Where Cleave and Morden parley with the various phantoms of their past in an escapist idyll of their own making, ironically, the same idyll gives narrative space to their grief and distress, and both narratives become prophetic valedictions foreshadowing that “final, most momentous change of all” (S 34).

IV

In his most recent novels, Banville uses the pastoral mode to affect a transformation of a modern search for narrative identity into a postmodern search for authorial immortality. He begins this project in *The Infinities* (2009), set in a kind of multiverse-acknowledging, parallel future Ireland, and he concludes the project masterfully with *The Blue Guitar* (2015). Indeed, if *The Sea* centres around a mortal protagonist driven to Arcadian places (and spaces) of childhood by his “rueful desire to understand the fragility of human existence,” *The Infinities* provides a more humorous treatise of the classical themes of love, death and desire, and its divine protagonists revel in the many ironies on offer in the mortal world. Adam Sr.’s imminent death generates a tension that infiltrates the thoughts, interactions and, ultimately, the narratives of every character at his deathbed. Adam Jr., the apprehensive son, is more ponderous about his childhood than even his father. His wife, the appropriately named Helen, is ravished by Zeus. Ursula, Adam Sr.’s wife, cannot make out whether her husband still has his consciousness. Petra, the emotionally and psychologically fraught daughter, timidly awaits her prospective lover, Roddy Wagstaff. Benny Grace, a former colleague of the dying Adam, adds to the tension with his disturbing presence. Each character echoes in their story, traits and behaviours of various divinities of Greek mythology itself: Adam Sr. is clearly a kind of omniscient Zeus whose desire to become immortal; through his work in the field of mathematics and his theory of the infinities, he echoes the mythological Zeus’s own hankerings after mortal delights and adventures. Roddy Wagstaff, in turn, is painted as a kind of Pan, a satyr who presides over the bacchanals of Arcadia. Greek divinities, Aphrodite, Eros, and Pan in particular, have always presided over pastoral landscapes, especially those of the Renaissance, and echoes of their presence are superabundant in *The Infinities*, where a setting that mirrors Poussin’s pastoral, commingles with a postmodern Irish wake, on the one hand, and an elegiac, concupiscent bacchanal, on the other.

Indeed, *The Infinities* melds the original, Greek myths and grand narratives of literature with the postmodern; this becomes even more relevant if we take into account how postmodern fiction has always thoroughly exploited love and death, not only as popular tropes, but essentially as formally relevant features of the novel. John Banville’s postmodern fiction achieves the humorous exploi-
tation of these two perennial pillars of human existence by systematically estab-
lishing and then placing in prominent position the relation between the charac-
ters, the reader and the author, and by weaving all three into a web of love, seduction and deferred self-annihilation, so as to, ultimately, transgress traditional ontological parameters. In this regard, then, John Banville’s novels develop and foreground a notion of love and desire as a creative activity – an instance of textual narrative which is necessarily seductive and, as a result, ceaselessly misunderstood.

In *The Blue Guitar* (2015), Banville achieves a sequel to *The Infinities* (2009) in various ways. On the one hand, many of the latter’s concerns are echoed in the former as Banville endeavours to create a kind of Hardyesque Wessex-equiva-
lent of Ireland, by positing and then confirming Adam Godley’s many-worlds theory in *The Blue Guitar*. As Adam Godley Sr. muses in *The Infinities*, “the eye makes the horizon. [...] The child on the train was a sort of horizon to him and he a sort of horizon to the child only because each considered himself to be at the centre of something—to be, indeed, that centre itself” (I 114). In *The Blue Guitar*, the theory of infinities is transformed into a fully developed, globally accepted world-view and offered as a hypermodern pastoral grand narrative to the human condition and existence itself. And yet, in typically postmodern fashion, Oliver Orme cannot but comment on the theory critically, and with curiosity:

> They tell us of the welter of other worlds we shall never see, but what of the worlds we do see, the worlds of birds and beasts, what could be more other from us than these? And yet we were of those worlds, once, a long time ago, and frolicked in those happy fields, all the evidence assures us it’s the case, though I find it hard to credit. (The Blue Guitar 171)

An unabated desire to transform reality into art has driven John Banville’s entire oeuvre, and the author’s many efforts find a culmination in the unimpeachably elegant tenets of *The Blue Guitar*. Inspired by Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” we can easily discern similarities between Banville’s efforts and the music played old man post-/modernism’s “blue guitar.” Ultimately, the Irish author provides in his seductively artistic and intellectual fictions “a tune beyond us, yet ourselves.” Banville offers narratives, in other words, that emplot the self onto the temporal axis of a futuristic nostalgia, where other(s) inhabit the topographies of memory and the mind, and where the resultant narratives of love, crisis and regret are willed artistically onto otherworldly landscapes, escapes, and explorations of wishful thinking, in a tireless effort to grasp the intangible in the postmodern condition: *always already elsewhere.*