

Panel 14 **Banville and Art**

Insular Encounters with Art: Imagination and Ekphrasis in John Banville's *Ghosts*

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John Banville's novel *Ghosts* (1993) is permeated by its protagonist's qualms while living on an island. Freddie Montgomery feels trapped, where his unreliability is rooted in a failure of imagination. The painting-like figures emerging from a shipwreck on the island's shore he describes seem to be an inherent part of the landscape. Nevertheless, the wasteland surrounding Montgomery's life is strangely enticing and spectral, and the insularity is striking in its sense of loneliness, austere and artistic, but seemingly devoid of human life. As an author who has lived in Ireland all his life, Banville brings special attention to the details of the island "off the West coast of Ireland", which seems to shape Freddie's new existence in the aftermath of a murderous act in the name of art – but can this peculiar place become his new paradise? Scholars such as Anja Müller (2004) and Neil Murphy (2024) investigate the relationship between reality and art that permeates Banville's novels. In this novel, this is shown more prominently through Freddie's ekphrastic descriptions of several paintings located in the house of Professor Kreutznaer, where he is supposed to take shelter during his stay on the island. Against this backdrop, the paintings become a manner of escapism, where art acts as some form of island-like homeland. One is tempted to wonder if being away from the world means indeed being stranded – or if the island is a new point of existential reference for the protagonist. By bringing attention to the island as a contemporary wasteland, this essay will present the intricate relationship between the outer world and self, and how creative imagination is a land of its own in Banville's universe.

Biography

Astrid-Cristiana-Daria Isac is a student in the Publishing Studies program at Stockholm University, where she previously completed a Master of Arts degree in English Literature. Her Master's thesis focuses on John Banville's *Frames Trilogy* as observed through Jacques Derrida's hauntological prism. She is currently working on articles about Banville's latest novels, with a focus on spectrality, ekphrasis and identity.