immanent essence (Barry 65). From this attitude, both literary characters and the individual subject were acknowledged as the consequence of a "freeplay of the world and of signs without truth and without origin" (Leitch 104). I will examine how fictional minds work within the contexts of the storyworlds they belong to, and how readers attribute states of mind to characters, where relevant, also to themselves.

William James claims, rather tendentiously, that consciousness involves a process of birth and change: "Each pulse of cognitive consciousness, each Thought, dies away and is replaced by another. Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies owned, transmitting whatever is realized as its Self to its own later proprietor" (James, *Principles of Psychology* 1.339). For James, consciousness is not an "entity" or private content of a subject's experience but an alignment or interest-granting purpose ("Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" 3-4). Consciousness resists objectification. A stream of thought, then, is a system of relating or "owing" in which a thought directs itself to its object, appropriates the object, and in turn becomes appropriated. Foremost in the placement of structuring experience and framing objects in the world, a thought later perishes and becomes an object to be framed (James, *The Works of William James* 235). For James, a stream of thought is nothing but a circuit of relations within the world through which thoughts become cohesive. In applying this idea, Dorrit Cohen argues, "The facts of Molly's life

pass through her consciousness only implicitly, incidentally, by allusive indirection" (Cohen 221). Molly's thoughts are directed onto the objects in the world.

The first-person, present tense combination in Molly's monologue takes place solely with verbs of internal rather than external activity. Molly begins her monologue with an affirmation: "Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the *City Arms* hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice" (*Ulysses* 871). Molly's consistent fluctuation between memories and projects, the true and the prospective, the specific and the common, is one of the most distinctive marks of freely associative monologic language (Cohn 227). In Edna O'Brien's *The Girls in Their Married Bliss,* Cait's stream of thought can be seen as a circuit of relations within her world: "She thought, He knows,he knows. If only he'll give me this last chance. I'll change, reform, make myself so ugly that I will be out of reach of temptation" (391-92). Cait, the first-person narrator, thinks, wishes, contemplates, hopes, and remembers; hers is a punctual presence of mental activity that she performs at that precise moment. This style proposes that O'Brien was absorbed in progressive stylistic experimentation throughout the trilogy, which is, without doubt, the production of her affection for Joyce. *The Country Girls Trilogy* is accompanied by a significant thematic creation, which finds its pinnacle in the unhappy separation of the two protagonists, Baba and Cait, and the progressive deterioration and vanishing of Cait.

As Gerard Prince proposes, stream-of-consciousness technical skill can be recognized as a particular kind or modality of interior monologue (Herman, *The Emergence of Mind* 247). According to David Herman, "interior monologue" is a substitute term that relates to more or less extended passages of free indirect discourse. Though free of quotation marks and tag phrases such as "she reflected" or "he wondered," discourse can be presumed

to coincide with or quote the unspoken thoughts of a character (Herman, *The Emergence of Mind* 247). For Prince, stream of consciousness does not just quote thoughts; instead, it "focus[es] on the random flow of thought and stress[es] its illogical, 'ungrammatical,' associative nature" (Prince 94).

As readers of these four texts, we should ask ourselves two questions. By what measures do homodiegetic narrators make attributions of states of mind to themselves and also to other characters? And, about the matter of characterization, how does an attribution of a mental state by the first-person narrator help to create in the reader a sense of the complete personality of the character who is the subject of that attribution? Attribution theory rests on the notion of theory of mind. Palmer calls the *continuous consciousness frame* an essential component in fulfilling the attribution theory for fictional texts. The *continuous consciousness* frame is a term which describes the capability of readers to take a reference to a character in the text and fasten to it a presumed consciousness that exists continuously within the storyworld of the novel between the numerous, more or less recurrent references to that character.

Daniel Dennett's concept of the *intentional stance* is interestingly similar to the continuing- consciousness frame, which is required for constructing fictional minds from narrative. Dennett suggests that the construction of real minds is "a strategy of interpreting the behaviour of an entity (person, animal, artifact, whatever) by treating it *as if* it were a rational agent who governed its 'choice' of 'action' by a 'consideration' of its 'beliefs' and 'desires'...The intentional stance is the attitude or perspective we routinely adopt towards one another" (Dennet 27). Palmer argues that there is a visibly coherent behaviour caused by directing consciousness in the real world and used by extension in the employment of the

continuing consciousness frame to the storyworld (Palmer 178). Both are a way of relating the present event or action to past regularities and motives of events and anticipations regarding future events.

According to Palmer, attributions to human beings are discursive while the depictions emerging from these attributions are performative speech actions within complex language games, which are permanently embedded in distinct social contexts (Herman, *Emergence of Mind* 278-279). Palmer argues attributions tend to be discursively built as seemingly genuine and objective but often include self-centred attributions of intentions. A mental state or event is depicted in a particular course of action and not in other classes of action for specific purposes, and these discrepancies can vary immensely as to how they assign agency, force responsibility, vindicate behaviour, explain incentives, attribute praise, divert criticism and responsibility, and so forth. For Palmer, this approach has discernible significance for the novel, where mental functioning can only endure within the worlds of a fictional discourse. Palmer suggests that ontological and epistemological concerns are so interwoven that it is challenging to keep them apart for long, and any distinctions are of accentuation alone.

These four texts create a historical continuum, beginning with the neorealism of *Ulysses,* continuing with the modernism of *The Country Girls Trilogy,* and ending with the tricky postmodernism of *The Infinities* and *The Singularities*. In the "Penelope" episode, in the case of the first-person narrator-character, there are doubts over whether there is one whole mind. The textual components are ordered along a scale extending from inner to outer domains, and the predominant presence of internal components is considered a signature of modernist methods. Many of the attributions in *The Country Girls Trilogy* are sound and

plausible and so appear at first to be reliable. Only later in the Epilogue to O'Brien's trilogy do we see that these authoritative convictions are simply false. The first-person attributions in *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* are extremely odd because they take place in one ontological plane with no clear distinction between real and imaginary – making it a polyphonic maze.

Molly's monologue complies with the customary circulation in her world and with the replicas of the workings of the mind. Within this single, stable storyworld, Molly is viewed in different roles. She is the first-person unreliable narrator oscillating between "bonding unreliability" and "estranging unreliability." Molly provides multiple points of view on the world, but she does not undermine the underlying unity of the self. O'Brien's *The Country Girls* is a homodiegetic narrative in which the narrator character's endeavours to attribute incentives to herself and others are humorously inadequate. Her "bonding unreliability" homodiegetic narrative stream presents Cait's preoccupations. The consciousness of Cait and Baba exists from the beginning to the end of the narrative. By contrast, in Banville's narratives, there is a self-reflexive engrossment in the narrative processes and a frequent use of metafictional devices that draw attention to the fictional status of the two texts. Banville is interested in how alternative worlds are created and uncreated. *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* stage a mathematical world construction in order to question certain truths about the truth. The concealment of the unreliability in Banville's two texts causes a kind of triple unreliability. Banville, Hermes, and Adam Sr. provide different accounts of the same events. Their first-person narratives offer an unmediated view of the whole storyworld. We do not experience the storyworld directly, in that events are presented to the reader through the consciousness of three different minds

with very different results. The world becomes "plural, unsteady, and questionable," which gestures towards a model of the self which is correspondingly plural, unstable, and questionable.

The Infinites are preoccupied with the unreliability of cognition and perception. The homodiegetic narration is shared between Hermes and Adam as they move from one world to another. The novel takes place within a double storyworld. The artistic avatar Adam/Hermes is both alive and dead simultaneously. Adam's first-person account tells us about his marriage: "Yet I wonder if I asked too much of her, or, worse, perhaps, too little" (207). He concedes that he may have attributed "too much" or "too little" in his deliberation towards Ursula; he wonders if there is any truth at all. Adam impedes a world of dying: Adam's self is disintegrated due to his inability to uphold the coexistence of two fictional worlds. As the passage shows, Adam self-consciously attributes a variety of states of mind to himself, first honestly and then untruthfully. Hermes or Banville interrupts: "I know that groping gaze" (213). There is a misrepresentation of their thought processes. The narratee – whose characteristics appear at this moment in the text, can be exposed by a technique akin to Mikhail Bakhtin's strategy for finding dialogic voices in writing that only seems to be univocal. The three first-person narrators are locked together in a frenzied attributional embrace. This truly is a Bakhtinian novel as Hermes and Adam continue to perform with a "groping gaze" at each other. In a cavalier tone, he states, "I loved the process...Apply, apply away! - that way my cry...I was resented, of course; my kind always are...This is what Benny loves, what all the gods love, to eavesdrop on the secret lives of others" (238-239). He tells us that he is not writing a realistic novel. He points to the constructedness of his characters as he says "apply, apply away!" Banville's mental functioning is apparent– he tells us how he creates his art beyond issues of fictionality. The first-person narrative streams consist

of a flood of attribution of motives and intentions. Banville self-consciously attributes a variety of states of mind to himself; by doing so, the narrative creates a "bonding reliability." Indeed, Banville, Hermes, and Adam Sr. perform to make the other's narration seem as unreliable as possible. In *The Singularities,* mental causation is abundant but idiosyncratic, gravitating irregularly to give due weight to writing. Banville's work usually engages in a self-reflexive concern in which he seems to be writing about writing.

As the text unfolds, it emphasizes the relationship between the storyworld of *The Infinities* and the larger storyworld in which it is embedded. The relationship between the continuous-consciousness frame and the concept of embedded narrative is that the former is a measure by which we can fabricate fictional minds; the latter is the consequence of that fabrication. Palmer argues that *embedded narratives* are intended to communicate a wide gamut of available information and then amend judgments about characters' minds (Palmer 183). I will explore the characters' minds in the storyworld with their embedded narratives, motives, objectives, and schemes. The embedded narrative approach can relate states of mind to the other presentations of Hermes' consciousness in the discourse and his behaviour and actions. In *The Singularities,* there is a link between reconstructing Hermes' fictional mind and comprehending the more extensive narrative within which it is situated.

This link is the relationship between distinct minds. *The Singularities* is a homodiegetic narrative in which the narrator-character efforts to attribute impulse to himself and others continue to be humorously deficient, undermining the underlying unity of the self. Banville, Hermes, and Adam join forces for the second time to depart from the real world. Their first-person selves continuously rupture throughout the narrative into a stream of highly self-conscious but progressively incomprehensible self-attribution: "On the subject of

phantom creatures, or semi-phantoms, I must tell you of an exciting, exciting at the time, discovery I made one day...I should be at my old salt's desk, hard at work...I might be writing, or preparing to write, or, as, more often, destroying what I have already written" (149). He is split in two; one character remains while the other floats off as a "phantom." We understand that this passage is about two minds rather than one, about Banville's mind and Hermes'. The two minds are in some relationship which seems to undermine the underlying unity of the self. In this regard, it is a doubly embedded narrative moving towards a plurality of worlds to question how such worlds are made and unmade.

Additionally, Banville uses a "bonding unreliability" as a mode of narrative address. He remarks on his work as a writer and explains the process of writing fiction. Banville then switches to third-person attribution to continue speaking about his writing. This doubly embedded feature of the embedded narrative recapitulates the dialogic nature of consciousness in different terms. The first-person narrator continues to work around the boundary between the two worlds – life before death and life after death.

Brian Richardson suggests death is the most significant difference between fiction and reality. Richardson observes that in life, "there is only one death, and it is irreversible" (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 52). According to Richardson, writers replace one fundamental cognitive frame, the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator, with another, the unreliable homodiegetic narrator (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 52).

The first-person narrator continues to work towards creating doubts over the status of the character's consciousness. Hermes, Banville, and Adam obsess about what the others are thinking, but they also speculate about the other characters' minds to understand the consequences of their actions. The first-person narrator's identity constantly fluctuates;

consequently, it is inconsistent and self-contradictory. Hermes questions the event: “But I ask, what threat could I possibly represent to him in his married bliss, dusty old codger that I am, with my little pot-belly and my dewlaps, my ties and tremors?....Verily, there are more things in algebra, Master Adam, than are dreamt of in your etcetera. Ha!” (226). Hermes briefly and knowingly visits the real world; Adam appears as a ghost to his former accomplice, exploring how actual truths have been constituted in actual historical situations. He moves towards an ontological impact to fracture the ongoing consciousness frame. These profound and complex problems related to the coherence and unity of the various selves arise directly from the ontological instabilities introduced by how the selves are revealed. Banville uses a double impulse toward invention and refutation. On the level of character, this takes place as the effort to oppose, even while inevitably creating, fictional representations of the self. This scene reveals how the relegation of language to the external and temporal domain follows equivocation toward it as concealment, convolution, and misrepresentation of an inward, singular truth. Banville’s writing moves in a sphere of archetype and paradigm. The first-person narrator produces a new setting and steps forward as he states, “I know I should get up from the table...just melancholy by nature; I am too, so I should know” (227). Banville uses his double to show their highly developed images of themselves. Indeed, Banville, Adam, and Hermes attempt to destabilize the reader’s reliance on the other to arrive at the true nature of the novel’s storyworld.

Joyce’s, O’Brien’s, and Banville’s novels feature unreliable homodiegetic narratives, which can represent mental states in and through language, although never infallibly. An embedded narrative notion inspires a detailed, functional, accurate, and inclusive approach toward the whole of a character’s various perceptual and conceptual perspectives, ideological

worldviews, and plans for the future considered as an individual narrative. This project brings together traditions of narrative scholarship and research on the mind to examine what stories genuinely are, how they operate, and what can be used to enrich our understanding of the mind.

Molly's Language of Flow

In the "Penelope" episode of *Ulysses,* Molly's biological femininity is positioned at the center stage to reveal her thoughts and fantasies. Her interior monologue moves toward a feeling that enables a historical understanding of the affective components of consciousness. Joyce explores consciousness to show that however verbal its presentations are, it lives near the less conscious facets of mental and psychosexual life. By reviving the associative flow of Molly's libidinal and cognitive processes, the text engenders an illusion of lucidity for the reader and Molly. Molly has access to her libido; her ego borders are penetrable and capable of acknowledging to consciousness the desires and discontents of the unconscious.

In a conversation with Arthur Power, Joyce remarks that the "modern theme" examines "the subterranean forces, those hidden tides which govern everything and run humanity counter to the apparent flood: those poisonous subtleties which envelop the soul, the ascending fumes of sex" (Power 54). In a 1922 *Vanity Fair* interview with Djuna Barnes, Joyce commented on his authorial intention in writing *Ulysses*: "I have recorded, simultaneously, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such seeing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudians call the subconscious" (Barnes 65). The evidence highlights that Joyce created the fictive illusion of "interiority" by vocalizing the radically split nature of identity.

In "Penelope," Joyce's ventriloquism of Molly's voice weaves and unweaves language toward a qualitative effect; it projects Molly as a "natural" and "earthy" woman. As the Earth, she represents what is kept under and stepped on but is also the fundamental ground that moves everything. Molly's performance relies on vigour, not precision, as she weaves language threads to turn a loom into a blank page and threads into words. I aim to

examine consciousness in a first-person context to discuss how psycho-narration and monologue stay close to the content of Molly's mind. Her textual identifications reveal the psychic truths about gender, female sexuality, and nation. I highlight in Joyce's work an allegorical unravelling of narrative that makes space for the representation of what he called those "ascending fumes of sex." Molly is connected with the Earth, and this image indicates her oppression and her power. Indeterminable psychosexual passions take form as they destabilize subjectivity; she weaves and unweaves herself to show how instrumental she is in sustaining her subjectivity. The representation of gendered subjectivity oscillates from the objective or external to the emotive of Molly's inner life. Through Molly's melodramatic language, I aim to draw attention to the flux of mental activity that naturally expands into this darker underside of consciousness.

Joyce uses the trope of the devouring mother to explore the connection between the myth of a menacing female and endangered masculinity and the collective national identity as well. I use Molly's character to distinguish how she moves through time to describe events as a flow of ceaseless physical sensations amid the social and physical context of the storyworld in which the mind functions. I use Alan Palmer's "attribution theory" to show how Molly, the characters, and readers attribute states of mind to themselves and others, with implications for how fictional minds perform. My argument also emphasizes Antonio Damasio's theory of the *core self* and the *autobiographical self*. Damasio suggests the two selves are "the seemingly changing self and the seemingly permanent self" (Damasio 217). Molly's monologue functions as a performance to seduce a fictitious interlocutor; its provocative content withstands any simple identifications because the mind moves between single mental events and states that continue over time in terms of the two selves. Molly's

masquerade reveals the truths about the issues of gender, female sexuality, and nation as they remain contrapuntal, interdependent components.

I use an intersubjective approach and a feminist narrative methodology because it will allow me to examine how Molly's fictional mind works within the context of the storyworld to which she belongs. Joyce ensures that we do not experience the storyworld directly; the events are presented to the reader through the consciousness of two very different minds – Molly and Bloom bring forward two very different results. Even though they have misread each other's interests and desires, their minds remain intertwined. I argue that the "Penelope" episode engages in the trope of the vagina dentata and female sexuality to transcend language amid the androgynous constructions of Leopold and Molly Bloom.

Mary Anne Gilles suggests that Joyce wanted to formulate a narrative that would mirror the preeminence of time over space. Gilles argues that "Joyce's interest in time centres around the exploration of character and how to represent life's fluid inner world" (Gillies 134). Shiv Kumar contends that "In presenting life as a stream 'never the same,' and personality as a process of dynamic blending of physic states, Joyce comes nearest to the Bergsonian flux" (Kumar 108). Two Bergsonian notions are preeminent here: the concept of *durée* and the unified idea of self. Gillies claims that Joyce's fictional worlds are founded on *durée* because his central focus is the inner world, and the dominant subject in his work is the self and its evolution and changes (Gillies 135). "Penelope" becomes the "true" inner life of the characters, as opposed to the unyielding selves they present to the world.

Bergson wrote that the *élan vital* propels both body and mind together toward transformation, that the self comprises copious layers that all pervade and are also the complete self at any one time. Our instinct permits us to know ourselves and other things to a

greater extent than our intellect (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 282). According to Bergson, our vision of the self discloses a crucial split between inner and outer worlds. Bergson claims that the social self is helpful for our interrelationships, but it is no longer critical because it has crystallized. What is essential is the vitality of the inner self, which is indescribable and rare because its states continuously evolve and connect, forming our total self (Gillies 135). Joyce illustrates a fictional mind constantly changing and growing beyond conscious introspection or reflection.

First-Person

The first-person, present-tense amalgamation in Molly's monologue involves verbs regarding internal rather than external activity. Cohn argues that Molly thinks, hopes, wishes, and remembers several times, so the immediate presence of her inner discourse consistently refers to and sustains the actual activity she fulfills at every moment of her monologue (Cohn 227). All of Molly's other verbal tenses and moods are rooted in this moment of mental activity. She experiences her self-narrative as continuing and living. Molly uses all verb tenses and voices: past, future, indicative, conditional, and particularly the present of her sweeping statements. According to Cohn, this consistent fluctuation between memories and projects, the true and the prospective, the precise and the common, is one of the most distinctive forms of freely associative monologic language (Cohn 227).

Molly's monologue flows evenly, and in her changing states of mind, she reflects, speculates, guesses, hopes, and fills in the gaps. The area of her mind that connects with Bloom and Stephen is close to the unconscious – it is the voice of pure producing faculty, which is continuously seeking, connecting, affirming, circling and holding memories. Joyce knows that Molly, Bloom, and Stephen misread each other's interests, yet their thoughts

remain conflicting and dynamic. Joyce positions Molly and gives her the power to transcend language amid their assumed gender roles. Joyce illustrates the great verbal art form amid the verbal mind to show how the mind imagines as he explores the nature of art from the inside-out – it is art that tells the mind's story. Molly begins with a self-centred statement: "Yes because he never did a thing like that" (871) and ends with "yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (933). The "Yes" grabs the reader's attention: words have an existence, a life of their own that allows language to transcend lived experience. "Yes" represents the collective voice of the reader set free in a language of affirmation.

Antonio Damasio argues that "core consciousness, the sense of self, arises in the subtle, fleeting feeling of knowing, constructed anew in each pulse." In contrast, "[e]xtended consciousness still hinges on the same core 'you,' but that 'you' is now connected to the lived past, the anticipated future that is part of your autobiographical record" (Damasio 196). In the "Penelope" episode, mental events happen to the core self, and states are attributes of the autobiographical self. Joyce uses this idea of the two selves in Molly to explore the enigmas of life – why we feel that we are constantly changing while concurrently feeling that we always stay the same. For Damasio, it is the core self that gives rise to the feeling of change and the autobiographical self that gives rise to the feeling of sameness.

The nature of the attribution in the "Penelope" episode can be illustrated by describing her marriage and family life with Bloom and her infidelity with Boylan. The humour is beautifully controlled by using the flow of attribution, which arises from the pronouns with unclear antecedents and words that start with one grammatical connection while moving to another in the flow of her language. Molly takes comfort in knowing who

she is and she embodies a privilege of vision and language that men seek in their perceptions. She self-consciously attributes a variety of states of mind to herself; she oscillates between truthful and untruthful statements. Through Molly, Joyce explores both the limitations imposed by the position of woman and its profound powers. Indeed, Molly is the focus of desire and the elicitor of all possibilities in the storyworld.

According to Palmer, the continuing consciousness frame operates in a way that enables readers to take a reference to a character in the text and link it to an assumed consciousness that exists continuously within the storyworld of the text between the numerous fragmentary references to that character (Herman, *Emergence of Mind* 278). In the "Penelope" episode, Molly oscillates between estranging unreliability and bonding unreliability. Joyce uses playful, unreliable narration to call attention to similarities or contrasts between himself as a teller and Molly, the first-person narrator as a teller. Joyce's technique goes around the patriarchal point of view, which allows her to move between power and oppression in order to reinstate the myth of the feminine. Joyce creates Molly as the "Other," empowering her as the figure and idea of a woman who is never immobilized in representation. During her unreliable narration, she continuously releases feminine energy that is not restrained by patriarchal control because as "Other" she knows herself better and has several interesting things to say. Molly escapes representation by the movement of her thoughts, which constantly change and move about without any finality.

Flow

Flow, as Derek Attridge has written, is the most recurrent way of describing Molly's prose, implying that it continually confronts locks and dams. Attridge argues that the "flow" of words and blood shows the mind without boundaries (Attridge 544). Declan Kiberd further

underlines that Molly's soliloquy "becomes a synecdoche for the recovery into the art of the whole human body" (Kibert 355). Joyce focuses on the anatomy of feminine and masculine roles to illustrate the subject's psychoanalysis. Kimberly Devlin argues that in writing Molly, Joyce casts a female voice that reveals the engendered linguistic performance of her culture. Devlin suggests that Joyce was permitted to feel the malaises of the construct only in the action of male-female parody and solely in trying on a female disguise himself (Devlin 89). Molly's dramaturgical performance sometimes takes the form of an oppressive gender identity, but at other times, her female mimicry is good-natured.

Joyce directs social scripts that shape Irish female identity not so much through one character's disruptive masquerade or mimicry but through his resistance to any cultural representations of gendered subjectivity. The difference between female masquerade and female mimicry permits women's relations with representations of the feminine to take dissimilar forms. First, women may accept and internalize those culturally determined depictions meekly and unconsciously; in contrast, they can seize them ironically and exploit them from an internal critical distance. Joyce has Molly thinking of female sexuality, marriage, infidelity, and nation; she helps him transcend language through her androgynous constructions in an effort to move beyond issues of gender, sexuality, and national identity. For Joyce, the conception of mind is a form of life in Wittgenstein's sense.

Joseph A. Boone suggests that the "Circe" episode maintains a balance amid the exultant evocation of sexual and textual plurality. According to Boone, Joyce creates a textual space for an unrepressed sexuality and for a polymorphous free play, Boone argues that "while "Penelope" paradoxically gives (and gives over) expression to a speaking subject in Molly, one whose discursive construction tantalizingly evades Joyce's authorial impositions even as her *enacted*

subjectivity remains part of the masquerade of the self and sexuality which "Penelope," no less than "Circe," seeks to expose" (Friedman 193). Molly's masquerade is a transformation of pronouns and costumes of sexual roles, which seems, at times, to move in the direction of an androgynous wholeness. The fact is significant because it indicates that the irrationality of the fantasy rests in social definitions and appearances rather than in Molly. Her subconscious fantasy of sexual transfiguration is the manifestation of her equally subconscious desire for a shift in social values. Joyce decides to keep moving beyond Molly towards a version of the feminine foreshadowed in the milk woman who was not Mother Ireland.

Several of the textual images of Molly are clichés. The "Penelope" episode stages conventional gender identification and discloses unconscious insight into women's construction process according to received textual depictions. Joyce ensures that her presumed roles are byproducts of identifications with distinct works of femininity accessible to her at her specified historical moment and locus. Molly's textual identifications with women can be read as an astute criticism of gender performance. Joyce stages Molly as a performer who is continually conscious of her theatricality and cleverly aware of the presumed nature of her gender acts.

Molly begins her narrative with the concept of a consistent reversal of language. Molly's language of flow is words and phrases that operate as contradictory or vague statements. Joyce's language repeatedly fractures the consolidation of a character who might signify an establishment of such discourses. In the 'Penelope" episode, Joyce uses language to divulge the transcendence of logic beyond the world. Gilbert Seldes suggests that Molly's stream of consciousness has been read as "the flux of ...thoughts, impressions, emotions, or reminiscences, often without logical sequence or syntax" (Seldes 8). Yet there is a logic to

her logic, and the illogic is a required element. Joyce uses language to depict the psychosexual complexity of the mind; he uses the trope of the vagina dentata and female sexuality and gives expression to Molly as the repressed in culture in order to explore gender and nation beyond the firmly overlapping contexts of these tensions.

Molly's narrative can be read as an example of é*criture feminine*, a woman writing her own body. Hélène Cixous and other é*criture féminine* theorists interpret Molly's unpunctuated sentences as a *jouissance* that transfers "*Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing" (Cixous 341). Throughout her monologue, Molly menstruates, urinates, and self- consciously voices "that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets" (932). Joyce conveys her bodily gestures like exclamatory indirection to show the alliance between the feminine, the sexual, and the maternal. This performance shows the objectifying terms of male heterosexual discourse that supply her with the only sanctioned language that she understands for articulating the sensuality of her material presence. Joyce makes symbolic use of a realistic feature of speech-for-oneself beyond her intense feelings. Molly's feminine perspective points to the layers of the whole self, the *élan vital*: "yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life...he understood or felt what a woman is" (932). In this intense mood, she highlights the contingency of the erotic partner and how Bloom's innate ability to understand women has been the motivating element of her primary attraction to him. More importantly, her statement challenges all the male thoughts and voices that have come before in an effort to create a version of the feminine. We read the perspectivism or presentation of their distinct viewpoints – Bloom lets her know he understands her vulnerabilities. Molly reveals how Joyce was excited to illustrate his linguistic "puissance"

with a feminine masquerade that places women in the material realm. In this sense, Joyce brings us, as readers, face to face with our own received ideas, making us view the authoritative male and whimsical female voice differently. Indeed, Joyce strives to depict the essential feminine as subverting, destabilizing, and "unweaving" the world of phallocentric language. Joyce's interest in alterity, in alternate voices and concurrent alternate realities, allows him to work, in style and characterization, toward the subversion of prevailing ideas and the disquieting of the reader.

Gender and Sexuality

Lacan argues that what is in our view is always a screen for a hidden power behind it is called the Other; the Other is the origin of our motivation because it is the otherness of the unconscious (Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality* 106-108 129). In Lacan's later work, he contends that the role of woman will have to be replaced by a new probability (Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality* 144 160). However, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that this role of woman is meant to have a negative impact on women because they will remain subordinate to men (de Beauvoir 129 132-134). Lacan and de Beauvoir agree that the woman's role is socially constructed rather than biologically given. Lacan insists that to eliminate the Other is to exclude the woman. Molly creates her feminine space: "I got over him that way when I unbuttoned him and took his out and drew back the skin in it had a kind of eye in it theyre all Buttons men" (902). Molly objectifies and gives a gendered description of men from the perspective of a female "Other." This sexual experience that is described is female in its objectifying relation to the sexual organs of the biologically male body. She plays the assertive "Other" who is interested in the erotic removal of men's clothing to go beyond and behind the biological determinations and the cultural

construction that make up the gendered world. Joyce positions Molly as the unreliable Other, while Bloom positions her as an object of worship and oppression.

In "Penelope," menstruation becomes a paradigmatic exemplar of Joyce's preoccupation with, and merriment at, competing myths of sexuality. Menstruation's potentiality and persistence as a focus for ideological discourse, moral concern, and emotional angst vivify Joyce's passion. Several beliefs about menstruation in "Penelope" are procured from folklore and religious faith. Yet Molly considers menstruation as something other than Joyce's staging of an essential, biologically endorsed femininity. She is the artful narrator who makes certain that her blood flow does not interrupt her obsessive task of turning the threads into words. Indeed, menstruation is relevant in "Penelope" because it is a periodic phenomenon. In the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous argues that Molly's unrestricted, free-flowing use of language might be a model for female writers: "Our blood flows, and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking" (Cixous 878). Molly supplies a myth of writing that is never lacking and which will supersede Stephen Dedalus to become central to *Finnegans Wake.*

Molly's use of ventriloquism highlights how thinking and menstruating are interchangeable and concomitant processes. Lisa Sternlieb argues that the early feminist critics read the combination of the mouth and vagina as patriarchal "linguistic *puissance*" and as "linguistic *jouissance"* by those impassioned with French psychoanalytic theory (Sternlieb 757). As Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi informs us, menstruating women were part of the vagina dentata trope because their organs were too reminiscent of the "castration wound" for many men, who secluded menstruating women – the group of women already marginalized from civic

engagement and other entitlements ((Szczeszak-Brewer 13). Joyce's amalgamation of two distinct types of "flow," both developing, uncontrollable, and insurmountable, may be the consequence of Joyce's simultaneous interest in and fear of the female "castration wound." Christine van Boheemen contends that Molly's menses is "the flow of the fertility of life which is obliquely seen as a symbol for a language, a textuality and a perverse form of writing against the grain" (Boheemen 76). Molly's narrative stream consists of a cascade of attribution of reasons and objectives because her liberty comes from the stability of facts, making her the center of attraction. Indeed, her attraction makes the world come into view. Molly's unweaving moves backwards in order to go forwards, "he didnt make me pregnant as big as he is I dont want to ruin the clean sheets the clean linen I wore brought it on too damn it damn it and they always want to see a stain on the bed to know youre a virgin" (914). The unweaving moves backwards, showing that virginity can only be achieved through sex. Molly points to the male perspective regarding women and virginity; she tells us about the anxieties and loss implicit in national and sexual differences. Female biological determinations pass through her consciousness only accidentally and by evocative indirection.

Joyce makes Molly mildly unreliable and immensely interesting by creating a central occurrence: the commencement of her menses. Cohn argues that Molly's menses work in a way that continuously reorders the direction of her thoughts, distinctly splitting them into a before and after. Her thoughts are exchanged by thoughts of the future, mainly in storyworlds, for seducing Stephen and re-seducing Bloom (Cohn 219). This shift to the biologically given allows her to move in a new direction without separating herself from the socially constructed one. The "Penelope" episode revolutionizes myths of national culture with the loss of reinstating the myth of the feminine. Social masquerade, race, and gender

come together to explore the ideologies grounded on belligerence toward difference. Joyce combines the myth of emasculation by a strong woman with the myth of a powerful, virile polis, a society whose safeguarding relies on female submission and exclusion of the ethnic other. It is in this manner that Joyce explores the trope of the vagina dentata and female sexuality.

Molly's masquerade draws on a theatrical precedent to show that sexuality and identity are an ensemble of constructed roles and discourses. Her monologue thematizes and foregrounds gender as a performance, yet she proves that all these "selves" are mere masks that forge the inner reality of her "true" being. "Real" gender, as Judith Butler calls it, is a performance. The reader gets a glimpse of Molly's subliminal desires, guilts, and fears, yet we also read her chain of associations as clues to what remains unspoken or suppressed. Joyce stages the hidden tides of consciousness as well as the "subterranean" depths of the subconscious to explore the erotics of mental activity. The continuous dramatic outlines of Molly's fantasies and her repetitive sense of an implicit audience document the psychological impression of her consciousness of the Other and the socio-historical impression of a theatrical culture. Molly's performance fluctuates between repression and freedom. Her thoughts display an acute awareness of what is going on around her, and she is constantly aware of what others will be seeing, hearing, and thinking. Dispersed references and occurrences throughout Molly's monologue elicit an impression of what is viewed as tolerable female and male behaviour in Dublin. Female sexuality takes center stage in a sequence of ever-shifting public masks to explore sexuality and identity beyond assumed gender roles. Joyce's simulation of a "woman's" voice is an excellent technique for

representing Molly's psychosexual complexities, marked by excess and positioned outside of the patriarchal national discourse.

Molly is intrigued by Blazes Boylan's reputed sexual prowess, and she is not afraid to express the sensuality of her material presence. Boylan plays the acceptable stereotype; his ostensible virility wins him the title of "conquering hero" (264). Molly plays the receptive and passive female: "Boylan gave my hand a great squeeze going along by the Tolka in my hand there steals another I just pressed the back of his like that with my thumb to squeeze back singing the young May Moon" (874). Molly playfully imitates Boylan's masculine mannerisms of sheer strength and force because her lovemaking is the counterpart of game-playing. She thinks of his reputed virility and how male physical force and sexual prowess are a demonstration of the masculine code. Moreover, she reveals that she has little bodily pleasure with Boylan because her pleasure is overshadowed by her insecurities about whether she has satisfied him. Molly's sexual performances are never spontaneous, unselfconscious, or natural because she is forever preparing for the act of pretending. Her feigning connects both to deceitfulness and to nature, both to masturbatory play and to creation. Once her performance is completed, she does not know which bits of the self to attribute beliefs, motives, and feelings to because her ceaseless movement is a displacement that subverts the fixed forms of life toward an endless flow of new possibilities. Both characters have highly developed images of themselves, which are derived from a sentimental view of the distinct roles proper to each sex.

Molly tends to measure her self-worth with regard to Boylan's responsiveness to her sexuality. In contrast, Boylan's sexual identity is predicated upon the supremacy of patriarchy. Furthermore, Boylan recognizes that sheer strength and force reinforce the

victory of patriarchy; he knows it to be a great example of true manhood. Indeed, society views sexual prowess as exclusively male: female pleasure is subjected to male demand. For the most part, Molly conceives that a female body is trapped within male paradigms of desire. Although Molly protests that sexual pleasure is a male privilege, she also subtly adjusts this judgment when she unwittingly reveals that a woman has the potential for self-pleasure as well as self-fulfillment. The" Penelope" episode is filled with copious connotations that subvert the polarity of the body and mind, sexuality and purity, culture and materiality in an effort to maintain the notion of an objective, universal aesthetic and cultural standard. Joyce works to modify Molly's bodily specificity into pure essence.

Throughout the "Penelope" episode, we are cast into the privacy of a mind talking to itself about its trysts with Bloom, Boylan, Mulvey, and several other men. Molly's word or set of words is followed by a pause while unveiling a comprehensible purpose. Her mind turns to thoughts of desire: "I made him blush a little and took his out and drew back the skin it had a kind of eye in it theyre all Buttons men down the middle on the wrong side of them" (902). In this instance, she pretends that the penis is a sexual prop, a shiftable object, a piece of the outfit of maleness. This transformation unlocks the depths of Molly's repressed feelings. She points to the "Buttons" on the costumes to reveal that costumes are merely stage props. Molly's monologue contains unresolved contradictions as she moves toward doing and then undoing; the artifice of her narrative unveils the mechanism of her own project and, ultimately, the fantasy of Joyce's as well.

Joyce explores clothing and how it powerfully defines sex roles, both visible and hidden sexual fantasies. Rather than a complete sex change, the change is one of pronouns and costumes. Everything that is seen and heard during her performance is what she, as

stage director, decides will be seen and heard. The perversity of the fantasy inheres in social definitions and appearance rather than in Molly. Furthermore, Molly's masquerade as a confident and hypersexual woman is the greatest manifestation of her equally subconscious desire for a change in societal values. Thus, Molly's act ironically reverses the acute role-playing demanded of women by society. Indeed, Molly reveals the truth about her struggle to conform to the social definitions of womanliness. Every piece of material that she looks through is to reassemble seamlessly woven costumes in order to effortlessly unweave herself. "Interior" and "exterior" remain blurred as Joyce's efforts to represent Molly's "interiority" in an external form seem to become an exposition of his interior anxieties.

Molly and Bloom pretend to play in a psychodrama that simultaneously captures their guilt, fear, and desires. Joyce explores how their genders seem to be both identical and opposite. He continuously blends regulated masculine and feminine traits in a manner that is as paradoxical as it is psychologically persuasive. In "Circe," Bloom is diagnosed as being "a finished example of the new womanly man" (493). The "Penelope" episode continues to explore sexuality with matters physically and psychologically sexual. Molly thinks that Bloom is not your "typical" man, and she points to the ways that his sexual identity veers from the norm. Molly remembers Bloom's female tendencies: "a body can understand then he goes and burns the bottom out of the pan all for his Kidney" (893). Molly discloses his tendencies in this scene of dead meat and the smell of blood: Bloom is sexually attracted by the propensity of life toward inanimate matter. This scene is a variation of the episode's Homeric analogue. Bloom plays the part of an enthusiastic detainee who looks more like a busy housewife than a husband as he prepares first his breakfast and then Molly's breakfast in bed. Bloom wants to break through the limitations imposed on the traditional male role

because he enjoys not only his “feminine” side but also domestic activity. Thus, the “womanly” Bloom accentuates the “unnaturalness” of the feminine stereotype. Indeed, Molly reveals the outer world of patriarchal society and Bloom’s inner sexual fantasies. Like a mind’s rapid shifting, Stephen enters the storyworld to help Molly re-seduce Bloom and offer a possibility for all three of them to highlight the concrete nature of language and its wordiness, making its screening discernible. Joyce works to transcend language beyond the dependence of their genders on each other.

Molly’s sexual fantasies focus on Stephen; she allows her desire to create the vision. Molly fantasizes about an erotic intellectual collaboration with Stephen to help initiate her marital reconciliation with Bloom. She unveils her conception of him as a “character”: “I suppose hes a man now by this time he was an innocent boy then and a darling little fellow in his lord Fauntleroy suit and curly hair like a prince on the stage when I saw him at Mat Dillons he liked me too” (921). In this recollection, Stephen becomes the object of the female gaze. Her imagined seduction of him is a private melodramatic scene, with Stephen intriguingly cast in the stereotypical female role: “Ill make him feel all over him till he half faints under me then hell write about me lover and mistress publicly too with our 2 photographs in all the papers when he becomes famous O but then what am I going to do about him though” (923). Molly transforms Stephen’s body into a pleasure-giving object while her embodiment of movement works to connect the possible with the actual. Her fantasy seems to suggest that it may be motivated by the media – the photographs and the papers are accoutrements in her masquerade of femininity. Molly unconsciously identifies with an undesignated adulteress, honoured in verse and the news. She weaves the web

connecting her to Stephen and Bloom as she continuously creates signifiers by the infinite *jouissance* of her movement.

Stephen actively participates in a transformative drama to create an illusion of union or reconciliation between Molly and Bloom. Joyce creates a love triangle, and his artistic vision is to show how subconscious fantasy becomes a release apparatus permitting Molly to modify her sexual desire for self-punishment into a cathartic experience. Molly is dressed in seductive garments; she does not conceal her intentions towards Stephen: "then Ill go our Ill have him eying up at the ceiling where is she gone now make him want me thats the only way" (930). Molly's brazenness is meant to recapture Bloom's attention because it is the flux that unifies. Molly thus stages the oedipal "drama" with a twist. She appropriates femininity in the guise of a professional seductress or femme fatale because she needs to make sure that the figure of the son's desire for the mother is not repressed. This scene is significant because the son's desire holds the key, hardening the family component by arousing the father's jealousy and reviving the desire for the mother.

Molly plays the role of stereotypical servitude in Stephen's presence to make Bloom jealous. She imagines bringing Stephen breakfast in bed if they stay the night. She pretends, "I could do the criada" (903). The quintessential actress allures Stephen with a highly dyadic sexual desire: "Ill let him do it off on me behind provided he doesnt smear all my good drawers O I suppose that cant be helped Ill do the indifferent" (903). Full self-expression does not evade Molly; she gives us an indication of her mixed sexual self-image. Molly tries to entice Stephen, yet she imagines his relative indifference to her as an erotic being. Joyce illustrates how language carries a system of signification beyond what she might aspire to or realize in her interactions with Stephen. In addition, Molly's masquerade is part of the

natural sequence of metamorphosis that might stipulate a reconciliation or union of an internalized sexual conflict. Most importantly, Joyce continues questioning our relationship to language; he focuses on his visual perception of the external world to transcend language. Once the internalized anxieties and guilt engendered by her cultural position as a woman and wife have been worked out, Molly is psychologically prepared to assume the only role that is natural to her. Molly experiences a balance within herself and her erotic fulfillment. Molly does not believe in the traditional role of wife when it comes to sexual fulfilment and extramarital relations: "Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck" (929). She tells the truth about their celibate marriage and how Bloom accepts her as a sexual being who needs to exercise sensate eroticism continually. Molly blames Bloom for her infidelity because he does not assume the role of the conventional husband. She steadily continues into a stream of highly self-conscious but increasingly disordered self-attribution. She plays the part of the unapologetic adulteress: "its all his fault if I am an adulteress as the thing in the gallery said O much about it if that's all the harm ever we did in this vale of tears God knows" (929). Molly performs a sequence of events, and her narrative idiom exists without being punctuated by opinions. "Penelope" continually dismantles the moral classification of gender in the name of "woman." She performs an ideal of self-mastery, asserting a personal will that goes beyond those prohibitions for both sexes in order to create a feminine space. The relation to language is thus, for Joyce, like his conception of the relation of a self to the world – it is a paradigm of the dialogical interplay between the inner and outer sphere of the self and its relationally embedded context.

Joyce stages Molly as a performer, and this technique recaptures "woman" as the genesis and, at the same time, grants her existence elsewhere, beyond herself. Molly appropriates from Bloom as she "drew him down to me so he could feel my breast all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (933). This "Yes" alters her bodily specificity into sheer essence. She expresses her confidence in her firm feminine hand as she draws him down to feel her breast. Thus, Molly assumes her final role as the willing and impassive female who finds happiness and fulfillment in her relationship with Bloom. Indeed, she finds the right balance of desire in nature because her "yes" of feminine conceding becomes her attestation of a private space and a public mask. By the end of her masquerade, Molly's theatrical conversation mirrors desire and the prospect of self-pleasure and self-fulfillment. Brivac suggests that her unconscious state holds the key because: "[a]s a goal that can never be reached by consciousness, she constitutes the thoughts of the men as conflicting, as lacking, and therefore as dynamic" (Brivac, 753). Molly's use of masquerade, her gender role- playing, is, to utilize Butler's terms, "repeated stylization of the body" which discloses gender to be an act "that performatively constitutes the appearance of its interior fixity" (Friedman 214). Molly and Bloom reassert themselves to make certain that the banishment refuses to make home all that odd a place. Joyce moves towards his vision to culturally construct Irish nationality as pure, total, and homogenous.

National Ethos

Molly's monologue exposes the nationalist rhetoric connecting fortified resistance, liberation, and Irishness to manhood and spirit. Joyce was aware that women and ethnic others were menacing not only to the perceived racial purity of a nation but also to a specific type of

masculinity etched within the mythos of Ireland. Joyce joins the feminine to the threat of loss to show that a woman can be successful in exercising a sexuality that is sufficient in itself. Molly questions hegemonic masculinity and the ways that it permitted Irish men to create a new identity, one that was distinct from both Englishness and colonial Irishness. Joyce's choice of Bloom's racial heritage and how it supplies a defence, via Weininger, for the "unmasculine" frame of mind ultimately redeems Bloom's character.

Joyce describes Bloom as a "womanly man" who is, at the same time, androgynous, penetrated, emasculated, predatory, and voracious. Neil Davison and Lorri Harrison assert, following Richard Ellmann, that Joyce used Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* as one of the sources of information on the perception of Jews and their sexuality. Making the most of Otto Weininger's notion of "effeminacy," Joyce ascribes these submissive proclivities to Bloom to suggest his desire to experience a broader spectrum of sexual behaviour than is traditionally sustainable, one that includes both active and passive principles.

In *Sex and Character*, Weininger argues that Judaism is deeply imbued with femininity, and that even the most masculine Jew has a Platonic μέθεξις in Woman (Weininger 276). Furthermore, Weininger states that the true conception of the state is foreign to the Jew: "*the Jew, like Woman, has no personality*." He further asserts that "Jews like to stick together, as do women, but they do not *interact* as independent, separate beings under the sign of a supra-individual idea" (Weininger 278). Weininger argues that the Jews' failure to grasp the idea of actual society is due to their lack of a free, intelligible ego. Joyce positions Leopold and Molly Bloom in the early-twentieth-century Dublin culture of nationalist passion and xenophobia. Molly is half-Jewish on her mother's side, and Bloom, as a Jew, is also the odd man living in Ireland, where the mythos of the nation are permeated with masculinist and

Catholic ideologies. Although Bloom's imaginative participation in femaleness is one of the most positive features of his personality, his empathy and his "effeminacy" or abnormality alienate him from the stereotypically "masculine" insensitivities.

Joyce provides Bloom with several tokens of "femininity," yet these "feminine" idiosyncrasies and points of view traditionally associated with women are, to a great extent, missing from both female and male localities in Dublin. Molly remembers how Bloom is capable of carrying out tasks that are generally viewed as "feminine": "only he thinks he knows a great lot about a womans dress and cooking mathering everything he can scour off the shelves" (891). Molly reveals Bloom's maternal identification and the culturally mandated repression of that identification. Yet Bloom allows himself to have "feminine" characteristics, and he is not afraid to assume the female persona. Despite his patriotism, he finds himself estranged socially because of his racial patrimony; this reinforces the passivity already developing in his view of life. And this passivity further estranges him as others use it as a foundation for considering him a sexual deviant who is not a "real" man. Meanwhile, social exclusion escalates the feelings of sexual lack that come from an anxious marital situation. Molly believes Bloom internalizes his social prejudices, "Blooms private hotel he suggested go and ruin himself altogether the way his father did down in Ennis" (909). Bloom retreats into a private space where he can be one harmonious atemporal self. Joyce illustrates the implicit adverse effects of the guilts and fears that result from the internalization of Irish societal values. By raising the issue of "feminacy" in a man, Joyce places an ironically amusing but equally opprobrious punch at the values of Dublin's sexually bifurcated society. We suspect that the tension between Bloom's guilt and furtive desires mirrors a parallel tension between the stereotypical portraits of the world of his quotidian reality, communicating the potentially androgynous reality of his psyche. Yet, the language Molly

borrows constitutes frustrated proto-myths which seek universal significance for the everyday in ways which conform to Joyce's strategies.

The space of myth presents itself as a place from which to question and redefine history. Joyce presents the dominance of nationalism as he explores the existing contradictions and ironies in an effort to subvert its repressive power. Irish manhood is analogous to Irish nationhood. Molly's monologue captures the complexity of Ireland and of the Irish, at home and in the diaspora. Throughout *Ulysses,* Bloom is performing in a way in which his subconscious fantasy becomes a release apparatus, allowing him to transform his masochistic desire for self-retribution into purgative experience. Joyce illustrates how masculinity helped forge Irish nationalism but also how it fostered the establishment of a constraining social hierarchy. Molly thinks of how myths of national identity can be founded on difference, "the weight all down my side telling me to pull the right reins now pull the left and the tide all swamping in floods" (908). She believes that unmanned men would not be capable of shielding the holiness of national borders and customs. In many ways, the fathomless, alluring sea is a source of danger, and she looks at the "floods" with mixed feelings, weighing the positive and negative effects of Irish nationalism. Molly does not mentally block out possible realities with theatrical scenarios of dishonest emotion; rather, she insightfully recognizes the apparently genuine paradox of the veritably fraudulent, which remains ideologically embedded in Ireland. Rather than representing individual androgynous wholeness, Joyce creates images of unification better than the individual self because he wants to culturally produce Irish nationality as pure, total, and homogenous.

The use of myth works to differentiate itself from the authenticating recourse to myths of Mother Ireland and essential Irishness, which describe Irish cultural nationalism. Joyce envisions a paradoxical community within the horizon; as a result, he disentangles the relationship between

the myth and the history of nationality, building space and materials for its reconstitution in different terms. The "Penelope" episode reestablishes the myth, which puts an end to that process, supplying narrative closure, the triumph of myth as the opposite of history, essentially of a myth of the feminine as history's other. Molly and Bloom become an emblem of Joyce's hypothesis of the universe, which paves the way for his new literary order.

Joyce's harsh critique of Dublin's male-dominated ethos can work to constitute a real human's gendered assumptions and behaviours as much as to mirror them. Molly's constant allusions to the nationalist mythos are ones that describe Ireland itself as an all-devouring, threatening sycophant. Joyce stages a social masquerade of race and gender to merge the myth of emasculation by a powerful woman with the myth of an impregnable, virile polis, a society whose protection relies on female submission and exclusion of the ethnic other. Molly and Bloom are trapped in the dependence of their genders, yet they acquire a certain amount of power and authority through the myth of the feminine. The representation and subversion of the eternal feminine and her relationship to Mother Ireland is a key site of cultural disentangling performed early in *Ulysses* with Bloom and Stephen until it is defined and concluded in Molly's monologue.

The reader's experience of "Penelope" as a personal look at a woman's most private moments and thoughts is the final ambition of the narrative. The episode engages in the construction, subversion, and reinforcement of gender to illustrate that we are all human governing bodies of humanity living the human experience. *Ulysses* intentionally dismantles the ideological verisimilitude of cultural nationalism to restore the myth of the feminine and to generate space and materials for its reconstitution in different terms. Joyce illustrates the intricacies of psychological life in the space of understanding shared by the reader and the

narrator. Molly's public act of weaving is a pretense influenced by the presence of an audience. She uses her narrative to string her reader along until she makes a solid version of the feminine. The immediacy of the narrative in "Penelope" and the impure access it offers to Molly's mind continues to receive a distinguished place in literary criticism.

Romantic Love and the Drive for a Fulfilled Identity

in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy*

Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* is much more than an unsettled representation of a rural Catholic Irishwoman's experience. In the action of these three novels- *The Country Girls* (1960), *The Lonely Girl* (1962), and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964)- the narrative demonstrates the coming of age of two young women from rural backgrounds in the Ireland of the mid-twentieth century and their progressive admission into an adult world, passing through the capital Dublin, to ultimately leave their country and arrive in London. The two young characters, the naïve and romantic Caithleen Brady and her fierce, merciless friend Baba Brennan struggle with their own growth into womanhood and with an increasingly critical perspective of both the social environment in which they have been raised and are expected to prosper as adults and the environment which they are pursuing as a retreat from the first one. The trilogy illustrates how childhood suffering and deprivation can suspend an individual's development and turn life into a reenactment of the past rather than a process of change. In *The Country Girls*, Caithleen narrates her family origins; she gives a precise account of her abusive, alcoholic father and her self-sacrificing mother, who is completely committed to her. *The Lonely Girl* depicts an unfolding structure of her trying to reverse unfulfilled childhood needs by turning to romance. *Girls in Their Married Bliss* follows this structure and its damage, leading up to her mental breakdown. Romance does not save Cait; it only reenacts those traumas, intensifies the wounds, and further depletes her agency. More than simply displaying women's battle for self-affirmation

in the face of constricting social and legal norms of a paternalistic culture, O'Brien's *Trilogy* and *Epilogue* dismantle the prescribed roles for women in patriarchal Irish society.

In the 1986 *Epilogue*, Baba laments her friend Kate's death, suspecting Cait's death to be a suicide. In spite of Baba's tempestuous marriage with her once-abusive husband, Durack, she survives, in part because she is the heroine who understands how to move around the ideological demands of the Irish state and how to protect the positive qualities of individualism. Baba's disparaging voice assists as an ideological amplifying mechanism of the issues explored in the three texts. Rather than simply representing Cait's self-destructiveness as the doomed path of one person, *The Country Girls Trilogy* focuses on the cultural conditions that helped produce it. Consequently, the narrative dramatizes the social conditions that can constrict women's development and agency: a history of early mental suffering and pain in the family, a socially constructed image of femininity, a paternalistic culture that refuses to legitimate female desire, collective cultural suffering, and a devotion to romance that imbues submission with the possibilities of escape. By analyzing these two fictional female characters through the lens of feminist narrative criticism, I will try to frame their analysis with as much socio-historical context as can be known by readers. The text illustrates the instability and fragmentation of fictional minds beyond a cultural-material context. O'Brien challenges the conception of a homogeneous national female identity, as enshrined in the articles of the 1937 Irish Constitution, which describes women as supporters of domesticity, family, and the Catholic faith.

O'Brien was aware that gender played a role in constructing the new Irish state. Despite the declaration of equal rights for women in the 1916 Proclamation and reiterated in the 1922 Free State Constitution, women saw a moderate dissolution of their political rights

thereafter. Political life in Ireland was considered a masculine domain, while women were subjected to efforts by the political and ecclesiastical authorities to restrict their activities to the domestic sphere. Efforts by political and church authorities led to Eamon de Valera's enshrining women as pillars of the family unit in the 1937 Constitution. O'Brien writes the female Bildungsroman as a dialectical criticism to counter the restrictions upheld by the ideological apparatus of the Irish state and the Catholic Church. At the same time, O'Brien's text shatters the boundaries of the romantic novel, a genre defined by a long-suffering heroine who, in the end, attains an acceptable marriage as a recompense for her forbearance and virtue.

Focusing on issues such as sexuality, religion, marriage, and motherhood, *The Country Girls Trilogy* unveils the ways in which feminine gender roles are constructed while supplying a radical criticism of capitalist patriarchy that is particularly Irish and Catholic. Simultaneously, O'Brien's work provides a critique of the imposed roles for women in literature, challenging the acceptability of the female-romance plot for representing women's experiences in fiction. O'Brien points to both the Irish literary tradition and the comprehensive history of women as subjects for, objects in, and creators of the novel. By doing so, O'Brien offers new terms of female desire; she promotes female desire as fundamental to a social vision that encourages rather than asphyxiates female identity.

Several scholars have studied how the postcolonial Irish Bildungsroman offers a discourse of resistance and confirms the restrictions on the emancipatory process in the structure of the new Irish Free State (Hardin, Smyth, Nolan, Mansouri). Nancy K. Miller explains how women writers are often criticized for not adhering to the "rules" of fiction, particularly when their work goes against the grain of the ruling (male) literary culture.

Miller suggest that to read women's literature is to see and hear consistently a mocking against the "unsatisfactory reality" in which "the plots of women's literature are not about 'life' and solutions in any therapeutic sense, nor should they be. They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction" (Miller 43). O'Brien critiques the options historically offered to literature's female heroines and authors, and she continues fighting against multiple repressions as a woman, as a woman writer, and as an Irish writer in a postcolonial nation. *The Country Girls Trilogy* was developed amid the structure of a powerful Catholic and conservative nationalism, strengthened by a protectionist economic policy that reinforced tensions for female citizens, especially mothers, as the mainstays and safeguards of Irish traditions (O'Leary 21). The intrinsic political stances of O'Brien's works, which deviate from the nationalist and Catholic principles of the Ireland of her birth, have been the subject of examination and a motive for censure and defamation (Colletta and O'Connor; Drisceoil; Huang; Ingman).

The use of the alter ego has been seen as a reflection of intrinsic contradictions within the individual through denominations such as "I and Not-I" or "the id and ego of a divided self" (Dunleavy and Lynch 99). Kate and Baba emerge as representatives of two battling selves, creating a space for ideas to converge in the projection of a plural, diverse, but shared experience. Sigmund Freud traces the neuroses back to the "situation in which one aspect of the ego, as an individual organism, comes into conflict with its other aspect, as a member of a succession of generations" (Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 414). Cait represents the drive for union with others, which, particularly in a paternalistic society, demands the submission of independent selfhood. Baba represents O'Brien's other person, her alter-ego; Baba signifies the drive for self-preservation, which

necessitates the maintenance of independent selfhood. The use of the female protagonists as alter egos assists O'Brien in achieving a perfect balance in which one character complements the other physically and on the psychological plane in a love-hate relationship that would bind them together in opposite extremes.

Through deliberate subjection of Cait's emotional psychology, O'Brien situates the reader as a psychoanalyst and evaluates her neuroses in relationships. In this manner, we have an obligation to listen to her story and to listen to the work's critical voice. This literary technique, through the official adjustment of the conventional Bildungsroman, is an effort to renegotiate the project related to the genre, which grants the expression of the complex experience of female independent selfhood. The anticipated progression, intrinsic to the traditional Bildungsroman, is truncated in the Epilogue. The two main characters grow from inexperienced girls in the first book to inquiring adolescents in the second one and disenchanted young housewives in the third. Simultaneously, they move physically from their childhood village in the West of Ireland through convent school to work in Dublin and lastly to marry in London. Cait drowns herself in a scene that recollects her mother's fate in the first book and underscores the recurrence of failure. Structurally, the unfinished circularity of the trilogy rests in radical opposition to the linearity that distinguishes the conventional structure of the male Bildungsroman. The interlaced narrative voices and their development throughout the plot create a dynamizing component of the formal and structural alternatives. The identity of these two protagonists, their experiences, and the socio-cultural historical circumstances of O'Brien and the reader are important in understanding the ways in which *The Country Girls Trilogy* participates in the politics of gender.

Jacques Lacan argues, "the connection between libidinal normativeness and a cultural normativeness" has been "bound up since the dawn of history with…the father" (Lacan, *Écrits* 95). Throughout the trilogy, Cait's attempts at a fulfilled identity are unsuccessful because a paternalistic culture refuses to legitimate female desire within the parameters of the socially admissible, affecting not a connection but a disconnection between libidinal and cultural normativeness. With the truthfulness of a "country girl" who desires her own completion, O'Brien attacks the ideological foundations of an Ireland unable to confess its own shortcomings. *The Country Girls Trilogy* uses Cait's innocence to deconstruct the ideological pillars of the new Irish Republic.

The present and its relation to the past are central to the Epilogue, and it is Baba's memory that informs its narrative structure. First, Baba narrates in the present tense the occurrences that are taking place. During these events, Baba shifts into the past tense to narrate the occurrences of the past twenty years. Genette Gérard explains how narrative discourse operates amid the interpolation of past occurrences with present ones: "the most complex [type of narrating], since it involves narrating with several instances, and since the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former" (Gérard 217). In this manner, Baba's narrative voice directs how much of the story is divulged. Rather than supplying a tidy, chronological summary of what has become of Cait and herself, as a conventional epilogue might do, Baba oscillates from "now" to "then" and back again. The time scale and frequency of narrated occurrences fluctuate excessively because the narrated occurrences are generated by and clarified through Baba's memory. If the *Epilogue* is meant to supply a kind of catharsis for O'Brien, it also works as

the crucial determinant for the reader to read the novels and to continue rereading them in the hope of some solutions.

Kathy Mezei suggests it is our responsibility as readers to disentangle and respond to the text's narrative strategies (Mezei 4). In her investigation of dialogic theory and women's writing, Lynne Pearce considers the gendered positions formulated in literary works, contrasting those that postulate the reader as an opponent versus those that address the reader as a probable confidant. Pearce explains how the narrator addresses the reader, "in contemporary women's fiction [this has] frequently been brought to metafictional consciousness" (Pearce 69). This identification also relies on the conflation of the textual with the extratextual: "the woman reader's knowledge of the workings of patriarchy, both inside and outside [the] particular fictional narrative that enable her to grasp the full connotations of the speaker's 'you'" (Pearce 73). In many ways, the Epilogue distinctly situates the reader in such a position in order for the reader to search for clues that might fill in the missing pieces. Female readers are more likely to apprehend the "you" in Baba's narration as a textual "interpellation" in the Althusserian sense of the term (Pearce 73). Baba's conscious address to "you" builds gendered positions for both the narrator and the narratee. The evidence highlights that Baba's narrative, through its oral, intimate, informal tone and its candid, direct address, engages the reader to understand the moral of the story. The tone of Baba's narrative discourse resembles what Robyn Warhol describes as an "engaging narrator," one who "usually assume[s] that their narratees (not to mention their actual readers) are in perfect sympathy with them" (Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* 36).

The Country Girls

Cait introduces her childhood friend, to whom she remains connected in a life-long relationship founded on dependency and fear, “Baba was the veterinary surgeon’s daughter. Coy, pretty, malicious Baba was my friend and the person whom I feared most after my father” (14). The nature of this symbiosis is explained by the compensation between two opposites, as the author has accounted for: “I decided to have two, one would conform to both my own and my country’s view of what an Irish woman should be and one who would undermine every piece of protocol and religion and hypocrisy that there was” (O’Brien 13). Through this scheme, O’Brien attains a balance in which one character complements the other physically: “Her hair was newly set so that it curved in soft black waves that lay like feathers on the crown of her head. I was raging. Mine was long and loose and silly looking” (145). Both young women experience confusion about sexual expectations and prohibitions as well as a materializing uncertainty about the socio-political order. The protagonists communicate their fears in distinct ways but with similar overtones of mental suffering and pain.

The timid, elegiac, and desiring Cait tells the reader her intimate thoughts: “She ignored the bit about my eyes. She was jealous. Mine were bigger than hers, and the whites were a delicate blue, like the whites of a baby’s eyes” (149). Cait’s voice is descriptive, precise, and measured as she reveals Baba’s fears and insecurities. Baba’s personality is demonstrated in dynamic and meaningful turns of phrase that are in line with her character: “We want to live. Drink gin. Squeeze into the front of big cars and drive up outside big hotels. We want to go places. Not to sit in this damp dump” (147). By contrast, Cait’s narration highlights her tendency toward romance: “But we want young men. Romance. Love and things” (147). Baba and Cait hope to escape the same difficulties that negotiate cultural prescriptions for women. The evidence shows that although *The Country Girls* centers on Cait, Baba supplies a vital

counterpoint to Cait, which will prove crucial to the overarching message of the Trilogy. Even as a child, Baba resists the cultural trends that control female identity because she does not believe in female submission. This social framework is based on the myth that "slavery…inaugurates the roads to freedom" (Lacan, *Écrits,* 686). *The Country Girls* illustrates the fundamental unpredictability epitomizing postcolonial Irish society. O'Brien highlights how the relationship between mothers and daughters is central to a unified identity and fortification.

O'Brien moves forward to explore questions of Mother and the Madonna Ideal; she struggles against these identities and unveils their dangers within a patriarchal social context. As a young girl, Cait acknowledges that Baba's mother, Martha is anything but maternal: "Not that Martha was motherly. She was beautiful and cold for that" (32). Baba continuously dissociates herself from her mother by handling her as irreverently as she handles her peers. She takes charge of her life to make sure that she is developing an autonomous female identity as she makes certain of not surrendering her integrity to others. In contrast, during her childhood, Cait defers to her mother with almost obsequious reverence. Cait knows that her mother is trapped in a paternalistic culture in which she is powerless and always afraid of her violent husband. Her father's mercilessly methodical approach to human passions harmonizes him with Lacan's conception of the father as "the perfect master of his desire," adept even of "turning a blind eye to" it (Lacan, *Écrits* 698). By living in such a household, Cait's integrity of the self is not able to develop fully and freely. When Cait's mother drowns, it intensifies her romantic impulse and the need to flee from her indignant father in order to find love and, thus, her own completion. For Cait, the romance script fills the void left by her mother and provides her with definitive satisfaction as a woman.

The loss of her mother represents Cait's initial shock at the shortcomings of a union supported by another.

For O'Brien, the death of the mother means the inception of the individuated adult female. When Cait hears the news of her mother's death, she thinks, "Somehow she was more dead then than anyone I had ever heard of. I cried again" (47). Cait fears that she will be alone in trying to mend the pain of unmet childhood needs. The absence of the missing maternal bond creates Cait's primary associations with romance. She begins to carry an almost infant-like longing for unity with her dead mother and for the overprotective care of a non-violent father that she never experienced while growing up. This fantasy controls her every move throughout the *Trilogy*. When she falls in love with Mr. Gentleman, her attachment proves vividly similar to the dynamics of childhood, keeping her in a child-like state of vulnerability. Furthermore, this vulnerability is connected to what Lacan separates as the "insufficiency," which, in every human's process of self-identification, engenders the "anticipation" of self-sufficiency that produces, in itself, "a form of [the ego's] totality" (Lacan, *Écrits* 78). Cait depends on Mr.Gentleman to complete her identity, and she perceives his promise of eternal care for her as maternal care but also as paternal protection and wholeness. When Mr. Gentleman kisses her, she thinks, "And that moment was wholly and totally perfect for me, and everything that I had suffered up to then was comforted in the softness of his soft, lisping voice... He kissed me. It was a real kiss. It affected my entire body ... and for a few minutes, my soul was lost" (92). This first kiss represents a promise of perpetual security, combined with the perfect continuity she once knew with her mother. The problem with this relationship is that they both pretend that he is her father, which will further position her in social and generational frameworks based on female submission. This

love scene reveals the tendency of romance to infantilize her, extending Cait's need to be protected from her violent, alcoholic biological father.

The convent school that Cait attends after her mother's death prolongs her instruction in gendered behaviour. The nuns stress the identification of Irish Catholic girlhood with chastity and modesty. On her first day at the convent, Cait remembers her mother's wish for her to be a nun when she grows up: "She would have liked me to be a nun; it was better than marrying. Anything was, she thought" (69). Women must choose among the culturally prescribed roles of nun, wife, and mother. Being a nun might protect Cait from Irish patriarchal ideology, yet her mind continues to gravitate toward the heterosexual romance script. Nonetheless, Cait yearns to be an object of desire and to hold a man's attention because she has no other resources or social support for coping with her difficulties. In her autobiographical text *Mother Ireland*, O'Brien explains "the combined need for, and dread of, authority," which promotes the general "spirit of expiation and submissiveness" (25). During her stay at the convent, Cait's thoughts waver between the nationalist myth that encourages women to seek fulfillment through romance and the Catholic caveat that the female pursuit of female desire will be punished. Every evening at the convent, Cait shares kisses with her schoolmate, Cynthia, but other times, she yearns to kiss Mr. Gentleman. She is positioned amid the incongruent romantic and religious ideologies in Ireland, where there is no escape.

Because her origins are in powerlessness and she knows no other way, Cait is especially vulnerable to the allure of the culturally constructed heterosexual romance script. Cait is keen on pursuing romantic love; she shows her naked body to Mr. Gentleman. In general, however, she is afraid to discuss the more visceral features of her own body. In a

direct address, she tells the reader: “To tell you the truth, I always shirked a little at the actual getting into bed” (169). Although she may recoil at the thought of sex, she anticipates waking up in bed beside Mr. Gentleman in Vienna— on their secret getaway. While waiting for Mr.Gentleman’s arrival to take her to the airport, she tells the reader: “My whole body was impatient now. I couldn’t sit still. My body was wild from waiting” (175). Cait is eager for escape, if not for sex but for the soothing of the self with fantasy. When Mr.Gentleman fails to arrive, Cait hints at her frustration instead of overstating it: “I came out to the kitchen and took two aspirins with my tea. It was almost certain that I wouldn’t sleep that night” (177). Her desire is muted and restricted; she is unable to discuss it explicitly because she does not entirely know what she desires.

O’Brien’s celebrated irony supplies a classic example of what feminist narratologists have called “double-voicing,” in that Cait characteristically makes expressions that mean something other than exactly what is said (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 40). Cait sets up the double-voicing by straightforwardly describing the scene at the convent that is devoted to the Sixth Commandment, in which the priest speaks about boys and sex. Sister Margaret calls her an “evil girl” because she accidentally places the notice on the lavatory door instead of the chapel door (105). Furthermore, Cait reflects on how she and Baba place a “dirty note” in the chapel and that Sister Margaret calls them “children of Satan!” (107). In this sense, one voice states the literal meaning of the expression, and a second implied voice ironizes that literal meaning. Cait, as the first-person narrator, thus exposes the oppression of Irish Catholics. Confusion about sexual expectations and prohibitions, as well as an emerging disillusion about the socio-cultural order of things, are expressed in different ways

by Cait and Baba but with similar undercurrents of mental suffering and pain together in the double-voicing beyond their rebellion.

Cait's preoccupations with the Madonna are presented in her "bonding unreliability" homodiegetic narrative stream, reducing the distance between the narrator and the reader. *The Country Girls* recognizes, but frustrates, desire because O'Brien is interested in showing the tensions of the Madonna-mistress complex. Sigmund Freud, who has termed it "psychic impotence," explains that "it is a psychological complex that is said to develop in men who see a woman as either saintly Madonnas or debased whores" (Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*). Indeed, Cait's desire is suppressed, but it is not smothered because she wants to be the object of desire for men. She yearns to be diminished in exchange for protection and guidance and to be lifted out of her rural and tradition-bound Irish origins, Her transgressions continue, but so do the psychological battles of her selfhood because she misinterprets the romance script, leading her to undervalue the positive qualities of individualism. Even though Cait resents the physical and emotional entrapment forced on her, her thoughts continue following the romance script, thinking that love holds the key to female identity. In *The Lonely Girl,* Cait's suppression of sexual desire leads to the translation of physical into emotional desire, resulting in an experience akin to religious ecstasy.

The Lonely Girl

Cait's ecstasy is analogous to a religious experience in which the loss of self in the love object replaces and even obscures religious devotion. In this book, the supreme ecstasy promised is not sexual pleasure but the loss of the specifically female self in the male Other who replaces God. Cait, trying to reach the heights of the ecstatic loss of self, subsumes her

own subjectivity in that of both Mr. Gentleman and Eugene. O'Brien illustrates the limitations of such a neat resolution. For O'Brien, life itself is surprising, and therefore, she stresses the importance of meaningful contact with oneself before contact with others. Although Cait tries throughout the *Trilogy* to find her own husband-God figure, each relationship fails to establish the self-annihilation it originally promised – she achieves only momentary escape.

If the narrative renounces subjectivity for Cait, it also demonstrates the conditions that hinder Cait from modifying her fractured and undeveloped psyche into an autonomous self. Cait continues to hope that romance will open her future and liberate her from the past. Even though Mr.Gentleman has failed to fulfill her romantic ideals, Cait's belief in romance persists. Her narrating voice relives painful moments, and she stays entangled in the disorderliness of her struggle to build a feasible and rational self. Furthermore, she is unable to comprehend the reality that a fulfilled identity is not an end but a process. It is clear that O'Brien does not want to offer an uncritical reproduction of the romance script; instead, she illustrates that it results in unrealistic and ultimately damaging assumptions of unending romantic love. In *The Lonely Girl,* O'Brien dramatizes the romantic script and its failure, and she makes this explicit in the centrality of the fictional mind, which bears witness to the consequences of her childhood filled with loss and violence. The romance script confirms the unfeasibility of Cait's way of being in the world and her long-lasting tendency toward self-destruction. O'Brien proposes that as long as women are held to a cultural framework that romanticizes women's forfeiture of independence in the quest for a sense of identity founded exclusively on sustained union with loved ones, capitulation stays confounded with female desire. However, Eugene represents "the deadening of

passions in society" – it is the phenomenon which Lacan theorizes in *The Mirror Stage* (Lacan, *The Mirror Stage* 738).

According to Lacan, "the deadening of passions in society" is, to a great extent, responsible for the "knot of imaginary servitude" distorting relationships in modern society. Lacan suggests that it is crucial for love to "undo …or sever" this knot of servitude (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage, 738). Cait informs us of her emotional state: "My heart leaped with anger and relief as I heard him climb the stairs" (360). She has no control over her emotions, and she depends on Eugene for help because she is not qualified to cope with the unromantic reality of human existence. Cait is unable to be alone and clings to Eugene because she wants to remain the principal woman in his life: "He was too articulate, too sure of his own rightness" (360). Cait recognizes Eugene's tyrannical tendencies towards her, but she is afraid to assume her own distinct subjectivity. Throughout *The Country Girls Trilogy,* Cait moves in the direction of tying the knot of servitude, which will never engender a reconciliation with her inborn state of isolation.

Cait tries to work on positive ways to grow an independent selfhood; she and Baba leave for England to begin new lives. Cait finds work and begins studying English at London University; she is finally acting rather than daydreaming. Cait informs the reader that Eugene has written to her after she settles in. However, she does not mention any new plan to improve their troubled relationship. The closing lines begin to foretell a healthier trajectory for Cait: "Even Baba notices that I'm changing ... What Baba doesn't know is that I'm finding my feet, and when I'm able to talk, I imagine that I won't be so alone, but maybe that too is an improbable dream" (379). Cait wants to achieve an agency of mature subjectivity, and "finding her feet" might be a precondition to finding someone to share herself with

instead of her former idea that finding someone fills an absence in her. For the first time, Cait is left without a masculine Other or – a better alternative – a self with whom to identify. O'Brien highlights the positive elements of living life as an individual – isolating the soul enhances and sustains female identity. But, as readers, we remember when Cait tells us: "It is only with our bodies that we ever forgive one another; the mind pretends to forgive, but it harbours and remembers in moments of blackness…I prayed to St. Jude, patron of hopeless cases" (347). She prays to St. Jude because she does not have the strength to pursue independent selfhood. *Girls in Their Married Bliss* breaks the well-worn cliché of marital bliss because Cait comes to realize that her marriage with Eugene has a negative impact on her self-identity.

Girls in Their Married Bliss

O'Brien challenges the gendered nationalism of her native country. Baba's narration undercuts any proclivity toward romance, reacting strongly against it. Baba provides a description that is blunt and utilitarian: "Not long ago Kate Brady and I were having a few gloomy gin fizzes up London, bemoaning that fact that nothing would ever improve, that we'd die the way we were enough to eat, married, dissatisfied" (383). Baba knows that their lives in London continue to be marked by their Irish education and background. For the most part, their disappointing destinies remain tied to inalterable patriarchal norms. Even though Baba is constricted by the same social roles as Cait, she deploys cynicism to create a protective distance from the romance script. Rather than "married bliss," Cait experiences a progressive deterioration of her mental state through her experiences and losses. In the absence of Cait's voice, narration alternates between Baba's first-person account and sections that narrate Cait's inner thoughts in the third person.

In *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, Baba examines Cait's situation and the effect of the Irish environment beyond the gender-biased system. Her relatively grounded perspective confirms the danger of turning to romance for safety; she moves toward a guarding distance from the romance script that holds such a deadly enchant for Cait. Baba narrates Eugene's treatment of Cait just after they marry: "He told her she was nothing but a farmer's daughter reverting to type" and that "she had no breeding" (384). This moment unveils the gap between Baba's cynical account and Cait's romanticized description. Cait, in a letter, claims, "he loves me, and there is something about having a child and being in a valley, and being loved, that is more marvellous than anything you or I ever knew about in our flittery days" (384). Because of her own failure to recognize and embrace her distinct subjectivity, she continues to disregard the unromantic reality of human existence. Baba provides insight into how women can avoid the romance script while safeguarding independent selfhood. Baba aims to give her honest and direct opinion about sex and marriage with Frank Durack.

Baba marries Frank, the uneducated wealthy developer, because he provides her with a sense of self-preservation. When Baba finally sleeps with Frank, she states her indifference to their sexual relations: "An Irishman: good at battles, sieges, and massacres. Bad in bed. But I expected that" (386). Baba does not think that sex is important in marriage because marital intimacy will only threaten the autonomy she enjoys. Baba refuses to be defeated; she rejects inconsistency both within her marriage and also at the greater scale of culture. Unlike Cait, Baba strives toward the consolidation of a coherent and autonomous self without having to choose amid the prescribed roles. Her transgression of the dictates of both state and church continues but with an astute awareness of its impositions on a woman. Because Baba's marriage is overshadowed by violence and a frustrating sexual relationship, she

continuously seeks extramarital channels to satisfy her sexual desires and to protect her individuality.

While she is living in London and married to Eugene, Cait begins a new relationship with another man. This love affair counters the idealization of the chastity of Irish Catholic womanhood. Baba's intermittent narrative voice anticipates the fate awaiting Cait, offering another female perspective. Cait proceeds to contemplate an affair but never actually follows through with the affair. This love affair is not another way to heal the wounds of her past. Rather, this love affair is an attempt to disentangle herself from the burden of Eugene's unpredictability towards the conflicting cultural demands. While she is thinking of going to meet her new man, her flow of thoughts settles into a free narration. This passage borders on the stream of consciousness: "She thought. He knows, he knows. If only he'll give me this last chance, I'll change, reform, make myself so ugly that I will out of the reach of temptation" (391-92). The constraints within her marriage and her household disrupt her autonomy. Yet she blames herself for their marital difficulties; she does not see past her internalized self-loathing. Unfortunately, Baba becomes pregnant a second time; she starts to think about the problem of "love" and how she can avoid motherhood altogether.

Baba and Cait work together to find a gynecologist for her abortion. As they are looking for doctors, Cait asks Baba questions about the father of the baby, her marriage to Frank, and motherhood. Baba responds with a direct and truthful statement "I don't hate him, I don't love him, I put up with him, and he puts up with me" (464). Despite her difficult childhood and marriage, Baba matures into a young woman who has compassion for those who suffer. She feels sympathy for both mothers and children. While being examined by the gynecologist, Baba reveals her private thoughts: "I was thinking of women and all they have to put up with, not just

washing nappies or not being able to be high-court judges...And not only when they go to doctors but when they go to bed as brides with the men that love them" (475). Baba points to the legal structures of oppression, and she thinks of the magnitude of a gender-biased system which leaves women hopeless. O'Brien merges the desire for the mother and the desire of the lover within a continuance, suggesting a conception of female sexuality as an adjunct of the female activity of union with others.

Helene Deutsch suggests that childbirth represents for women the cessation of the sexual act, which was only initiated by coitus, and that the ultimate satisfaction of the erotic instinct is equivalent to that in men and takes place at the moment when soma and "germ-plasm" are parted. Deutsch explains how the interim between the two acts is filled by complex processes in the libido. Deutsch argues: "The object incorporated in coitus is introjected physically and psychically, finds its extension in the child, and persists in the mother as a part of her ego. Thus we see that the mother's relation to the "child" as a libidinal object is twofold: on the one hand, it is worked out within the ego in the interaction of its different parts; on the other hand, it is the extension of all those object-relations which the child embodies in our identification series" (Deutsch 10). Throughout the *Trilogy,* intercourse and motherhood summon a struggle between the narcissistic components of self-preservation and the object-directed orders of procreation, which comprise a peril for the security and fortitude of the ego.

O'Brien questions the remarkable insufficiency of the roles of wife and mother as the solid footing for a stable female identity. Moreover, Catholic ideology idolizes maternity while, at the same time, "[aligning] female sexuality [with] corruption" (Rocks-Hughes 95, 86). Motherhood has failed Cait in that it has not furnished the sustained union with another by which she might attain a fulfilled identity According to a patriarchal authority directed by

Eugene, a wife and mother should not need to be sexually and emotionally fulfilled. Eugene points to the social imperative that she must follow: "I might let you see him on humanitarian grounds, but of course, your morals make you unfit to be a mother" (407). Cait remains bound to a position in which she expects to be punished for her desires. Furthermore, she cannot manage to build autonomy and fulfillment for herself; powerless, she does not challenge Eugene in the least. In her eyes, Eugene is the paternal figure – the enforcer of conflicting cultural demands. This conversation does not allow Cait to express her emotional needs and desires. Rather, it frustrates her desires, making her a victim of a cultural paradox that marks proper motherhood against sexuality. On close inspection, her dependence on others – first her mother, then Mr. Gentleman, Eugene, and her son, Cash – leaves her locked in a child-like state of vulnerability from which there is no escape.

Yet, melancholic incorporation is a way of resisting loss, even at the peril of ruining oneself. Cait continues incorporating the voice of her dead mother into her psyche so that this relationship is, in a sense, not completely lost. In melancholia, the incorporated loss may generate inwardly turned hostility that manifests as self-beratement. Judith Butler explains that in melancholia, "self-beratement takes the place of abandonment and becomes the token of its refusal" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power,* 186). In this way, Cait does not truly lose her mother because she protects her mother within herself. Furthermore, internalizing her mother's voice protects her through melancholic incorporation, but only for a short time. Butler's thinking of melancholic incorporation clarifies how suppressed, incorporated loss can deplete the psyche, "to refuse a loss is to become it" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power,* 178). Cait's story is melancholic because she is not capable of completely analyzing her childhood trauma or destroying her attachment to her mother in order to break free from a

lifelong sequence of childhood pain. O'Brien gives a harsh critique of the systematic social control of women, especially but not exclusively of Irish women, through socially prescribed roles that refuse to acknowledge agency and subjectivity and through literal violence.

There is no escape from Cait's suffering and victimization. She has internalized the persecution of others, which makes her inner landscape the most unsafe place of all. As *Girls in Their Married Bliss* proceeds, her distress reaches a breaking point, dramatized when she begins screaming and breaks a glass window in a bus station: "Then something broke loose inside her, and she started to scream and bang the glass that covered the numbered face. She hurled insults at it and poured into it all the thoughts that had been in her brain for months" (459). Her mind transports her to the past and all the pain that has haunted her mind since childhood. When she awakens at the mental hospital, she is in a state of hopeless anguish: "Then she remembered, first one thing, and then another...Every detail was crammed into a capsule, so small and tight and contained that she would carry it with her forever" (459). At this moment, she is empty and there is not a single person or anything for that matter that can save her. Cait sees no option other than to capitulate all prospects for future maternity. The omniscient narrator goes on to describe Cait as "someone of whom too much had been cut away, some important region that they knew nothing about" (510). The romance script has reached its climax and closure. The sterilization represents a radical refusal to conform to her nation's view that the natural vocation of women is motherhood. At the end of this third book, Cait is left without a husband or child. She is psychologically and physically scarred by her failure to find the love object with whom she can feel "superbly blest." Cait's self is now so deeply depleted that her voice has fallen away

entirely. The intense and pervasive trauma of history is evident in both Cait's mind and body and the Irish cultural consciousness. She has failed to achieve agency because she remains intertwined with her personal difficulties and the constraints of her cultural context. For the most part, O'Brien harshly chronicles the failures of the romantic genre, and she charts them on Cait's body. *The Country Girls Trilogy* successfully stages the conditions that debilitate the mind in a discourse of resistance that emphasizes the disenchantment and frustration of the Irish landscape.

Epilogue

Baba's opening remarks on the present event delay any reason as to why she visits Waterloo. The reader begins questioning what will be happening next to the female characters. In the Epilogue, Baba retrospectively narrates the story of both protagonists over the past twenty years, alternating between one story and the other, while she waits for the train that will return Cait's body. Baba's harsh tone is an Irish type of the abhorrent feminine, the banshee, to deliver her rage against the cultural codes forced upon her.

The female romance plot explores the idealized vision of motherhood. This plotting of motherhood recalls one of the most familiar developments of the female romance plot: the heroine can only perceive her power as a woman through marriage and childbearing. Baba candidly recalls Cait's emotional state: "She put her hand to her heart and said she'd like to tear it out, stamp on it, squash it to death, her heart being her undoing" (532). While alluding to the Sacred Heart, Baba casts Cait as the Mater Dolorosa, whom Baba describes as "drooling and holding out the old metaphorical breast, like a warm scone or griddle bread" (517). Baba describes Cait's battle with her son as "the old umbilical love. She wanted to twine fingers with her son, Cash, throughout eternity. The rupture had to come sometime, the

second rupture because of the first one came when her hemlock husband took him away and she had to fight to get him back" (517). This conclusive "rupture" culminates with Cash growing up and emigrating to America. When the moment comes, Baba wastes no time in telling Cash about his mother's death. Of course, Cash is not really surprised, "because he knew she was prone to the old Via Dolorosa" (531). Conversely, Baba does not believe in the postcolonial idealization of a brand of romance that demands spiritless femininity. Baba insists that the Catholic ideal of womanhood of the Virgin Mary is illogical.

Baba reflects on her own motherhood and how she and her daughter never formed an ideal maternal bond. She remembers Durack's nickname for her, "Little Mother," yet she tells us that she is not at all a mother like Cait. Baba thinks of her daughter as willful: "a girl that had a will of her own and a mind of her own from the second she was born...She left home before she was thirteen and couldn't stand us. She liked him better than me, but that's because she could twist him around her little finger and always did" (517). Baba recalls how she always put effort into reconciling her personal needs with a dynamic sense of generosity without sacrificing her independent selfhood. Baba, for her part, does not buy into the role of Mater Dolorosa; she refuses to participate in the religious and sociopolitical protocols: "Now, when Pope John Paul II travels, he says what Popes have been saying since *secula seculorum* – Thou shalt not sin. He's still for keeping women in bondage, sexual bondage above all as if they weren't fucked up enough with their organs" (524). Baba refuses to be submissive, selfless, and chaste. Indeed, she points to the Church's hypocritical stance on contraception and the prominence it grants to motherhood as the quintessence of particularly Irish motherhood. As Baba walks toward Cait's hearse, she thinks of Agnus Dei, the portion of the Catholic mass in which Jesus Christ, as the sacrificial Lamb, wipes clean the slate of

human sins through death and resurrection. The *Epilogue* twice testifies to Cait's desolation, which validates in some ways the inescapable development of a psychologically unstable ego in sharp disparity to the conventional evolution of a coherent subject (Abel, Hirsh, and Langland). In turn, this desolation represents the inability of Irish women of the 1960s to develop a unified identity. James M. Cahalan argues that Kate's progressive distancing of the family habitat is a movement "toward increasing exile, loneliness, and loss" that surely concludes in annihilation and death (Cahalan 59). Throughout the *Trilogy*, O'Brien moves in the direction of reconciliation with our inborn state of isolation, or what Lacan calls "insufficiency" (Lacan, *Écrits* 78). This reconciliation represents both a regression and a progression, pivoting on the acknowledgement that unified identity at the individual level must certainly precede society's redemption as a whole. Yet Cait achieves a final loss of self that underscores O'Brien's unforgiving view of the romantic novel. O'Brien exposes the deficiency of the roles of wife and mother as a stable substructure of a woman's fulfilled self-identity. By choosing death, Cait also rejects the romantic script and dismissal from the female-authored literary text itself.

Conclusion

In *The Lonely Girl*, the romance fantasy grows rather than recedes in strength even though Cait's experience persistently disappoints the expectations that it creates, specifically the expectation of an enthralling relationship with Eugene. Cait holds on to the romance script because she believes that Eugene will lift her out of her old life with unconditional love and support. The social prescriptions imposed on women further challenge an already exhausted sense of self. This book recounts the ways in which others denigrate Cait,

resulting in the loss of her personal and cultural identity. In the closing lines of the book, Cait is in solitude – the first unstable step toward a reconciliation with the self.

Cait's and Baba's feelings of emptiness at the end of *Girls in Their Married Bliss* highlight the irony and bitterness inherent in O'Brien's title. The third book presents the culmination of years of pain and suffering. Baba is in an abusive marriage, yet she uses her pragmatism to preserve her independence. Cait cannot break free from the memories of her violent childhood; early memories return endlessly without lessening across the years, and life brings her no satisfaction or healing. She does not know what motivates her, or what drives her decisions, nor why she lacks full agency. Cait's separation from Eugene does not liberate her from her past; it only intensifies her wounds from childhood. Feelings of frustration lead Cait to submit to sterilization – an act that represents her resistance to motherhood. Cait realizes that the seductive heterosexual romance script fails to bestow a unified identity because it is empty. She has failed to adhere to the prescribed roles of a nun, seductress, wife, or mother. Most importantly, she is unable to evolve into a coherent subject by establishing social perspectives on human relations, both on an individual level and as a culture. Ultimately, her transgressions lead to her death.

In the *Epilogue*, Baba places responsibility for Cait's death towards Ireland. Baba transmits a most acrimonious critique of what she still refers to as "my country" and "Cait's." While waiting for Cait's coffin at Waterloo Station in London, she tells the reader that Cait has drowned tragically at a health farm in England. As she thinks of having to take Cait's ashes back to Ireland, she aggressively states: "Her son and I will have to take her ashes there and scatter them between the bogs... every other fucking bit of depressingness that oozes from every

hectometer and every furlong of the place and that imbued her with the old Dido desperado predilections" (525). At this moment, Baba knows that the ultimate escape is impossible. The failure of trying to evade cultural roots is symbolized in the landscape. Yet Baba refuses to welcome defeat: "I hope she rises up nightly like the banshee and does battle with her progenitors" (525). O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy* and *Epilogue* is successful in offering a critique of Ireland that is both strident and loving. The Irish cultural context limits women's choices and lays the preliminaries for a critique of that ideal. For O'Brien, female desire can be attained in the space between altruism and the quest for fulfilled desire. In the end, O'Brien leaves readers with the moral of the story.

Inside Out: Performing Mathematics in *The Infinities* and *Singularities*

In John Banville's *The Infinities* (2009), and *The Singularities* (2022), the protagonists move from an epistemological exploration of truth to an awareness of the limits of human knowledge and language. Words and narrative bridge the gap between the inner personal sphere of these characters and outer reality. For Banville, mathematics and music represent an aspiration to circumvent the contingencies of speech and to think abstractly. In his novels, he builds a mutual relation between mathematics and word, soul and addition, silence and its semiotic other. He does all this writing with considerable humour. The development, affective signification, and conclusion of these novels are all founded on a pre-established structure: the shape of a mathematical sign and its probable meaning. The prose produces a mathematical imprint, just as the mathematical imprint produces the performative conditions of rule-following. In this manner, Banville reconditions the siglum to its part as a symbol in human undertakings, including mathematical uses. Banville's work becomes a question of language in its own privilege: language as a question remains separate from the question of fiction and from epistemology as well. At stake is not fiction in its epistemology function but the language in its mediating one; there is a linguistic ambivalence that appears with particular force in the negative mystical traditions that perhaps all of Banville's works explicitly implore. The ontological and epistemological concerns are intertwined in an impenetrably tight manner throughout the storyworlds.

Cartesian epistemology itself perceives, if it does not also obey, premises and principles not exclusively, if even predominantly epistemological (Descartes 1967). It

accords with metaphysical hierarchies and presumptions antecedent to it, which it strangely reproduces. These incorporate the priority of inwardness in opposition to externality; the assertion of ideal, infinite truthfulness to which such inwardness supplies entrance, with which it is identified. Cartesian epistemology accords with the mistrust of sensation, of temporally and extensively mediated experience, in opposition to the inner and innate intuition of pure reason. Additionally, Descartes' physics and mathematics accord with unity over multiplicity; the value of eternity over time, the exclusion of body, of externality, of temporality as foreign to the true, unitary infinite truth, to which the inward self alone has entrance (Koyre 119). With the application of René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Leopold Knonecker's *Jugendtraum,* Banville successfully mathematizes narration (Dioxidis, Mazur 205-6). Banville's texts involve the relegation of language to the external and temporal sphere while pursuing equivocation toward it as concealment, contortion, and misrepresentation of an inward, singular truth. Banville illustrates that it is impossible to think without an image; he moves toward Neoplatonism and into a specifically negative theology.

Banville's representation of mathematics accords with Wittgenstein's acknowledgement that, unlike verbal formulas, mathematical ones are irrefutable petrifactions that experience cannot overturn (Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* 655-57). Mathematical signs are allocated as a rule-directed use in our verbal practices. Banville makes use of mathematical signs "outside" mathematics: their meaning converts a production of signs into mathematics. Performance liberates equations from formalist abstraction, none more than the performance of mathematics. Wittgenstein and Banville challenge the formalist point of view that, since it is not experiential, mathematics can only

scrutinize "lines and scratches." Wittgenstein explains that the concern comes from the credence that meaning is "something in the mind" (*Wittgenstein's Lectures Foundations on Mathematics* 223). Banville mathematizes narration by making sure that the mathematical sign is given meaning only from its implementation.

Banville positions his characters to show that mathematics cannot transcend the categories of reason. "It is essential to mathematics," Wittgenstein argues, "that its signs are also employed in *mufti* (*Wittgenstein's Lectures on Foundations of Mathematics* 223). It is the use outside mathematics, and so the *meaning*, of the signs, that makes the sign-game into mathematics" (Wittgenstein, *Mathematics* V). Throughout *The Singularities* and *The Infinities*, both of which take their titles from mathematical concepts, Banville illustrates that the structure of a true mathematical proposition is completely defined in language: it does not rely on any outer fact at all (Wittgenstein, 1989: 249). Banville creates a mathematical narration that shows this exact reality. By extension of this principle, characters take the form of a figure; they represent infinity and singularity. The characters perform the role in Wittgenstein's metaphor by mufti.

In addition to mathematics, Banville is interested in the relation of musical experiences to knowledge. Music, after all, depends on mathematical calculations of intervals, divisions of intervals, and relations of pitch, meter, and rhythm. In *The Infinities* and *The Singularities,* music and math become closely intertwined in a synchronism of voices and moods. In Banville's texts, characters long for silence, yet they are unable to liberate themselves from the sound of their obsessional voices. Like Beckett, Banville not only accentuates the use of time, rhythm, and tempo in his narrative but also emphasizes the repetitive and recursive nature of music.

First-person narration is, in great part, the persistent condemnation of body, voice, figure, character, and language in the appellation of interiority and essence before and beyond it, where there is a double impulse toward creation and confutation. On the extent of character, this transpires as the endeavour to resist, despite constructing a fictional representation of the self. Consistently, Banville's writing seems to move in a sphere of paradigm and archetype to show that the world operates by geometry because geometry is the earthy paradigm of divine thought. In the *Infinities,* the narrator states: "Me. Me. *Me*" (29). He fully exploits the thinking and doubting of the Cartesian "I." The closing of *The Singularities* reveals the true self: "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (307). Indeed, the true self is not the head nor the body, and certainly not in time, but rather an infinite, internal singularity. Narration proceeds through negativity, which includes a linguistic nihilism, a negation of language that expands beyond the world. It is presented thematically within the nihilistic narration as the need to go on living and the desire to die into life – thought and logic penetrate the deepest abysses of being (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals and Ecce* 95).

Language takes part in the circumstances against which the self must profess, out of which the self must take flight, from which the self recognizes and redeems itself in order to truthfully possess itself. What is important to understand is that language is not antecedent to matter and temporal embodiment, but language nevertheless supplies the terms not only for its negative representation but, through self-negation, for the world beyond embodiment as well. Of course, this is a point Nietzsche insists upon. Nietzsche explains the inseparable and crucial connection between reason and language: "we cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language. (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 482-483).

The storyworld in Banville's texts is "plural, unstable, and problematic" (Herman, *Narrative Theory* 277). I will highlight in his work what appears to be a continuum of language that immediately thrusts the self into multiplicity and exteriority. The texts no less question whether this need compromises the self or whether, outside of this linguistic multiplicity, there is any self at all. I argue that for Banville, contradiction is a predominant trope for the circumstances hindering existence to being; he uses a pure speech act that oscillates between existence and nonexistence in order to return to the true self, that is, in the form of the eternal, internal, singularity. These texts stage an infinite *joie de vivre* of "living" and "dying" that continuously describes, demonstrates, vindicates and situates in an equally expendable way.

The Infinities and *The Singularities* stage the concept of infinity. *The Infinites* is the infinitude that moves around a vertical figure eight, and *The Singularities* moves along a horizontal one. Wittgenstein attests that: "The senseless thing is indeed that one so often thinks that a large number would be nearer to the infinite than a small one" (Wittgenstein, *PR* XII 138). He considers that it is "only because of the polysemy of our language that it appears as though numerals and the word 'infinite' should produce an answer to the same question when in reality the questions which these words answer are fundamentally different" (Wittgenstein, *PR* XII 142). For Wittgenstein, infinity is not a conception that gets mathematicians closer to eternity because the cipher cannot mean more than it is. Wittgenstein explains that language has a relation to infinity because there is always the equivocal clarity of an algebraic abstraction of the figure's role in social practices and forms of life, however nominal they may be. The figure is an abstraction, but its pathways and its attendants cannot be.

The Infinities is set on one midsummer's day at Arden House, where Adam Godley lies at death's door. In *The Singularities,* Felix Mordaunt mysteriously appears one midsummer morning at the Arden House; this time, the stage has a sense of "raw edge to it" (30). These two novels are extensions of each other, in whole or in part, and the grace period of ecstasy and the respite from temporal consciousness inhabit the complete narrative space. On a textual level, these novels exhibit a common obsession with time – personal time, calendrical time, and time as feeling. Most importantly, time accords with Cartesian epistemology – it is the mistrust of sensations, of temporally and extensively mediated experiences. As to the true self, language opposes and is excluded from eternity and from all the conditions with which eternity is identified. Banville gives us a fictional expedition of what it can be like to live in the unstable historical wake of the Nietzschean understanding of knowledge and desire. *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* illustrate that the rational pertains only *within* this closed structure, a model of which is language.

The Infinities and *The Singularities* stage in distinct ways stories of a certain type of desire and of failure. Within these storyworlds, the characters, after much study and thought, discover that some indispensable, most fundamental quality of the real world has fallen through their intellectual grasp. Most importantly, they have evaded a certain type of mathematical and/or geometrical formalization. Banville brings us back to think about his trilogy of *The Book of Evidence* (1989). The protagonist of these novels is, in many ways the historical consequence of the Copernican determination to look "unflinchingly upon the world as it is and not as men, out of a desire for reassurance or mathematical elegance or whatever, wished it to be" (Jackson 515).

In *The Infinities* and *The Singularities,* Adam Sr. is in many ways the historical result of the Brahma theory, who looks at how: "The world is always ready to be amazed, but the self, that lynx-eyed monitor, sees all the subterfuges, all the cut corners, and is not deceived" (*The Infinities* 151). Banville represents the desire for scientific knowledge, much like Nietzsche's representation of Socratic knowledge in *The Birth of Tragedy.* Nietzsche describes Socrates as working under a prolific illusion: "the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of logic, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 95). Alluding to the Copernican revolution, Nietzsche carries on that science has shed "a common net of thought over the whole globe, actually holding out the prospect of the lawfulness of an entire solar system" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 96 and *Genealogy of Morals* 153-56). Nietzsche's philosophical project tries to make sense of what we know and who we are once we have realized just these truths about Socratic knowledge. *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* stage the Socratic thought in the total storyworld of appearances as the characters continue enquiring into nature, tracing geometrical relationships. The characters navigate the sea of knowledge, yet they soon come to realize the importance of art as it appears from the failure of scientific knowledge.

The Infinities

The Infinities is a funny novel. Patricia Craig calls it "a kind of celestial-cum-earthy comedy, with unsettling undertones" (*The Independent.* Tim Rutten refers to its "formal daring and slyly erudite humour" (*Los Angeles Times*). Claire Messud states that the novel achieves "a considerably lighter effect, foregrounding the present and imbuing the past with as much comedy as darkness" (*Irish Times)* Messud's account of the novel's "marriage of classical and Shakespearean comedy" harmonizes with Banville's own report of it (*Irish*

Times). Banville comments on his work, "You know, Heinrich von Kleist, whose play *Amphitryon* is the skeleton of the book, his ambition was to blend Greek drama with Shakespearean burlesque. And that's what I'm trying to do as well" (Yoder, *The Millions Interview).* Banville gestures towards the coalition of celestial laughter and all too human burlesque. At the same time, there is something radical in this merciless black comedy since Banville positions Adam Sr. as brain-damaged and unconscious. Lying on his deathbed, Adam Sr. begins to reflect on the significance of living life – he thinks about the eternal truths that lie behind the chaos of the world.

With the help of Hermes, the shape-shifter, Banville sits in the celestial chair orchestrating his to perform a pure speech act in order to return to the true self, which is in the form of the eternal, internal singularity. Banville is in complete control as he determines the form and the content of the entire work in order to explore Nietzschean understanding of knowledge and desire on a more everyday level. Hermes' first-person accounts operate as a subjective psyche conversing with itself about occurrences that it perceives and impressions that persist. In a Scheherazade fashion, Hermes' chore is held back by the other immortal presences in the novel. Zeus, father of Hermes and chief of all the gods, is in love with Adam's daughter-in-law, Helen, an actress who is rehearsing for the part of Alcmene in a production of Kleist's *Amphitryon.* At certain moments, the novel is narrated in a third-person free indirect style that shifts from one character to another, as Hermes intrudes on the thoughts of Adam Jr., Helen, Ursula, Petra, Ivy, and even Rex, the family dog. Hermes stands in for a slightly uncanny outsider who contemplates the world beyond its mortal others and himself. Throughout the novel, Hermes, Banville, and Adam Sr. represent the "I." In its several incarnations, "I" locates itself with the contradiction inherent in the inscription

itself. “I” is a microcosm, darkness, and air. The first-person narrator reads the minds of the protagonists; it is his way to come closer to the pure, simple self.

Banville manipulates the Nietzschean assertion that there is no truth at all and that all truth, in general, is simply an illusion or a batch of lies executed by whoever happens to have power. Banville applies Nietzsche’s theory to a set of “arbitrary metaphors” that are subject to the “legislature of language and not to the thing in itself (Nietzsche, “On Truth” 177,176). Although Adam Sr. has established certain mathematical truths, the fact remains that the truth cannot be apprehended within the type of knowledge to which Adam has been faithful. Within the prophetic dream, Adam takes the plunge beyond his disembodied desire; the mathematician takes us on a voyage towards an entirely new way of thinking, never before thought. Hermes tells us that Adam: “borrowed books from the library...He tried to devise puzzles and problems of his own. The terms eluded him, they squirmed and writhed” (64). Adam discovers that he has eluded a certain kind of mathematical and/or geometrical formalization. He reflects on certain truths, and he tries to make sense of what he thinks he knows: “The impossibility of accuracy torments him...And then there is the question of time. What, for instance, is an instant?” (65). The ontological and epistemological concerns are tightly intertwined. Adam continues to question the truth: “But are there lights? No, only light, flowing endlessly, moving every instant. Everything blurs around its edges; everything seeps into everything else” (65). Adam is pure mind, pure thought, and his body is not a denial of corporeality, but a salvation of life energy. Banville moves around the limits of logic to question the “essence of logic,” which veils the fact that this is purely a faith or hope, because logic seems self-evidently to be the unfailing means to the complete truth.

The Infinites stages the suspended realm beyond the self-defeating of Socratic knowledge with the dialectical emergence of art. Adam is living life amid the beginnings of modern science without convictions as to the nature of reality, truth, and ethics. Banville positions the great thinker of modern science with structures of art: "Very impressive, in their vernacular way, these totems, I have seen them in museums" (207). He thinks like a mathematician, so he has little understanding or love for art. Adam reflects on the past and questions what really drove him to make the decisions that he made in his life: "That was the uncanny thing, the way he would come bustling yet again into my life...link his fat arm through mine and steer me aside" (198). He realizes that his dedication to science has determined the course of his life; he is reaching the boundary point. While Adam spends some time with Madame Mac, the wife of the Hon. Mr. Mac, who loves science, he begins to reflect on: "What was Madame Mac to me, or I to Madame Mac? Yet I had the impression of having been drawn despite myself into a kind of restive intimacy...I did not understand, and still do not" (205- 206). Adam does not see past solid ground knowledge – he only understands science, and this drives him toward the unknown. For Nietzsche it is at this boundary point, the point at which "logic coils up…and finally bites its own tail," that a "new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy 98).* Adam is positioned amid the most striking landscape of modern science – from quantum theory to Darwinism. Indeed, Adam is living in a state of life-in-death– he is caught within a natural "order" that comprises a contradictory mix of determinacy and randomness.

The Infinities illustrates the implicit uncertainty of enunciation that frustrates both Neoplatonist and positivist searches for unassailable forms shorn of contradictions. Hermes

states, “yet I was the very one who would break time’s arrow and discard the slackened bow. Benny Grace used to mock me for my doubts and ditherings … what business is it of ours to save the phenomena? That was the difference – the difference! – between the two of us. I raged for certitude” (196). Benny and Hermes make visible the fundamental position, self-contradictory status and value of language and of negation itself. Banville questions whether language, as a debasement, is to be condemned or a deception to be pierced in accordance with the various movements of the essence; it, at best, veils and, at worst, deceives. As readers, we turn to think of Banville’s obsession with writing and how language is a question that remains separate from the question of fiction and epistemology as well. Banville shines a light on the issue of language in its mediating status. For the most part, his work problematizes this mediating status of language, a status Banville neither introduces nor invents but discovers as the archaeology of a cultural structure, in which it exercises an unquestioned tension.

Banville illustrates how contradiction is a predominant trope for the circumstances hindering existence from being. The vicious circle of contradiction consumes this negation: “What a pair we must have made, though, Benny and I…his fat sidekick clinging. On for dear life to his neck. Or was it the other way round…Did I have a taste for the low life before Benny came along and dragged me gaily into the gutter for a respite?” (197). Notice how the mediating status remains unquestioned because the occultation of any linguistic problem of language is crucial to language’s position and role. Its self-effacement and concealment as an issue is obligatory because its position, in fact, is contradictory and ambiguous; therefore, it must be disassembled and disguised. Indeed, linguistic equivocation appears with specific power in the negative mystical traditions that, perhaps of all theologies, Banville’s work

notably invokes. However, Banville is interested in mathematizing narration in order to create stylishly intelligible expressions in a harmonious language.

In “Visions, Dreams, and Mathematics”, Barry Mazur illustrates Leopold Kronecker’s desire – his dream in which he tries to find solutions to a large and interesting collection of polynomial equations. Mazur describes Kronecker's *Jugendtraum* theory, which involves an arc of mathematical discovery and enlightenment beyond the disembodied dream. For Kronecker, the disembodied dream must be large enough to pursue the expedition. (Doxiadis, Mazur 185-86). For Mazur, story constituents are usually planned to assist the mathematical ideas; the story is a means, and the ideas are the end (Doxiadis, Mazur 189). Mazur explains how a mathematical vision can be realized with Kronecker’s theory called *Jugendtraum: “*is the vision that certain structures in algebraic geometry or analytic geometry can be put to great serves: to provide explicit and elegantly comprehensible expressions, in a uniform language, for an important large class of algebraic numbers” (Doxidis, Mazur 191). In addition, Mazur makes reference to René Descartes’s *Discourse on Method.* The individual referred to as “I” in Descartes's *Discourse on Method* seems to have studied philosophy, logic, and mathematics. Descartes’s famous discoveries in mathematics (the union of geometry and algebra) supply some momentum for this more common view of a method of thought (Doxiadis, Mazur 205-206). The *Discourse on Method* is a prototype which assists in the intellectual voyage of mathematically structured ideas. (Doxiadis, Mazur 206). Banville uses Kronecker’s *Jugendtraum* and *The Discourse Method* to mathematize the narration of these two texts because it guides thought to be liberated of defects and gives a strong template for unifying principles.

Banville explores a discursive knowledge mediated as language, and an instinctive insight able to understand the wholeness of its object as a whole, thus transcending discursive differentiation, and language with it. Adam Jr. thinks about his wife Helen: "he has been aware of an increasing vagueness, an increasing insubstantiality, in his life with Helen… He cannot be sure; he cannot be sure of anything. The fact of the lost baby" (86). The narrator exposes contradictions and inconsistencies; he shows how deeply and productively vagueness operates within a logical system. Within this problematic, language appears as the instrument of the discursive. In many ways, contradiction need not be ambiguous, even when ambiguity derives from a vague statement. Adam reflects on an image; contradiction gives form to disorder: "the non-fact of it, is a tiny, desolate presence….He feels he is retreating in her sight…..smiling at the other passengers in that unfocused way that she does" (86). Ambiguity is an aberration that solicits interpretation, while vagueness may be constitutive of a logical system. Language works within the problem of epistemology, in which the possibility and conditions of knowledge of an absolute, eternal, incorporeal totality by human intelligence are unable to understand the absolute totality in its own immediacy. Modes of knowing are discursive, partial, and sequential. Yet the narrator continues to generate scenes; erasure and retraction give way to creation and to the true self that loses itself within multiplicity.

Banville illustrates that while language is not antecedent to material and temporal embodiment, language nonetheless supplies the terms not only for its negative representation but also for the world beyond embodiment. The first-person narrator states: "Where now was Benny my bad companion, my cicerone into occasions of sin? Somewhere among the harbour dives he had abandoned me, or I had given him the slip. I did not want to

go back into the hotel room where Inge would be under the bedclothes sobbing into her fist" (157). This scene oscillates between affirmation and denial, which is governed by the logic of contradiction. The first-person narrator states: "In a state of fuddled euphoria and still breathing hard I wandered down to the lake – there was a lake – and watched a huge sun roll slowly along its shallow arc" (157). Banville manipulates each differing method of knowledge, which is determined by a different method of being that assists as its object. Rather than being deviant, his utterances unveil both the logical and affective communicative force of contradiction. On an ontological level, language both relates and intercrosses. In a sense, meaning is found in a different way than had previously been most commonly thought.

For Banville, contradiction is not an experience but a condition of experience immanent in language. The narrator reveals the ways in which Ursula doubts her life with Adam: "All that money, years and years of it, just appearing in the bank every quarter without explanation, and Adam not saying a word so that she had to be silent too, no mention permitted, no acknowledgement, even though it was what they were living on" (257). She enquires into nature as she traces geometrical relationships within her marriage. Like and with time, language challenges and is excluded from eternity and from the conditions with which eternity is identified. Ursula is kept within a realm of uncertainties; she is trapped in a contradictory mix of determinacy and randomness.. She is an extension of the masculine perception, not the representation of feminine consciousness. The narrator asks a question: "What did he think she would think? It had to be a woman naturally" (257). He questions his belief in whether the world is amenable to physical investigation. In this inner human world, where the gods baffle her with contradiction, the male narrator reflects to make sense out of

what we know and who we are once we have realized just these truths about Socratic knowledge.

What makes Banville's representation of all this, in fact, post-Nietzschean, is that there is no mythification to be had, no conjuration of dionysian or appollonian essences. Banville uses contradiction to construct a textual environment by manipulating the senuous capacities of language with the rhythms and cadences of the prose. While Petra lies on the bed with her father: "She hears the cries of gulls, far off, then suddenly near, then far again. Kiss me. Kiss *me*. Oh. A sudden start. She opens her eyes – have they been closed" (247). The pathos is corporeal, erogenous, and is evoked through elaborate imagery. Father and daughter are intertwined –art is displayed on their bodies. In Adam's dying state, everything begins to change. Another image enters her mind: "She thinks of her father facing blindly into another world, breathing other, even darker air. Why are the gulls no longer crying? Where have they gone to?" (248). The world becomes questionable, unsteady, and plural as they drift in the limbo sphere, just as the self-undoing of Socratic knowledge. The orchestration of the work is, in significant part, the tenacious denunciation of character, body, voice, figure, and language in the appellation of an interiority before and beyond it. The self attempts to extricate itself and leave the world while pushed into darkness. Indeed, language itself generates a positive realization; language moves toward a reduction that inevitably gives way to generative and creative energy.

The Infinities stages a paradoxical humour where language is all surface, where the duality of the subject is not reflexive but expressive of the contradictory forces of being. Petra is the Orphic character who seems "as if she were written in a primitive script of straight lines and diagonals, a form of Ogham that no scholar has yet learned to decipher"

(105). Petra and her father have a special connection intertwined as one; they unite as nature and the void beyond the unmasterable of language itself. In *The Singularities,* Banville presents a perturbed male narrator who attempts to give a written account of himself, to explain himself to himself. The tableau vivant comes alive in *The Singularities* with erotic forces, acting through all the lively characters as they try to make sense of their experiences through words.

The Singularities

The Singularities opens upon an ex-convict who has just been released from prison after serving twenty years of a mandatory life sentence for murder. Mordaunt is now ready for the true calling of atonement- the restitution of life – through the knowledge of art. It soon becomes clear that he is Freddie Montgomery, who is a mainstay in Banville's trilogy, *The Book of Evidence* (1989), *Ghosts* (1993), and *Athena* (1995). In *The Singularities*, Freddie assumes a new name, Felix Mordaunt, and acquires a driver's license and a red Sprint. This modification of character underscores the temporalization of the problem of reliability. Banville's proclivity for punning on names – F.M. is both Freddie Montgomery and Felix Mordaunt – touches on the multiplicity of self.

Most importantly, *The Singularities* presents an equivocal linguistic axiology. Banville brings the reader to this concluding truth about the imperative shipwreck of logic. Alluding to the Copernican revolution, Nietzsche argues that science has cast "a common net of thought over the whole globe actually holding out the prospect of the lawfulness of an entire solar system" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 96). Banville positions Mordaunt to show the dialectical appearance of art out of the failed desire of science. Throughout the text, Banville seems to be fairly secretive about the real and imaginary as he alludes to several

famous portraits, such as “Saint Catherine of Siena” (136). “Carthage,” and “Siege of Münster” (138). It seems that Banville is setting up an oeuvre in the all-inclusive sense because he wants to highlight the knowledge of art. However, Banville illustrates the ways in which Mordaunt is trapped in the nonexistence sphere just at the self-defeating of Socratic knowledge.

Mordaunt constantly finds himself in the situation of knowing and yet not recognizing. The famous painting, *The Portrait of a Woman with Gloves,* enters Mordaunt‘s mind: “the very one that he had murdered for, or so at any rate the indictment laid against him” (137). He remains concerned but not despondent about the way things have turned out for him. He continues to suffer from misidentification and delusions, which affect his entire being. Mordaunt is incapable of moving towards a healthy understanding of himself and others. The narrator describes Mordaunt as a figure of excluded otherness: “Mordaunt steadily watched the road, bland of expression… He seemed to me to become more intangible by the moment. It was not that he was without affect, only he seemed to occupy a separated place” (99-100). His indifferent causticity and detached cynical irony make him “intangible.” Throughout the scene, “I” tries to move in the direction of temporally and extensively mediated experience, as opposed to inner and innate instincts of pure reason. Language continues to hold an equivocal standing in pursuit of pure essence. Because to truly recognize a single human being is to recognize the essence of the human world in general. Banville illustrates fictional representations of the self; there is a double impulse toward invention and refutation to give way to the pure, simple self, which continuously loses itself in reproduction.

Throughout his life, Mordaunt has been in search of his being. It is the thing itself, the pure, unmediated essence; he thinks that he might find his true home and his place in the world of Arden. The narrator tells us that Mordaunt is driven by mysterious motives: "Also he seemed on the verge of tears, vague tears, though he knew no cause to weep, or none specific. He rose from the chair, sighing, and opened the rattly back door (93). Within the silence, he feels that he can neither escape nor mitigate this shattered sense of self. Mordaunt feels guilt and remorse, yet he moves on with the real business of atonement. The narrator describes metaphysical expressions: "Here was the spot where only a month or two ago he had stepped through something like his own reflection and entered this otherworld of mirrors and mazes. He should be able to re-step now through that ripple … He should, but couldn't." (93-94). As he looks at the images, emotion overwhelms him. The scenery continues to affect his sense of himself. He reflects a shattered self-image – an unfathomable nature of the remembered self in a manifestly chaotic world. Banville thus positions Mordaunt on the grounds of Arden so he can continue to explore certain truths about the truth.

Like Nietzsche, Banville continues bringing us past this boundary condition to present us with a turning to art, and it is turning that pursues out in its own way "protection and remedy" (Nietzsche *Birth of Tragedy* 98). Banville explores the ways that art can reverse the normal relationship between viewer and representation. Mordaunt has a shameful awareness of himself, and any gaze affects his sense of self. For the most part, he does not know who he is; he thinks of ways to make acquaintances with the fact of death: "he will not cut and run. Has he not determined to fashion a new version of himself, to become his own avatar?" (110). Mordaunt continues to play the perturbed character who continuously

attempts to give a written account of himself. In an empty pocket of time, the narrator tells us: “Stepping over a threshold always marks, for him, a series of tiny but significant transitions: outdoors to indoors ... Nothing like the slammer to intensify the self’s awareness of its self, inexistent or otherwise” (111). The slammer proves to be an enclosed space in which a further series of mirroring ensues. This set of “arbitrary metaphors” are subject to a lawmaking body of language. This negativity unquestionably includes linguistic nihilism, a negation of language that seems to stretch out not only to the world which language describes but to disavow language itself. “I” moves towards “nothing” because the unsuccessful attempts of the voice are to free itself from speech by speech. By moving outdoors to indoors, the “I” tries to separate the true self from the impulse behind the voice. Yet, the first-person narrator does not get stuck in contradictions; he uses them in order to delve deeper into metaphysics. For Banville, contradiction betrays an exhilarating defiance of semantic convention, including the conventions of logic.

In Banville’s texts, there are numerous systems of reference and systems of explanation. The first-person narrator states: “The thing is technical rather; like, somewhat like, a proposition in logic: I am, in all my amness, therefore they’re not, unless they’re within sight and sound of me, here and palpable, for me to vivify them” (130). Banville illustrates how being is not syntactical – he points to how pronominal oscillations are syntactic maneuvers within an exclusively linguistic space. Furthermore, Banville depicts how the disguised first-person can only conceive a third person (and vice versa) because of the very priority of the third. He reveals his strategy to us: “Teetering there, gazing down upon this alarming creature, Queen Tut in her cerecloths, I wondered if something now would be required of me, something in the way of rescue … But maybe, I thought, maybe

she's here by her own choice; maybe she crept up here one day to hide herself" (151). He looks at the characters from above to see how he can move them along the plot. The first-person narrator states: "I could already hear the ambulance siren, could see the stretcher being bumped down successive flights" (151). Banville illustrates how art brings us closer to an understanding of knowledge and desire. At the center of the text, in section II, Banville reflects on the Neoplatonist's acceptance of Plato and his ambiguous word regarding the One, which ultimately led them in their quest for absolute Unity, to equivocate regarding its relation to Form.

Most importantly, Banville takes the time to reflect on his work as a whole. It is a self-reflexive concern in which he seems above all to be writing about writing. Banville illustrates his obsession with writing; he explains the status of fiction and the faculty of fiction-making. Throughout the text, Banville makes reference to several famous literary novels. The first-person narrator tells us of his discovery of the finite world of Forms: "I was greatly excited by my discovery, of course, I was. I felt like an anthropologist who has stumbled upon a tribe as yet unheard" (154). He is the "anthropologist" who wants to continue to excavate towards a "tribe yet unheard." Banville reflects on textuality itself and how it came to be; by doing so, he points to the very texture of art. Furthermore, Banville brings our attention to the workings of his imagination: "I summon up the others, all the successive others who will be here after I am gone, and for whom the air will pipe again" (162). He explains how he creates his characters amid metaphysical elements and how he will continue to disguise himself to perform among those characters. The artist creates a reality that is entirely a mental construct; his ideas are written in texts, and he creates the highest type of reality, which gives the illusion of being "real." Banville's philosophical project is to explore the literary-historical richness of his writing. In its

juxtaposition of literal and figurative meanings, *The Singularities* stages a paradoxical humour where language is all surface, where the duality is not reflexive but expressive of the contradictory forces of being. However, the narrator continues to impersonate himself to show that contradiction is a sort of sleight-of-hand to execute what negation cannot.

The contradictions of Banville's narrators are not, as in the realist novel, only psychological but also grammatical. The narrator reminds us of Adam's self-destructive tendencies: "he worked up an image of himself as a soul-driven to its limits of despair and the consequent urge to destroy himself; he wrote, echoing Nietzsche, whom he idolized" (166). Like Nietzsche, Banville believes in writing a work of pure style. It is where style is the Nietzschean gesture, pure foolishness that makes manifest the generative and catastrophic intensities at the center of matter, the contradictory forces of becoming. In the self-quoted monologue, the narrator states: "I have looked deep into the abyss, and then the abyss has looked even deeper into me" (167). Nietzsche writes that Socrates is working under a productive illusion: "the unshakeable faith that thought, using the thread of logic, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 95). Banville juxtaposes philosophical and fictional texts according to mathematical principles to trace geometrical relationships. The narrator suggests that both philosophy and literature provide no clear pictures of reality: "for some simple pleasures and humble pastimes was a carefully managed pretense, aimed at promoting the image of a down-to-earth personality with unpretentious tastes, in the line of other masters of masquerade such as the two Alberts, Einstein and Schweitzer, and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein" (188). The philosophical texts of these great thinkers continue to be self-consuming for the finite human intellect. Yet,

these books are organized around the problem to show that they produce two kinds of knowledge. Banville creates a space to reveal that philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

There is a special bond between Petra and her father – their *amour fou* can be heard as a musical score on the page. Banville's text and music become closely interwoven in a synchronism of voices and moods. We hear several voices that sound simultaneously – the heterophonic character of sentences is multiplied into a polyphonic composition. Throughout the text, the narrator produces the creative act; the scenes are performed amid the "single" and "infinite" looping track because he wants to show how language depends on a world antecedent to the first-person. We continue to reflect on the paradox of being; we think about the true self – eternal, internal, singularity. Dionysian comedy brings forward a harmonious perfection, which continues to live infinitely in our minds and hearts.

Conclusion

In *The Infinities* and *The Singularities*, there is a strange crossover between an omniscient and a homodiegetic narrator. As a first-person narrator, Hermes is the inventor of a fictional world where experience is intersubjective and sensory. The free indirect style, drifting from one character to another, fragments the illusion of self-presence while building a more extensive, creative character in which pathos appears in mathematical signs. In *The Singularities*, the Adam-Hermes duality in the first-person conveys the essential paradoxes of being, namely that there is no life without death and that human beings are not the centre of the cosmos. These two novels theatricalize characters to show that no transcendent logical machinery controls algebraic patterns. If, in *The Infinities,* Adam Godley's narrative of dying is to communicate with those he is leaving behind, then, in *The Singularities*, the opposite side of the paradox, the real paradox

that continues to slip from one voice to another like a Möbius strip, indicates that "being is not syntactical."

For Banville, contradiction is a predominant trope for the circumstances hindering existence. Hermes does not get struck in contradiction; he produces multiple settings to surround the self with, and then steps forward into them. He is the arbitrator of the creative act whose contradiction outshine the trivial paradoxes of life itself. Throughout the texts, the "I" locates himself with the contradiction inherent in the inscription itself. The true self is an eternal, internal singularity. The characters attempt to extricate themselves from time, from externality, and from language as well. In *The Infinites* and *The Singularities,* the characters long for silence yet they are incapable of liberating themselves from their obsessional voices. Banville's work points to denying self-denial and negating negativity, but it moves towards affirmation as well. Its gestures toward reduction inevitably give way to generative and inventive erotic forces. Its tropes and patterns intrude into attention and affirm their own creative power.

Banville interweaves math and music in *The Singularities* in a humorous way to highlight the complex web of natural phenomena in the universe. Pitch, tempo, mood and balance flow amid the last words of the text. In the third-person reflexive structure, ironic consciousness seems both death-refuting and life-negating, supporting the illusion of immortality while simultaneously estranging the self from an acknowledged unmediated relation to the world. The two novels are linked in this respect, as paradoxical mirroring of each other, like the masks of tragedy in a world. The two novels are linked in this respect, as paradoxical mirroring of each other, like the masks of the tragedy of life's vitalities.

Conclusion

Robyn Warhol argues that feminist theorists have welcomed "standpoint epistemology" as a way of framing what can be known (Herman, *Narrative Theory*, 97). Feminist epistemology comprehends "objectivity" to be a politically and socially useful fiction because it acknowledges that individuals sharing certain identity classifications are positioned to see the world in the same way. What one sees relies completely on where one is standing while one looks.

In *Molly's Language of Flow,* I explore the ways that Joyce uses the trope of the vagina dentata and female sexuality to transcend language and to depict the psychosexual complexity of the mind. Joyce strives to represent the essential feminine as subverting, destabilizing, and "unweaving" in the world of phallocentric language. Molly reveals how Joyce was excited to illustrate his linguistic "puissance" with a feminine masquerade that places women in the material world. She unveils the constant sliding or dynamic interplay of language that corresponds to the actuality of feeling. Her language of flow is the Bergsonian flux as she moves with vitality of the inner self. The "Penelope" episode captures the "Freudian subconscious" with different modes of representing the psychosexual forces while driving Molly's inner worlds deep into the unconscious.

Throughout "Penelope," Molly's mind is close to the unconscious, helping her connect with all the dispositions that were acquired through experience. Her visionary power is intimately connected to the loss of consciousness forced on her as a woman. This night-time reverie allows her desire to create the vision. She gives up so much rational power because the masculine vision of the world is established on a feminine vision. "Interior" and "exterior"

remain blurred as Joyce's efforts to represent Molly's "interiority," in an external unconscious state, seems to be an exhibition of his anxieties. Molly's self-absorbed musing slides constantly from one setting and context to the next to seek universal significance for the daily in ways which agree with Joyce's strategies.

Antonio Damasio argues that our non-conscious processes are at work within our minds without our "knowing" it (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 107). Damasio suggests that the brain's preference is to make as much as possible of its activity non-conscious (Palmer 108). Joyce positions Molly in a non-conscious state because he reasoned that our attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions are unconscious most of the time unless activated for some reason.

Joyce has Molly thinking of female sexuality, marriage, infidelity, and nation. She helps him transcend language through her androgynous constructions in an effort to move beyond the old myth of eternal feminine, issues of gender, and national identity. The representation and subversion of the eternal feminine and her relation to Mother Ireland is a key space of cultural unravelling, enacted early in *Ulysses.* Joyce understands that no simple opposition is posited here between the local and folkloric and the conservative and universal myth. He and Molly work together in an attempt to resolve the contradictions and paradoxes of female sexuality, gender, and nation. The "Penelope" episode continuously undermines the polarity of body and mind, culture and objective, universal aesthetic and cultural standard. Molly's subconscious fantasy of sexual transfiguration is the manifestation of her equally subconscious desire for a move in social values.

Molly's masquerade is part of the natural sequence of metamorphosis that might stipulate a reconciliation or union of an internalized sexual conflict. Molly performs a multiplication of possibilities for identity, and its multiplicity is defined in terms of binary polarities – Ireland or

England, Molly or Bloom, pure or hybrid, myth or history. Joyce uses the trope of the vagina dentata to challenge the cultural nationalists whose protection relies on female submission and exclusion of the ethnic other. The "Penelope" episode successfully makes a variant of the feminine a sponsor of his new literary order.

Molly is the first-person unreliable narrator who does not mentally block out possible realities with theatrical scenarios of dishonest emotion; rather, she insightfully recognizes the apparently genuine paradox of the veritably fraudulent. The "Penelope" episode is about memory and recognition, yet those mental skills are themselves profoundly linked to the brain's spatial abilities. Molly remembers: "I saw them not long ago I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven theres nothing like nature the wild mountains" (931). Joyce focuses on a particular location: Dublin, Ireland. His treatment of place moves not toward the inside of the brain but towards the outside because he wants to exhibit the significance of space for the Irish collective psyche. This scene depicts the moment and the mood as Molly continues to describe this specific geographic location. Joyce illustrates a space in which the field of memories lives in the past, behaviour in the present, and plans in the future. If memory is the foundation of our narrative self-invention, we must live in some junction between inside and outside. Joyce imports into his text neuroscience's insight into the human brain and mind. Indeed, he was unwittingly acknowledging the limbic underpinnings of his art.

In chapter two, "Romantic Love and the Drive for Fulfilled Identity in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy*," I explore the ways that the author represents problematic issues of female identity in a highly patriarchal society. O'Brien asks questions which are explicitly from a woman's point of view, focusing on women's bodies, women's sexuality, and women's

emotional dilemmas. *The Country Girls Trilogy* and *Epilogue* explores themes of female loss of identity and self-destruction, trauma, anger and depression, and the power relations between lover and beloved, man and woman, and even between the Church and the human. This feminine *Bildungsroman* focuses on the young women's estrangement from traditional Irish values, and how the two female protagonists, Cait and Baba, struggle to understand their socio-cultural environment in the effort to achieve autonomous female identity in paternalistic postcolonial Ireland. The naïve Cait and the brazen, irrepressible Baba take the reader on a journey from Clare to Galway, to Dublin, and then to London, from innocence and high-spirited mischievousness to melancholic *gravitas* beyond worldly wisdom.

The Country Girls Trilogy stages the romance script to critique the conventional fantasy of romance, which traditionally supplies a remedy for pain in the past and a potential site for the future manifestation of a transformed self. Throughout the trilogy, Cait hopes that romance will open her future and free her from the past. Cait is vulnerable to the promise of romance because she is caught between a nationalist myth that encourages women to find fulfillment through romance and the Catholic caveat. The text does not simply propose an uncritical reproduction of the romance script; it also dramatizes its failure.

O'Brien revises the parameters of the traditional Bildungsroman by placing Cait on a pathway to destruction, revealed in the progressive fragmentation of her personality, the loss of speaking, the destruction of intellectual and physical possibilities, and finally, her death. Cait, the first-person unreliable narrator of the first two books in the trilogy, takes on the form of the split subject because she is progressively in need of a harmonizing voice to bestow the confidence and security she lacks. O'Brien's choice to remove signs of abuse from the action has the powerful

effect of keeping Cait's feelings and motives questionable, not just for Eugene and herself but also for the reader.

The Country Girls Trilogy illustrates Cait's pervasive fear, which sets up the central question about what becomes of a self so damaged by trauma that the integrity of the self cannot develop freely or fully. Cait does not go into detail about her father's abusive actions towards her late mother or towards herself. In the first two books, Kate alludes to the abusive actions through descriptions of her post-traumatic feelings. Read from a feminist perspective, *The Country Girls Trilogy* is a novel about the persistent damage of childhood pain that reveals Kate's tendency toward self-blame and her hope of escape through romance. This text, however, does not allow the reader to disavow the pain that Cait feels. The actual reader who picks up the signs of Cait's past comes to understand her better than Kate herself can understand herself. In a sense, to comprehend the couple's situation within a structure that is not available to either of them but fully present in the text is the twenty-first-century belief that the process of remembering and telling about trauma is the key to healing from its effects. These metaleptic moments promote a feminist purpose, destabilizing what is supposed to be the conventional determinations of her post-traumatic feelings. However, O'Brien does not radically neurologize the pivotal attributes of personhood but mixes a neurobiological vocabulary with introspective or phenomenological descriptions.

Memory, which, in line with a philosophical tradition, is the space in which texts tend as the rudimentary constituent of personhood. For O'Brien, memory assists as the organizing force of its narrative structure. Through Baba's voice, O'Brien proposes an alternative way of negotiating the cultural context, but the Epilogue also confirms the conclusive role of trauma in Cait's dissolution. Baba narrates in the present tense events that are taking place, but between

these events (or during them); she shifts into the past tense, reporting events of the past twenty years. Gerard Genette describes these types of narrating as simultaneous: "narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action," interpolated, or "between the moments of the action" (Genette 217). O'Brien's epilogue integrates these two forms, making the narrative form highly complex. For Genette, the interpolation of past events with the present one is the most complex type of narrating. Genette argues that this interpolation "involves narrating with several instances, and since the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former" (Genette 217). Baba's act of narrating is about memory, ensuring their relationship to the world beyond the important inclusion of emotion. Indeed, in *The Epilogue,* Baba's perspective is embodied in a narrative about geographic location as a phenomenological and symbolic space.

In chapter three, "Inside-Out: Performing Mathematics in *The Infinities* and *The Singularities,* Banville explores contradiction as a predominant trope for the circumstance hindering existence to being; he uses a pure speech act that oscillates between existence and nonexistence in order to return to the true self, that is in the form of the eternal, internal, singularity. Hermes's first-person narrative is a subjective psyche conversing with itself about occurrences that it perceives and impressions that it has of events. Throughout the novels, Hermes, Banville, and Adam Sr. represent the "I" in various guises; they are the homodiegetic unreliable narrators who read the minds of the characters. It is Banville's technique to come closer to the pure, simple self while living quotidian life in the context of postmodern understandings of knowledge and truth. Banville does not simply think about style as the Nietzschean gesture; he thinks about certain truths about the truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche explains the process of how the absolute truth appears in the legislature of language. For Nietzsche, no matter how absolute a truth appears to be, no matter how exactly words appear to be equivalent to the things to which they refer, the truth is always, ultimately, a set of "arbitrary metaphors" that are subject to "the legislature of language" and not to the thing itself (Nietzsche, "On Truth" 177,176). Nietzsche goes into detail about the nature of language and its ramifications which became formalized into structuralist linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure, and then other great thinkers such as Jacques Derrida to show how this structuralism, in turn, liberates its own attempts at grounding language. *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* make use of Nietzsche's theory of the truth in order to explore language and its consequences beyond the "arbitrary metaphors" that are subject to "the legislature of language."

Banville illustrates how the realm of consciousness representation obliges us to come to terms with the complex, dynamic relationship between the mind and the world. These postmodern narratives are arbitrary and indeterminate, unveiling a euphoria in chaos, discontinuity, and ambiguity and a correspondingly patronizing attitude toward the conventions of a coherent plot, realistic characterization, and distinctly identifiable settings. Both time and space in *The Infinities* and *The Singularities* remain unstable and unintelligible.

Francisco Ortega and Fernado Vidal suggest that the assimilation of a neuroscientific expression into the literary narrative and the neurologization of literary inquiry represent a neuroliterary field (Ortega and Vidal 339).Within this framework, the neurosciences supply writers, especially novelists, with resources for rendering characters, psychological states, and processes while furnishing academics with tools for interpreting literature. Ortega and Vidal argue that the neuroliterary field is defined by its thematic structure: brains in literature, literature in the brain (330). While some writers initiate neuroscientific concerns, processes, and

terminology into their narratives, some scholars hope that a neuroscientific approach will equip the crucial determinant to literary creation and reception. This relation, however, is not symmetrical: neuronovelists seem to think that the neuroscientific approach can restore their field, yet neuronovelists stand apart both from their writings and in their dedication to regarding humans as "cerebral subjects" substantially described by the fact of *being* brains (Ortega and Vidal 330). Both writers and scholars demonstrate a manner of neuroscientific realism. For scholars, it operates as an ontological credence, and for writers, it is mostly a literary tool. So what is consciousness for?

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio answers that the "devices of consciousness handle the problem of how an individual organism may cope with environmental challenges not predicted in its basic design such that the conditions fundamental for survival can be met" (Damasio 303). Human beings need consciousness in order to be attuned intelligently to our environment.Damasio describes the distinctions between immediate, single mental states that alternate over time in terms of two selves. According to Damasio, the two selves are the *core self* and the *autobiographical self: "*the seemingly changing self and the seemingly permanent self" (217). Damasio argues that, in "core consciousness, the sense of self arises in the subtle, fleeting feeling of knowing, constructed anew in each pulse." In contrast, "[e]xtended consciousness still hinges on the same core 'you,' but that 'you' is now connected to the lived past and anticipated future that are part of your autobiographical record" (196). In the context of this discussion, mental events take place in the core self, and states are attributes of the autobiographical self. Secondarily, Damasio uses this concept of the two selves to clarify one of the greatest enigmas of life: why we feel that we are always changing while concurrently feeling that we always stay the same. Damasio insists that the

core self brings about the feeling of change and the autobiographical self brings about the feeling of sameness.

The characters in these four Irish texts perform their personal scripts. What we notice is the influence of past and future on the present workings of real minds. It is these personal scripts that ascertain which features of the storyworld are perceived by those characters. Daniel Dennett suggests that the duty of the mind is to "produce future" (Palmer 179). Additionally, another frame of reference on this past-present-future relationship is supplied by the *homeostasis / homeodynamics* dissimilarity that is used in neuroscience. *Homeostasis* describes those features of the brain that maintains it in a steady state and makes certain continuity between the past, present, and future. *Homeodynamics* describes those features of the brain that permit it to contend with change. As readers, we understand fictional minds as continuing both homeostatic and homeodynamic features that let the minds maintain stasis and contend with changes to the environment. Palmer suggests that clues regarding these elements are also important for readers when following the changes and also the regularities and consistencies the character's embedded narratives (Palmer 179). As with Damasio's concepts of the core self and the autobiographical self, fictional characters have to maintain fixed entities, but they also have to change in order to stay fascinating.

Richard W. Byrne and Andrew Whiten argue that "Machiavellian intelligence" is a term that implies "that *possession of the cognitive capability we call 'intelligence' is linked with social living and the problems of complexity it can pose*" (1). Banville explores Machiavellian intelligence and how these mental mechanisms are especially harmonized with calculation, cooperation, and conflict. For Banville, theory of mind is the most important cognitive mechanism in building a range of other committed structures. Simon Baron-Cohen argues that

worldly mindreading demands an intention detector, an eye direction detector, and a shared attention mechanism (Byrne and Whiten 162). Banville explores the human mindreading system because he is interested in how the mechanisms of social competition operate among human beings. Byrne and Whiten ask these two questions: "Where intelligence is shown in the social domain, does it manifest mainly as 'nasty' deceit and exploitation, or is 'nice' co-operation also enhanced? Does mutualistic co-operation require more or less intelligence than competitive manipulation?" (4). Banville positions his characters to look deeper into self-consciousness and to see what behavioural traits are required for competitive manipulation and worldly mindreading.

In *The Infinities*, Hermes' first-person account lets us into something sinister: "I confess I am agog myself. What happy consequences have I set in train by my playful subterfuge of the morning? I experience a twinge of misgiving" (183). When Hermes tells us about his feeling of "misgiving," he points toward the deception that is relevant to the hypothesis of a Machiavellian origin of intellect. Hermes' gaze monitoring works at the level of reading other's intentions. Banville questions both the cognitive inferences and the context of Machiavellian behaviour to see how to differentiate real states of mind from apparent behaviour in the case of false intent (deception and counter-deception) (Byrne and Whiten 167). Hermes observes and states: "For instance, she is convinced that a moment ago she asked the Wagstaff fellow beside her to open the wine, but if so, he either did not hear or is ignoring her" (184). This scene illustrates how human intelligence developed to handle the social complexity of living in groups – to outsmart our fellow primates and to help keep track of our affinities. If a human being is able to respond alternatively, according to the beliefs and desires of another human being (rather than correspondingly only to the other's apparent behaviour), then it possesses a theory of mind

(Byrne and Whiten 8). Indeed, human mindreading is worldly behaviour-reading that includes another manifestation of the mind, such as attention, which is critical to the functioning of our own thorough-going mentalism. Yet, in *The Infinities*, Banville explores neuro discourses and neuroscientific knowledge and all their figurative probabilities and their capability to suggest forms of individual and social experience.

Banville provides a neurochemical depiction of the ways that Petra suffers from cerebral palsy. He thinks of how she might be feeling, "I did not recognize the feeling ... I was only imagining with an intenser acuity ... In my form of paresis, if I am using the term correctly – Petra would know – it is distressingly easy to mistake an imagined sensation" (260). He brings a neuroscientific perspective and language into the first-person narrative in order to recuperate the patient's voice that is normally abstained from scientific, including neuroscientific writing. Banville uses Petra not just to thematize spastic paresis but also to enact how the world is experienced by someone suffering from a condition such as cerebral palsy that causes muscle overactivity and spasticity. The narrator gives us a depiction of interiority, "it is only a tic, one among the many that afflict her ... She makes a gesture towards it, her left arm jerking out stiffly from her side and a finger childishly pointing and then the arm falling weakly back" (10). This passage shows the workings of her brain and her interactions with the environment beyond social relations. He moves from first-person to third-person, making it a case of medical diagnosis. Banville illuminates Petra's condition in neuroscientific terminology and processes, purporting to capture the moment-by-moment flow of consciousness itself. In *The Singularities,* Banville depicts Ursula as a character who may be suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Banville neurologizes consciousness and represents Ursula in neurological terms. The narrator tells us that Ursula "Can't make it out, with her cataracted eye... She thinks of

the steaming copper vats ... their trousers tied with twine for fear of rats getting in and running up their legs and biting them" (62-63). Neuroscientific vocabulary is given from a third-person viewpoint as if it were a medical diagnosis. Banville explores the nature of the self and neurological disorders to illustrate the frailty of selfhood and personal experience. He transcribes in narrative a precise observation of the neurobiological processes of someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Yet Banville uses brain-based vocabulary in contexts that are not medical or psychological, in this case, a personal, felt experience. Franzen Johnson argues that the drawing of the character in terms of neurobiological processes can be nuanced with the assertion of felt experience, which includes brain processes but is irreducible to them (Ortega and Vidal 342). Banville challenges the belief that personhood and selfhood occupy essentially the brain; he illustrates human attributes outside of the head. Robert Zwijnenberg argues that writers illustrate a general feature of art, which is "allowed to be a locus of contradictions where opposites may coincide" (Ortega and Vidal 342). However, Banville positions Mordaunt as the character who suffers from Capgras syndrome.

The Singularities challenges the idea that neuro novels imply cerebral solipsism and hinder readers' identification with characters who suffer from neurological disorders. This rare neurological disorder called Capgras syndrome involves the complete person, his life, his history, and his personality. The narrator tells us that Mordaunt had been in "a secluded place of detention for the ordinarily insane" (5). Mordaunt suffers from misidentification and delusions; therefore, he continues to murder people who he thinks are charlatans. In a third-person free indirect discourse, the narrator states, "And stranger still, what emerged at the other side was not quite him, or was him but changed, being both less and more than he had been, at once diminished and at the same time somehow added to"

(21).Neurological solipsism is not a necessary consequence of conceiving oneself and others as cerebral subjects. Banville illustrates how the mind/brain works; he turns brain mechanisms into a constitutive part of Mordaunt's psychology and behaviour. Mordaunt's self-doubt about his being manifests modern neuroscience's view of the self as unreal, an illusion produced by the brain. The delusions about identity that characterize Capgras syndrome become the paradigm for the functioning of the self in general. This scene seems to cling to a neuroscientific view of the self mainly when read through the lens of cognitive literary criticism and Neuro Lit Crit. Indeed, in the Neuro Lit Crit perspective, writers are accurate observers of neurobiological processes, which they somehow transcribe into narrative by showing a neurochemical depiction of interiority.

Joyce, O'Brien, and Banville manifest a manner of neuroscientific realism. It is their dedication to handling humans as "cerebral subjects" and of *being* brains. James Joyce's *Ulysses,* O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue,* and Banville's *The Infinities,* and *The Singularities* represent mental states in and through language, although never infallibly.

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