

*John Banville*

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Colum McCann

We are living now in the exponential age – a sequence of rapidly punctuated evolutions, a sort of carousel of quickening, where everything is faster-smaller, faster-cheaper, faster-incomprehensibly reduced. We are tightening and tightening in a narrowing gyre. But John Banville has always refused to kowtow to the times. He is a writer with a longitude and latitude in him. He is a twenty-first century novelist with a twentieth-century rage and a nineteenth century decorum. His work is of great psychological power. He writes to that Faulknerian notion of the human heart in conflict with itself, of beauty and vengeance and pity and sacrifice and love and hate and desire and loss and all the rainstorms in between. The whole time he is properly concerned with language and the music of what happens. He has a daring and a dash about him, served alongside a slice of ponder. He is also prepared to risk failure. He continues to touch on James Joyce's notion that a great artist continues to recreate life out of life and in so doing he (or she) redeems quotidian reality. Banville shapes our reality with a thrilling poetic intensity.

On a personal level I used to work with him at the Irish Press on Burgh Quay in Dublin. I was a very young cub reporter and he was an imposing copy editor. He terrified me. I never once talked to him. He wore a jacket and tie. Often he also wore a heavy scarf indoors. It was as if he was ready to bolt the building at any time and get back to the novels which, at that stage, I hadn't read.

I have read them now and my world is wider and better because of them.