



The Book of Evidence

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Returning to Ireland to reclaim a painting that is part of his patrimony, a thirty-eight-year-old man commits a ghastly and motiveless murder, which he confesses in a novel-length narrative.

The Book of Evidence Details

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From Reader Review *The Book of Evidence* for online ebook

Jeff says

Freddie Montgomery tells us the story of his life and his crime. We can't be sure if this is post-conviction or pre-trial "confession." As such, he meanders through his adult life with brief flashbacks to sensual moments from his youth. Describing gin: "[it:] always makes me think of twilight and mists and dead maidens. Tonight it tinkled in my mouth like secret laughter." Discussing his theory that humans are not fit to live in this kind of world: "How could they survive, these gentle earthlings, in a world that was made to contain *us*?" And my favorite bit when he "meets" the "woman" who will lead to his "downfall" (oh! how i love winkwink-nudgenudge quotes):

Things seemed not to recede as they should, but to be arrayed before me--the furniture, the open window, the lawn and river and far-off mountains--as if they were not being looked at but were themselves looking, intent upon a vanishing-point here, inside the room. I turned then, and saw myself turning as I turned, as I seem to myself to be turning still, as I sometimes imagine I shall be turning always, as if this might be my punishment, my damnation, just this breathless, blurred, eternal turning towards her.

(Occurred to me just *now*: that's reminiscent of Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*!)

More often than not, i enjoy Freddie's perceptiveness and descriptiveness, but occasionally the artifice of Banville's Narrative Device feels forced or Freddie's voice irks me. For example on page 51 (of my edition), the interruption of the fictive illusion seems meaningful:

I put my arm around him, laid a hand on his forehead. He said to me: don't mind her. He said to me --

Stop this, stop it. I was not there. I have not been present at anyone's death.

Both statements cannot be true; we see that Freddie's yet another late-20th century unreliable narrator. But then there will be one of these:

Of the various kinds of darkness I shall not speak.
My cell. My cell is. Why go on with this.

I am just grateful there aren't more of these burstings of the bubble.

Reviewing my marginalia and highlighted words, sentences, paragraphs, "Children should be seen and not heard" comes to mind. Banville seems to be examining what it's like to see and be seen but the act of writing is really about being heard ... in order to be seen? There is a lot of playing with the idea of children, childishness, parents, parenting, responsibility, dependence, and how seeing and being seen/heard relate to them.

I made several notes in the margins when i was reminded of other fictional works--Rilke, Kafka, Burgess, Goethe, Shakespeare, Proust--all of which (except Proust & Kafka?) alluded to evildoers or killers.

For people interested in comparing/contrasting other contemporary *Irish* books about murder/murderers (this ain't really a spoiler of any kind), i recommend Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (one of my new all-

time favorites) and Edna O'Brien's *In the Forest*. All 3 murders/murderers are different. All 3 styles of writing are different. Seems the only sameness is the seeming centrality of murder and the setting being 20th century Ireland. Banville's ranks a distant 3rd (but that's like an Olympic bronze medal). Edna O'Brien's prose is the prettiest and her descriptions/evocations of Place the best; her ability to change gears and write from different personal *and* distanced, objective perspectives is virtuosic. Flann O'Brien's book just happens to deal with issues that are of the most interest to me and his brand of writing felt most like what i'd aspire to if i ever wrote a novel. When i read *The Third Policeman*, it was as if i were reading my own thoughts: i wished i'd been able to write that book before he did; i loved O'Brien for writing it the way he did; i thrilled at the feeling of union. I think Banville's work falls short of greatness; maybe i'm just biased against first person narration or the *obvious* unreliable narrator biznaz. Y'know, maybe people who liked Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers* might like *Book of Evidence*. I never finished reading that one; maybe someday. [it was the last book i read in 2011!]

Bill Kerwin says

Irish novelist John Banville—known to readers of mystery fiction as Benjamin Black—had been writing novels for twenty years when, in 1989, *The Book of Evidence* was short-listed for the Booker. Every page of this elegant psychopathic monologue—a thief and murderer's intelligent and restrained account of his inane and violent crime—reveals Banville to be a master of his craft.

Protagonist Freddie Montgomery is—like Humbert Humbert—an unreliable narrator. He and Humbert are unreliable, however, not because they lie to us, but because their amorality and lack of feeling rob them of the capacity to connect their own actions with consequences, and therefore they are deprived of the ability to create a coherent emotional identity. Freddie, in fact, may commit his crimes—and write his "book of evidence" too—in a vain attempt to feel something—anything—and, through such feelings, to comprehend his ever elusive self. But—just like the monkey-artist in Nabokov's preface to *Lolita*—the first, the only, portrait he can fashion is a picture of the bars of his cage.

In addition to the unreliability of his narrator, Banville resembles Nabokov in the beauty of his prose. Though his style is less resplendent and concentrated, it is also more melodious and precise. The jeweled splendor of Nabokov is perhaps inimitable, but one could do worse than imitate Banville's flowing, pellucid style.

Brad says

Fourth attempt, fourth time abandoning *The Book of Evidence*.

I made it a little farther this time, as I do each time I take a crack at it, but I've still not reached one hundred pages, and I can't see myself ever picking this book up again. But it's John Banville, and I am an Irish Lit guy, so I feel like something is wrong with me; I can't read his books.

But there's definitely something wrong with this book that isn't about me. John Banville doesn't care about his protagonist, Freddie Montgomery. When one writes a first person narrative and one doesn't care for one's narrator, the book can be excruciating to read. At least it is so for me. And I've to wonder why Banville

bothered.

Still, maybe there is something to be said for Banville's achievement. He wrote a book about someone he doesn't care for, and he wrote it well. I can't deny that. His prose is beautiful and occasionally brilliant. But I can't imagine writing a book about a character I don't care about. I can write a book about someone I dislike or even loathe, but I have to care about them even so. Banville seems to have written about a character, however, that he both disdains and doesn't care for. It is something I can't do, and it is also something that I can't read because Banville's attitude becomes my attitude, and I can't carry on reading without caring about the character(s) I am asked to spend time with.

So do I try *The Book of Evidence* again sometime, when I think I am in the mood for some uncaring misanthropy? Do I try *The Sea*, even though it won the Booker Prize and probably sucks? Or do I just stop trying to appreciate Banville? Can't decide right now. Help me out gentle readers. Is there a Banville you think I may like?

S. says

I really enjoyed this book because I really enjoy despair and self-pity. Especially if it's couched in a good story by an Irish writer with a fabulous vocabulary.

Banville is the saint of sumptuous sentences. Although the book is riddled with them, there's a real knock-out on page 32:

"I drank my drink. There is something about gin, the tang in it of the deep wildwood, perhaps, that always makes me think of twilight and mists and dead maidens. Tonight it tinkled in my mouth like secret laughter."

Okay, that's three sentences. It's mostly the center one I mean, but also the sequencing of these three with 1) the simple set-up, 2) the sensual ravishing, and 3) the kill-off, is masterful.

He also hits the bullseye when evoking the senses.

"...I caught a whiff of something, a faint, sharp, metallic smell, like the smell of worn pennies."

"I had not thought paper would make so much noise, such scuffling and rattling and ripping, it must have sounded as if some large animal were being flayed alive in here."

As above, he's fabulous with "as if."

"His left eyelid began to flutter as if a moth had suddenly come to life under it."

"She drove very fast, working the controls probingly, as if she were trying to locate a pattern, a secret formula, hidden in this mesh of small deft actions."

"Her pale colouring and vivid hair and long, slender neck gave her a startled look, as if some time in the past she had been told a shocking secret and had never quite absorbed it."

"When I spoke to her the poor girl turned crimson, and wincingly extended a calloused little paw as if she were afraid I might be going to keep it."

His words savor color and light:

"I have always loved that hour of the day, when that soft, muslin light seeps upward, as if out of the earth itself, and everything seems to grow thoughtful and turn away."

Lying in bed, the main character describes watching lights scan across the room:

“Now and then a car or lorry passed by, and a box of lighted geometry slid rapidly over the ceiling and down the walls and poured away into a corner.”

There's so much more! Just read the book if you like good writing. I warn you that the murder is horrible and sad. Also, the characters are horrible and/or sad. I recommend this to anyone who thinks the “general awfulness of everything” can be redeemed by art.

Anna says

Freddie Montgomery is unmistakably guilty - he stole and killed. The confession he writes, while in jail and awaiting trial, may be unreliable, but then, I don't think it is about reliability. You could see it as a confession of a psychopath, or as a story about a man whose life is missing some essential element. But it has depth, and self-reflection. It has something that gripped me, like no other story that I read recently. Not because Freddie is likable, because believe me - he is not, but because his story it is so dense with evidence - nothing he says is unnecessary, everything matters and every sentence carries so much meaning... .

He killed because he could, because there was nothing stopping him. The life that lead to this apotheosis was one rather without rules, he is portraying himself as a man with no virtuous and in a way without moral restraint. He glides through life not really engaging in anything, or with anyone. Nothing has consequences, and when it comes to the point of no return, the girl that he kills and the act itself, doesn't appear real enough, to stop him from committing the murder. Real things hurt, and not much did hurt in his life until that point. Then there comes a shock, and guilt, and the stain of blood that just like lady Macbeth's can't be wash of his hands. And it is not until then, that he in a way becomes wholly human, and while not able to seek forgiveness since his act was unforgivable, he must now see his victim and imagine her back into existence again.

It is an excellent and thought-provoking story, written in such a fluent prose and I would like to recommend it to all of you, analytic and psychologically inclined souls out there - who like to see under the surface or things, and search for a reason and meaning. For those of you, I am sure, “The book of evidence” will be an unforgettable treat.

Lavinia says

Oh, look at me liking evil psychopaths! John Banville, hats off!

Paul Bryant says

It struck me that quite a number of novels are written from the point of view of a really repulsive man, one of those bombastic egomaniacs who you'd walk over broken glass to avoid, yet in a novel you're trapped with this guy in your ear, in your brain, on every page, every sentence. No let up. Why would any writer saddle themselves and why would readers want to get saddled with such inescapable loathsomeness? In case you're

wondering, here are examples of what I mean :

The Room - Hubert Selby
Extinction - Thomas Bernhard
Tropic of Cancer - Henry Miller
Lolita - Nabokov
The Mad Man - Delany
The Fermata - Nicholson Baker
Gould's Book of Fish
Atomised - Houellebecq
The Killer Inside me - Thompson
Herzog - Bellow
Earthly Powers - Burgess
1982 Janine - Gray
Money - Amis
What I Lived For - Oates
Anything in the first person by Philip Roth
I the Supreme - Roa Bastos
and
The Book of Evidence - Banville

Certainly some bombastic egomaniacs are fun to be with (for instance Christopher Hitchins, a guy who could have been fictional, but wasn't), and a couple of the above might be said to be good company - the guy in The Fermata, he certainly does funny stuff whilst being a repulsive sexual predator, and John Self in Money sure has a way with words while he's sniffing and defiling ladies' underwear. Humbert Humbert is a real entertainer too, except that his wit and ebullience wear thin quite quickly. Probably he's our best example - Nabokov hopes, I think, to skewer the reader - we are entranced by that voice, that voice, not to mention the propulsion of the narrative, so much so that we can't wrench free of this hideous story even though we are perfectly aware of its ghastliness. That's certainly true in What I Lived For - we can't wait for this gross bastard to crash into the brick wall of his own life, and JCO let's us have it in stunning slowmotion. But some of these creeps have no redeeming features - the guy in Atomised, the loony in The Killer Inside Me, the full-time hater of everything in Extinction, and the windbag poseur in The Book of Evidence, and Henry Miller in all his glory - the agony of reading Tropic of cancer knowing that HM lived to be a ripe old age! You just want to nail their heads to the nearest escrivitoire. So I can't say i know what those novels think they're doing.

As a ps, and this might be my limited reading experience talking, I can't think of any novels from the point of view of an unbearable egomaniac female. Maybe someone could suggest a few.

Nora Barnacle says

Korektno, ali nedovoljno za o?aranost.

Na?elno, ovo je "Lolita" bez Lolite, a sa zna?ajno neubedljivijim Hambertom, pa vu?e na sindrom "od drve?a ne vidim šumu" ili neki srodni oblik zabunjenosti.

Banvilov lepi stil je prepoznatljiv, no ovde uše?eren na neki njav na?in (ali ne, daleko bilo, albaharijevski njav, pre darelovski... njoruckast), kao da je pisano po porudžbini sa nadom u novi angažman. Ovo je

njegov četvrti roman koji sam čitala i - sasvim zanimljivo, iako najverovatnije slučajno - dva koja su prevodili muškarci ("More" i "Kepler") su mi se dopala mnogo više od onih koje su prevodile žene ("Pokrov" i "Knjiga dokaza"). To, međutim, ne znači da je Arijana Božović loš prevodilac, upravo suprotno. Ko pročitao, neće se pokajati. Ko ne pročitao, preživeće. Trojka je, ali ne kvarim prosek nikome, naročito ne Ircima.

Vit Babenco says

John Banville never spares his personages. And he doesn't spare his readers too.

Statistics, probability theory, that was my field. Esoteric stuff, I won't go into it here.

What mind is capable to commit an ugly, senseless crime? *The Book of Evidence* is a story of a deviated mind and **John Banville** tells his tale masterfully. Art and crime get interconnected and the book is full of despondency.

That fat monster inside me just saw his chance and leaped out, frothing and flailing. He had scores to settle with the world, and she, at that moment, was world enough for him.

There is no repentance or chagrin – this kind of mind can't have a pity for anything in the world, it can only have a pity for itself.

Time was split in two: there was clock time, which moved with giant slowness, and then there was that fevered rush inside my head, as if the mainspring had broken and all the works were spinning madly out of control.

No mind can stay outside morals, completely unpunished; retribution is always around the corner, even if it is merely an inner retribution.

Sharyl says

John Banville's *Book of Evidence* is a disturbing short novel about Freddie Montgomery, a man who has committed murder. This is his account of his life and what led him to kill.

Needless to say, it is disturbing. Freddie rambles, filling his audience in on his life in bits and pieces, going back and forth in time without taking a break. There are no chapter divisions, so this novel would be best read in as close to one sitting as possible, just to appreciate the nature of Freddie's associations and thoughts.

Sometimes, Freddie reminded me a bit of Humbert Humbert, with his bizarre, sad existence--he can't seem to control himself, and I almost felt sorry for him. Also, at times, it's clear that Freddie feels that he's a

perpetual outsider, always different, never really included or a part of anything. He is The Stranger.

Because Freddie's viewpoint is the only one on offer, the reader is left to wonder about some of his relationships, particularly with his wife and mother. The little I gathered about these two women made it abundantly clear how unreliable a narration Freddie was providing.

This is a fascinating read.

When Freddie is in prison:

"By the way, what an odd formulation that is: to get life. Words so rarely mean what they mean."

The questions I am left with (view spoiler)

Laura says

Just arrived from Australia through BM. A magnificent book!!

Joe says

Never have I liked a book more in the first 10 pages that I hated more in the next 210 pages. The basic premise is that the main character (I hesitate to call him the protagonist) is in jail for killing someone and we find out over the course of the novel what happened. He is clearly a psychopath or sociopath or...something, I don't know, he's crazy.

At first I was hoping this was going to be some sort of Hannibal Lecter/Professor Moriarty evil genius walks us through his crime situation. Not so much. It is clear that the author doesn't care about his character, so why should we.

I see what the author is going for, he wants us to be in the mind of this completely delusional person. I suppose on that front, he succeeded. But the experience is completely devoid of joy. Now don't take that to mean "unhappy." I've read books about brutal killers/killings that were very grim but I can always take joy out of a story told well.

Here, the story is so boring. So boring! I get that the killing and the reason behind it were supposed to be boring because that's what the author was going for but just because that's what he was going for does not mean that it works.

Some of the phrases in this book were beautiful. Some of the quotes, fantastic. There's clearly a good writer

inside of John Banville dying to get out but these good spots only highlighted the turd of a book I was actually reading.

I can't give this more than 1 star because I really don't want anyone else to have to read this. I don't want to encourage books like this to exist. Banville wanted to punish the reader here. Great, thanks, you have succeeded.

BlackOxford says

A Hangover with a Vengeance

Is it possible to explain a crime without rationalising and therefore justifying it? This is the issue posed in *The Book of Evidence*. There is probably no living writer in the English language who could better find the words to explore this question. Banville's particular skill in two domains, alcohol poisoning and the subtleties of Irish snobbery, provides the framework for exploration.

Drink and drunkenness play a big role in Banville's Quirke mysteries, but in *Evidence* he really does turn alcoholism into a literary event. I stopped drinking 40 years ago, but could feel the pull of the beast forcefully in his acute descriptions of the man desperate for relief from his life through more or less continuous self-medication. The fact that this man doesn't really know what he wants release from is captured just as concisely in his 'Castle Catholic' disdain for most people everywhere and for all people rural and Catholic in post WW II Ireland. "This is a wonderful country," the protagonist says, "A man with a decent accent can do almost anything."

Colm Toibin's introduction in my edition, however, seems somewhat off the mark. Toibin thinks that the key to the story is a sort of dual identity in the protagonist, in the manner of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde. I can't see it. Yes, Frederick Montgomery's actions are inexplicable to himself after the fact; he even compares himself to Dr. Jekyll while waiting for his arrest. And he is certainly a different person after his crime, both psychologically and existentially. But this difference is in the manner of Kafka or Dostoevsky not Stevenson. The 'selves' involved appear to be the quite normal acting self and reflecting self, not two separate personalities.

When Frederick attempts to analyse himself, he sounds much more like St. Paul than Dr. Jekyll: "It's hard to describe. I felt that I was utterly unlike myself. That is to say... it was as if I - the real, thinking, sentient I - had somehow got myself trapped inside a body not my own, ...the person that was inside me was also strange to me." Given his Catholic/Calvinist bloodline, his confusion is more likely to be down to his religious background rather than anything more demonic.

By his own admission Frederick has 'drifted' into his situation. He does not believe he is insane. Nor does he perceive himself or the human species as inherently evil given the acts of gratuitous kindness he has given as well as received. But the accumulated effects of otherwise insignificant choices have been a fatal if 'slow subsidence'.

Whatever remnant of his Christian upbringing there is, it is also not sufficient to provide an explanation. Original sin just isn't a satisfying theory: "I ask myself if perhaps the thing itself - badness - does not exist at all, if these strangely vague and imprecise words are only a kind of ruse, a kind of elaborate cover for the fact that there is nothing there?" His crime has provoked a crisis in the self that would not have occurred without it: an

existential emptiness that is even more frightening than religious evil.

When we, we as civilised persons as well as we of civilisation, can't find the words for a thing, this emptiness has terrifying substance. Could this be the punishment that obviates the need for explanation? The very lack of explanation is excruciating for Frederick. The peace that passeth all understanding eludes him. It is "...hangover time with a vengeance." And he gets to share it with precisely the class of folk he has despised all of his life. Could this be hell?

Clodagh says

This book is so believable I became thoroughly depressed reading it. The self justification of the main character and self absorbed sociopath tendencies he displays were really quite upsetting. I believed him, I was engaged, pulled in and wanted to do nothing more than to pull him out of the book and shake him until he could learn to feel emotions for other people, and to feel remorse. The writing is amazing, Banville is a genius. This is one of the best books I've read, but also one of the hardest - the writing is fluid, the plot pulls you in but I had to take a few sanity breaks to stop myself hurling into a whirlwind of thoughts about the evils people can do.

Alex says

This book was a neverending monologue, filled with rich descriptions which turned the attention away from the actual story. Which of course I couldn't understand really, trying to navigate through neverending memories.

I was prepared for something exciting and thrilling. After 10-20% in the book my excitement to know what happens next felt to the ground and I just read without really reading to the end.

The style didn't pass the message in my opinion. It was like a monologue of a person with a manic disorder who sits in front of a wall and speaks.

Laura says

I read this book based on the recommendation/review of a friend, and I am absolutely floored. John, where have you been all my life? I second all the reviewers' praise of Banville's language - even found myself feverishly writing down scattered phrases or entire paragraphs. - And how beautifully Banville controls the story - delivering just the right amount of plot detail and character insight at just the right time. Finally, I am struck by the juxtaposition of Banville's vigorous prose with his protagonist's (and interlocutor's) general apathy (or "accidie," as Banville would have it). It is, in a word, perfect.

Aubrey says

Hm. Definitely wasn't what I expected. Bit boring, actually. But there are a couple of prime moments where

the book kicks you in the face in the most hilarious way possible with how unreliable the narrator is. So, not completely irredeemable.

Parthiban Sekar says

Through his remarkable and dark-humorous writing, Banville lets his hero Freddie narrate or plead GUILTY to his jury/ audience - We, the readers - You, "Who must have meaning in everything, who lusts after meaning, your palms sticky, and your faces on fire!" It would be difficult not to think of Nabokov when you listen to self-pity story of Freddie and the way he addresses the readers or mocks them, at times.

Nevertheless, this is beautifully written and not lengthy. You would not be disappointed if you read this book of not much of an evidence.

Quiver says

Remorse implies the expectation of forgiveness.

There's a tradition of first person narrators talking about their murders, regretting, not regretting, not understanding, understanding. In this case, Meursault, the protagonist of Camus' *The Stranger* (1942), comes to mind. Even though Meursault provides the events as they unfold, rather than as a confession, there is something of his absurdity and detachment, even the circumstantial, that guides Banville's Freddie Montgomery.

A more obvious parallel, in terms of technique, could be drawn with Ernesto Sabato's *The Tunnel* (1948), in which we hear the confession of an artist apprehended for the murder of a woman.

What makes Banville's book remarkable, is not so much the plot—there is hardly much of it—but the linguistic dexterity and psychological depth of the protagonist.

Time was split in two: there was clock time, which moved with giant slowness, and then there was that fevered rush inside my head, as I finite mainspring had broken and and all the works were spinning madly out of control.

I felt as fragile as a crystal. Even my hair felt breakable, a shock of erect, minute filaments bristling with static. I could hear the blood rushing along my veins, quick and heavy as mercury. My face as swollen and hot, and strangely smooth to touch: a doll's face.

Banville is able to capture everyday phenomena, like time, like thoughts, like bodily processes, with clarity and colour. The voice of Freddie is particular, peculiar, and human—when he speaks, you hear a full-bodied,

realistic person speaking.

Had I written this review after I first read the book six months ago, I would have said the narratorial voice is supremely well-accomplished for a fictional character.

However, writing the review now, after having read the first two novels Banville published, *Birchwood* and *Nightspawn*, I have the following to say: Freddie's voice is essentially Banville's authorial voice. Both of the other books are written in a similar style, reflecting from the present about the past, and both contain strong first person narrators that capture the world in complex, yet more or less realistic ways. (Because of the literary tropes Banville uses, there are always specks of magic dust flying off the pages, so "realistic" is an elastic term.)

Crimes abound, confessions too. But Banville makes his tale stand out. *The Book of Evidence* is worth reading whatever your taste, if just to see how a character is fleshed out—masterfully.

Side note for aspiring authors:

I am reminded of William Zinsser's advice in Chapter 20, The Sound of Your Voice, of his book On Writing Well.

Develop one voice that readers will recognize when they hear it on the page, a voice that's enjoyable not only in its musical line but in its avoidance of sounds that would cheapen its tone: breeziness and condescension and clichés.

Banville has that distinct voice, no matter his protagonists, and its worth starting from his first books and working your way through to hear it develop, gain polish, but essentially remain unchanged.

Kyra says

Montgomery, the murderer, the protagonist of this narrative, strikes me as he tells his tale to be the foremost unreliable narrator. He is guilty, of course, of course, but of what? Some sort of existential botch to hear him tell it. Not murder where a person with a soul is taken forcibly. Oh no. Montgomery is much too delicate for that. He shirks duties and agrees with himself on every pleasure he takes, and regards himself first as a man deserving of enjoyment; a connoisseur of pleasure that he curates like the Dutch paintings that in the end so inflamed him. But, alas, he's not a hard worker at his pleasures. He is entitled to them, a taker of them, a thief of pleasures earned and kept by others. After duping a hustler of his own ill gotten gains, he is forced to leave his wife and child in some unnamed demi-paradise and hustle home to Ireland to try and get the money he needs to return them. There is so little urgency in this task and at times it seems he has forgotten it altogether. The first sin he permits of himself is laziness, a profound laziness that first drives his cynicism and ultimately engenders his murderous rage. This book is told by a lazy man who gradually becomes sinister because of his failure to create anything of value over a lifetime of coveting only the best, and so in the end, he decides that it is the murder itself that will be his creation. But then, it's done. The where are the reviews? The congratulations? indeed he has really no idea why he's done it. He wants you to know that he's guilty, and he wants you to know that he's smart and aesthetically sensitive about it. What emerges from his narrative of his acts is the portrait of a sociopath who is startled by the fact of other's humanity.

It's a brief, incisive read, that harkens to Nabokov. First of a trilogy the second volume of which has sat on my shelf for 25 years unread. I guess I'll manage to choke the second volume *Ghosts* down now and put it to rest, if you pardon the pun. Banville is a cold writer. His sentences maintain tension, are smooth and round and don't call attention to themselves. There is a clinical feel to this writing that I appreciate, but not all readers will, I expect. Still, the craftsman will admire it. Well done.
