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Original Article

Relationship of Author and Character in The Works of William John Banville

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Abstract

Introduction: The personal ideas and opinions of Irish author William John Banville, whose works have a unique style in contemporary world literature, are examined in this article through the historical characters. It primarily focuses on "The Revolutions Trilogy", which includes the works "Doctor Copernicus", "Kepler", and "The Newton Letter". It examines the author-character relationship and Banville's perspectives on life, science, and society through the representation of characters like Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton. Additionally, the trilogy's epistemological ideas are analysed.

Materials & Methods: In-depth and qualitative analysis of "The Revolutions Trilogy" is provided in this article. The primary focus is on Banville's creative depictions of Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton, as well as how he uses art to convey their scientific heritage. The trilogy's intricate relationship between truth and fact is investigated through text analysis. The scientists' human weaknesses and personal experiences are exposed through the use of the biographical method. The historical and artistic portraits are contrasted using a comparative method. By means of historical-philosophical contextualization, the work is examined from both modern and Renaissance viewpoints.

Results: Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton are portrayed by John Banville in "The Revolutions Trilogy" as both human and scientific. The author makes a distinction between truth and fact, stating that while they coexist in science, they do not in art. Banville reveals the intricate relationship between art and science by reflecting deeply on the scientists' life philosophies and personal experiences. Banville demonstrates his own intellectual development throughout the trilogy and approaches scientific heritage in an artistic manner. The main argument is that human values and firsthand knowledge are even more significant than science.

Conclusions: Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton's lives are depicted in John Banville's "The Revolutions Trilogy" using both human and scientific dramas. The work highlights the scientists' inner lives and their interactions with society while making a distinction between fact and truth. Human frailty and science are depicted in harmony throughout the trilogy.

Keywords: Biofiction; John Banville; *Revolution* Trilogy; Newton; Kepler; Copernicus

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Introduction.

Fiction is a type of art that can not only create new characters and images, but also transform the lives of previously known historical figures. In this case, the success of the work largely depends not only on the knowledge and skills of the writer, but also on his main goal in creating the image and his personal views. The Revolutions Trilogy by the Irish writer William John Banville is considered as one of the best trilogies of modern literary criticism supposedly describes the lives of great geniuses - scientists of the Renaissance, quite famous in the field of literary criticism, but their biographies already exist in other works written on this topic. It differs in that it is depicted from the writer's point of view rather than reality or plot.

The Revolutions Trilogy, consisting of three books - Doctor Copernicus, Kepler and The Newton's Letter has a special value in Benville's career. Some literary critics, especially American scholars, add another work by Banville, Mefisto, to this collection and recognize it as a tetralogy. Doctor Copernicus was awarded James Tait Black Memorial Prize, Kepler wins Guardian Fiction Prize. The Newton Letter was described in The New York Times as Banville's "most impressive work to date". Colm Tóibín has stated that the book, among others by Banville, ought to have won the Booker Prize [6].

A logical question arises here - why did the author write about the astronomer-physicists of the Renaissance? If a closer look is taken at the life of John Benville, his early working career includes the opportunity to travel to different parts of the world by joining Irish National Airlines [7]. This gives him an interest in the sky, astronomy and the opportunity to prepare motives for his future works. American literary critic John Kenny, examining the history of the creation of this trilogy, draws the following conclusion: "Amid a handful of scholarly books, the single most important acknowledged source is Arthur Koestler's eminently accessible cosmological history, The Sleepwalkers (1959), and the constructed lives of the three scientists are primarily used, much in the way Joyce used The Odyssey, as a means of working towards other ends. All three novels are, as Banville's own qualification of postmodern self-reflexivity has it, "a way of writing about the creative process without writing about a man who is writing a book about a man who is writing a book about a man who is writing a book" [1].

Results

Banville, who was otherwise interested in Newton's philosophical views, begins Newton's Letter with the following words of genius: "I seem to have been only as a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me" [2, 3]. That is, Newton discovered a great innovation in science, there is no doubt that he was a genius of his time, but science is a very large ocean, and many mysteries remain to be unrevealed in it. Additionally, much is known about Newton, but there are many topics that should be written about him in fiction.

In The Newton's Letter, the author describes the event of burning the scientist's scientific heritage, written works, drawn formulas, and puts forward the opinion that real science does not burn, because it does not live on paper, but in scientific circles: "It had needed no candle flame, it was already ashes. Why else had he turned to deciphering Genesis and dabbling in alchemy? Why else did he insist again and again that science had cost him too dearly, that, given his life to live over, he would have nothing to do with physics? It wasn't modesty; no one could accuse him of that. The fire, or whatever the real conflagration was, had shown him something terrible and lovely, like flame itself. Nothing. The word reverberates. He broods on it as on some magic emblem whose other face is not to be seen and yet is emphatically there". Banville encourages readers to look at Newton not only as a scientist, but above all as an ordinary person, a member of society with feelings.

Discussion

In The Revolutions Trilogy, the author does not simply tell facts or truths about the lives of three scientists - Copernicus, Kepler and Newton - who are considered not only geniuses of the Renaissance but also the development of all mankind. When John Banville was asked about "What is the relationship between truth, fiction and storytelling, he answered as following: "There is fact, and then there is truth. And the two are not

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necessarily contingent or determinist, whatever the word is". [1] So, for a writer, truth and fact are two different things, so even in the trilogy he avoids telling the reader known or unknown facts about scientists. His goal is not only to express the attitude of his heroes to the era, society, environment, their contribution to the development of science and technology, but also to show their values, experiences and lifestyle as ordinary people. That is: "Banville's treatment is grandly singular and sophisticated, … their inner lives take precedence, though their idealizations are ultimately seen to be a mere shoring of fragments against ruins in a post Renaissance age of total suspicion and provisionality. Though realistically absurdist in places, this predicament, in Banville's figuration, is largely tragic" [9, 15]

Banville states that there was a need to write a work about such heroes as Copernicus, Kepler and Newton, and he took on this mission, believing that there were no necessary fiction books on this subject. The author says that the main goal is: "To make things to someone" and remembers Gore Vidal's answer when he was once asked why he had written a book and he said because it wasn't there".

For John Banville, truth or fact in science has a relative meaning in art, especially in fiction. As he stated: "The truth of art is not factual, but it is true... I think anybody engaging with horrible world, but engaging with a real work of art is engaging with truth. But it is not fact. I mean all this is made up. And yet in some strange way, it is true. And work of art can't be a work of art unless it is true. You can't have a false work of art. If it is false, it isn't a work of art. –That is one of the great values of art for our time, for any time".

John Banville was at different stages in his life, both as a person and as a writer, when he wrote each of the three parts of the trilogy. Therefore, when analyzing the books of the trilogy, it can be seen that he grew in his thoughts about life, heroes and the scientific legacy that they left behind. When he wrote Dr. Copernicus he had come to a stage in his life as a writer where he could continue to be an Irish writer and continue to write Irish novels and he didn't want to do that. He even admits that he was young, he was very ambitious, he was very hubristic and he could see in the later his name would be at the series of paperbacks in English called Fontana Modern Masters so he thought he would be one of the great European novelists of ideas. Although he tried in Copernicus and then in Kepler to write about ideas, to incorporate ideas into fiction he thinks that he failed now. All works of art are failures, but looking back in his career as a writer now he thinks it was probably the wrong direction to take but it was fruitful, but he remembers at the time his wife's reminder: stop being mesmerized by fact. Facts are merely facts, they are not necessarily the truth and this is where the distinction comes that in science truth and fact are the same things but in art they are not truth. It is something other than factual so I can't certainly failed to combine the two but it was an interesting effort".

Recent research has established that John Banville's Revolution is planned as a tetralogy of 4 books. In fact, the author admits that besides Copernicus, Kepler and Newton he wanted to write about a physicist who lived in the 20th century. As he said in one of his interviews: "I started I wanted I was so excited by the little bit that I did know about 20th century physics, I wanted to write about a representative figure who would be an amalgam of Einstein and Heisenberg and these people somehow I found myself writing about Copernicus and I thought well I will do four books. I will do Copernicus, I will do Kepler, I will do one Newton and then I will do one about my 20th century physicist. I like all such projects of course I never finished it because I wouldn't able to write about 20th century figure because science is so specialized. Copernicus, Kepler they could know all there was to know about their science, by reading about seven or eight books. That in the 20th century and in the 21st century is not the case. May not be or maybe I am wrong, but there may not be another Einstein figure because it is so specialized, it is very hard to have an overall grasp of what is going on in science". At the same time, based on our analysis, it can be concluded that Banville could not find an image among the scientists of the 20th century that corresponded to his worldview, goals and interests, like the scientists of the Renaissance, or he was a little bored with this topic. His views and thoughts about the Sky, Earth and Sun, science and scientist, society and personality were reflected by 3 scientists who lived in the middle ages.

John Banville's original goal for starting the trilogy in his early years has improved over the years. At some stages of his work, he was convinced that this work was a mistake and even thought about stopping it, but he could not do it. Explaining why this is so, he admits that The trouble is that when a fact is taken from the world

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of science or even from the World of Nature and imposed on a fiction the two will not blend together and he resembles it with collage like a painted picture and then a piece of newspaper stuck onto it. It may look nice and it may be interesting but it is not, it doesn't blend now he doesn't quite know why that is but he knows it is a fact. Science is a discipline which has rigor that can prove or disprove a scientific hypothesis; one cannot prove or disprove a sonet or a novel. They simply either work at some improvable level or they don't but a scientific hypothesis one can disprove or as the philosopher Carl Popper says that science, real science is distinguished by the fact that it can be falsified, scientific theory can be falsified but one cannot falsify a work of art. It is either good or bad, but Banville believes that the creative force behind science and behind art is the same. It starts out from the same place in the imagination and reveals the other reasons that he wrote books about Kepler and Copernicus the scientific figures was Banville was fascinated when he read about them to discover that they didn't much care how things actually are in the universe. What they cared about was finding a system that would as they used to say save the phenomena. A system that would account for how things look but would not necessarily have to be true. This fascinated him and it still does, in other words they were trying to impose a system they were trying to impose order upon incoherent world which is what artists do as well. Now the kind of order that we try to impose that artist try to impose is different to the scientist's notion of order, but it springs from the same urge to make sense of incoherence.

In the three books of the trilogy about three scientists, the author describes the biographies of his heroes in a different way. In particular, the first book about the great Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus is called Doctor Copernicus and describes the life of the scientist from childhood until his death. Kepler, the second book about the German scientist Johannes Kepler, covers events from the protagonist's middle age to his death. The 3rd book, The Newton Letter, has almost nothing to do with Newton's life; the main emphasis is told through the narrator's thoughts about science and life. The main plot events in the trilogy are presented retrospectively - that is, remembering the events of the past and drawing conclusions about them. [9]

In Banville's works it is noticed that he is constantly arguing ideologically with his heroes, especially with Copernicus. When presenting the views and scientific theories of a scientist, the author expresses his personal views, even if they are not entirely compatible with science. As Michael Lackey notes: "To be more concrete, Copernicus, and here I am treating him primarily as an artist rather than a scientist, created a new model of seeing, understanding, and experiencing the world, and it succeeded because so many people internalized it as a legitimate picture of the universe. Put simply, the artist constructs a new way of seeing and being, and through communal awareness, that model changes the world: "that extreme of self-awareness, that is what art seems to do to the world". [5, 13] Within this framework of secular transcendence, Copernicus could have and would have succeeded in two separate ways had he adopted a world- and life-affirming approach to knowledge. Given his obsession with discerning "the thing itself, the eternal truth, the pure forms that lie behind the chaos of the world" [2, 238], Copernicus felt himself to be a failure, because he never was able to access Plato's other-worldly Truth. At the same time, in the work Banville reacts to Copernicus's very subjective attitude towards scientific theories. For this reason, not only the author, but also as a representative of the twentieth century, interested in space science, he tries to express his personal thoughts and show his opinion that in "Doctor Copernicus" there should be an objective attitude towards science through the image of the scientist's brother. "Having abandoned on an intellectual and emotional level the idea of an other-worldly transcendence, Copernicus would have had more success in his personal relationship because rather than turning away in disgust from the messiness and chaos of the everyday people in the everyday world, he would have been more prone to accept, affirm, and perhaps love the material world around him, which would have included his damaged brother" [5, 108]

Banville's attitude towards his characters in his trilogy: "Kepler was an infinitely more likable human being. Copernicus was a cold fish, very cautious, very careful, But Kepler had such life that was full of incident that I had to suppress most of it because it simply would not have been believed as fiction and he also reminded me a little of myself. Busy little man running about desperately trying to live his life, desperately trying to bring up his children and at the same time desperately trying to find Transcendent version of the world. So I liked him, I liked him a lot. Copernicus is hard to like".

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Unlike Kepler's portrayal, Newton's Letter barely features the great English scientist. The author explains it this way: “I wrote about historian who is writing about Newton because I didn’t want to write about Newton. He is too great, a genius to great a systematizer. I had to approach it from the side. I mean as I say Newton probably the most beautiful mind that there has ever been, he was a horrible man. He spent last years of his life studying Alchemy, trying to interpret the Bible. He was appointed by the government to stamp out counterfeit. He hung lot of people who made counterfeit money. He had done his work as a scientist by the age of 28. As a scientist the rest of his life was interesting for him, but it wasn’t interesting. He was like one of those great poets like Keats or he was one of those musical geniuses like Mozart. It was all done very early”.

Conclusions: All of Banville's works, especially The Revolutions Trilogy, force us to look at great geniuses not only as scientists, but also as ordinary people. Along with their universal discoveries, it is also said that they had some shortcomings, that they had difficulties in some area and that they were weak. In my opinion, the main idea that the author wants to convey through this trilogy is that not only the value of knowledge, but also personal values should be above all else for a person in life. For this reason, philosophy and analysis never end in Banville's work. After all, he himself answers this question like this: “I am sick of it. I can’t be doing with it anymore. Just give it up. Paul Valery, a great French poet, said: “A work about has never finished, only abandoned”.

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