

John Banville's Own Paradigm: *The Newton Letter**

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Abstract

John Banville in *The Newton Letter* (1982), by acknowledging the postmodernist attitude that questions all the totalisations, encodes the echoes of various texts through the embodiment of certain genres, both fictional and nonfictional such as travel writing, letter, memoir and autobiography. One of these texts is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) where the writer explains the paradigm shift. Accordingly, the paradigm change challenges the discourses of the rationalistic perceptions of all systems of understanding. Banville creates his own paradigm in *The Newton Letter*, by referring to multiple generic formulations, which can be regarded as a daring attempt trying to prove the idea that scientific and literary discourses are in fact close to each other. Kuhn's text is not the only source that Banville makes use of. Hoffmann's "The Lord Chandos Letter" (1952) is another text inspiring Banville in projecting the crisis the unnamed narrator of the letter experiences while working on his Newton biography. The narrator cannot continue to write about the life of Newton as he believes that it is of no value and that one can never be sure about the validity of historical discourse. The narrative tones of both letters are quite similar. It is the tone of boredom and confusion. Instead of working on his Newton biography, the narrator of *The Newton Letter* gets indulged in various love affairs during the time he spends with the people in the Ferns near Dublin where he goes with the intention to complete his work. About the relationships and mental states of these people he develops his own truths that are falsified to his surprise towards the end of the letter. The other text is Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1809) from which Banville borrows the names of the characters and the scientific explanation made

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about the results of the unity of certain substances found in nature, called the theory of elective affinities. He likens the latter to the human relationships. The paper aims at analyzing the postmodern means through which a similarity is acclaimed between science and literature in Banville's novel. It also aims to unfold variety of textual layers that constitute the generic structure of the novel.

Keywords: Banville, *The Newton Letter*, Thomas Kuhn, "Lord Chandos Letter," *Elective Affinities*, paradigm shift.

Öz

John Banville'in *The Newton Letter* (1982) adlı romanı tüm bütünselleştirmeleri sorgulayan postmodern tutumu benimseyerek, hem kurgusal, hem de gezi yazıları, mektup, anı ve özyaşamöyküsü gibi kurgusal olmayan belli başlı türlerin özelliklerini gösteren metinlerin yankılarını bünyesinde barındırır. Bu metinlerden biri Thomas Kuhn'un paradigma kaymalarını içerisinde açıkladığı *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) adlı eserdir. Kuhn'a göre, paradigma değişiklikleri bütün anlayış sistemlerindeki akılcı bakışaçılarının söylemlerine meydan okur. Banville eserin yapısında birden fazla edebi türe değinerek kendi paradigmasını yaratmış olur ki, bu da bilimsel söylemlerle edebi söylemlerin aslında birbirine ne kadar yakın olduğunu ispat etmeğe çalışan cesurca bir girişim olarak görülebilir. Banville'in kullandığı eser sadece Kuhn'un eseri değildir. Eserdeki adsız anlatanın, Newton'un yaşamöyküsü üzerinde çalışırken yaşadığı krize ilham olan metin Hoffmansthal'ın "The Lord Chandos Letter" (1952) adlı kurgusal eseridir. Newton'un hayatını yazmanın değersiz olduğuna ve tarihsel söylemlerin doğruluğundan kimsenin emin olamayacağına inandığı için, Banville'in eserindeki anlatan çalışmasını yarıda keser. Her iki mektuptaki anlatanın konuya yaklaşımı oldukça benzerdir. Bu ton anlatanın sıkıntısını ve aklının karmaşayı yansıtır. Anlatan, Newton'un yaşamöyküsü üzerinde çalışmak ve eserini tamamlamak niyetiyle gittiği Dublin'in yakınlarında bulunan Ferns'de kendini tutkularına teslim eder. Buradaki insanların ilişkileri ve ruhsal durumlarıyla ilgili kendi doğrularını oluşturur, ancak bunların yanlış olduğu daha sonra ortaya çıkar. Banville'in kullandığı diğer metin de Goethe'nin romanı *Elective Affinities* (1809)'dir. Banville bu romandaki karakter isimlerini ve doğada bulunan bazı maddelerin arasındaki çekimi açıklamak için kullanılan "seçme eğilimi" teorisini insan ilişkilerine uygular. Bu makalenin amacı Banville'in eserindeki bilim ve edebiyat arasındaki benzerliği ortaya koyan postmodern yöntemleri incelemek ve bu romanın kendine özgü yapısını oluşturan metinlerin çeşitliliğini göstermektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: John Banville, *The Newton Letter*, Thomas Kuhn, "Lord Chandos Letter," *Elective Affinities*, paradigma değişikliği.

John Banville's *The Newton Letter*, first published in 1982, is written as quite a long letter addressing Clio. The novel encodes, in a wider, context not only structural but also thematic conceptualisations shaped by Banville's acknowledgement of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) (McMinn, 1999, p. 89). Kuhn evaluates

the history of modern science in terms of “paradigm” (1962, p. 10) shifts or frameworks which mark certain changes in explanation and evaluation in different periods in the history of science. He argues that the accumulation of scientific knowledge is not subject to linear progress, there are different revolutions throughout the periods in history. Paradigm changes are these periodic improvements in history. The conceptual paradigms can be revalued, reinterpreted and reactivated in posterior periods of history. A paradigm can recall an earlier one when it is reapplied and reworked. As Kuhn points out in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:

Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life When paradigms enter, as they must, into a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defence. (1962, p. 94)

What is significant in Kuhn's argument about the language of science is that this paradigm change in the history of science basically offers challenges to the discourses of the rationalistic perceptions of all systems of understanding. Thus, all grand narratives, including the rationalistic exploration of scientific precisions, are challenged by this paradigm change. James Franklin remarks that “The basic content of Kuhn's book [*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*] can be inferred simply by asking: what would the humanities crowd *want* said about science?[...] Kuhn's thesis is that scientific theories are no better than ones in the humanities[...]” (Thomas Kuhn). Hence, it is made clear that the gap between the discursive formations of science and humanities is narrowed when Kuhn suggests that the development of science is a discontinuous process. For him the practitioners of science are in “random activity” (1962, p. 15) This skeptical and questioning approach of Kuhn approximates the postmodernist challenge of fixities and of chronological continuities. Dr. Wood, Sociology Professor in The State University, New Jersey, points that “One reason why Kuhn's book was so important and controversial was that it challenged the prevailing positivistic concept of science as a unitary and unidirectional process of accumulating facts about the world” (An Introduction). For Kuhn, “[t]he successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science” (1962, p. 12) and he posits that each paradigm leaves a loose end to the next one that will work to fill the inherited gap (1962, p. 24). As can be understood, paradigm shifts occur because of the shifts in the logic of thought, so there is a move to a new worldview and this worldview is postmodern. Kuhn's refusal of foundations and a unified theory involves a turn toward fractured knowledges. Here, one can see a connection between Kuhn's paradigm shifts and Jean-François Lyotard's statement about metanarratives' losing their truth-value.

Lyotard analyses the functioning of the postmodern scientific knowledge and puts forward the idea that “[s]cience develops – and no one will deny that it develops – by developing this question [...]” The question is: ‘what is your argument worth, what is your proof worth?’” This is a rather epistemological and pragmatic problem, and he continues as, “this question, as it develops, leads to the following question, that is to say, metaquestion, the question of legitimacy: ‘what is your ‘what is worth? worth?’” (1989, p. 54). The explanation he makes about the shift from pragmatic to ontological problem in the “Notes” section of his book indicates the change in the body of knowledge and attitude. He states that “[t]he history of human sciences in the last century is full of such shifts from anthropological discourse to the level of metanarrative” (1989, p. 99). This attitude is quite similar to the one asserted by Kuhn regarding both the discontinuity in paradigms and the change in discourses through the paradigm shift. Hence, the postmodern paradigm signals a new worldview denying the linearity of discourses, including literary, scientific and philosophical just like Kuhn’s denial of linear positioning of scientific discourses.

For Lyotard in the postmodern and postindustrial societies, “[the] grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (1989, p. 37). Accordingly, self expression is possible only “through the mediation of speculative knowledge,” even scientists are discursively squeezed “in their professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialties” (1989, p. 34). Likewise, for postmodern theories of literature, the gaps naturally embedded in the structures of grand narratives are to be filled with various stories acknowledging various discourses mostly in intertextual format. About the formation of discourses, for Michel Foucault discourses are “large group of statements,” they are rule governed language terrains defined by what he refers to as “strategic possibilities” (1972, p. 37). Thus, like Kuhn’s paradigms, for Foucault at a given moment in the history of a particular country there will be a particular discourse of, say, sociology, archeology or medicine. All societies follow certain procedures through which “the production of discourses is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers” (Foucault, 1992, p. 221). When interpreted from a cross-disciplinary perspective, the similarity between scientific and postmodern literary discourses thus becomes overt. According to Kuhn, scientists, even the students of science, work on these paradigms or discourses in order to be affiliated with and to become members of a particular scientific community that will help them practice their theories (1962, p. 11). However, scientific revolutions are “non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 92).

When one considers the affinity between Kuhn and postmodernist challenge of totalizations, the parallelism is quite striking. More importantly and perhaps more critically, the changes of paradigm for Kuhn, do not make the scientists get “closer and closer to truth,” (1962, p. 170) in other words, they never reach it and there is not any speculated end which will mean truth. These paradigm shifts are challenges against totalizing systems of knowledge and each paradigm shift is a cumulative act of a discursive formation. Accordingly, the truth is never found, it always functions and continues as an open ended unreachable phenomenon. This conceptualization of the paradigms and the discontinuous development which is called paradigm shift signal that scientific revolutions are not cumulative, they follow a non-linear development, and therefore there is no even continuity between the old and new paradigms. This development reminds one of the movement of the signifier. The parallelism between Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shift and poststructural despair in attaining one single truth and at the same time rejoicing this despair points to the impossibility of reaching the “transcendental signified” (1974, p. 49) first coined by Jacques Derrida.

The attitude of abandoning old scientific certainties is echoed and reflected upon John Banville’s experimenting on the fusion of various discourses, actually both on the thematic structure of the novella and also on the writer’s questioning attitude in categorizing or separating fictional and non-fictional types of narratives. Banville demonstrates clearly in the novella that he himself as the writer of the story, and the voice as the narrator of the story have their own aesthetic paradigms signaling the despair of the modern man confronted with the challenges directed upon all totalizations including generic taxonomies. Therefore, decoding the novella necessitates several interpretations that should be employed in various layers including the discursive, generic, epistemological and ontological. After *Dr. Copernicus* and *Kepler, The Newton Letter*, subtitled *An Interlude*, only chronologically develops the story of the intellectual and scientific revolution initiated by Copernicus and Kepler, and later improved and transformed by Newton (1642-1727). *The Newton Letter* exemplifies the confusion of an intellect working on Newton’s biography and his indulgence in emotional and sexual affairs after he loses his faith in “the primacy of text” (Banville, 2001, p. 507). Primacy of text leaves its place for his preoccupation with the real people “who keep getting in the way now, objects, landscapes even” (507). This is the very beginning of generic fusion in the narrator’s mind. When memory interferes, he loses his object and his mind gets scattered.

This paper aims to decode the highly complicated formal structure of Banville’s novella written under scientific metaphors, and also to clarify this complexity which mainly derives from the novella’s multilayered generic construction and ambivalent textual inscription of literary and biographical inspirations of the writer. The paper will

also try to explain the parallelisms between the content of the novella and the scientific echoes it makes to display how science and literature can come close to each other when relativity and discontinuity are at stake. This affinity must have been rather critical for Banville who is inspired by Kuhn's ontological interpretation of scientific revolutions that must be independently considered throughout history. The remark made by Friedman about Kuhn on the ontological status of scientific theories underlines the close relationship between scientific and certain postmodern literary discourses: "Kuhn consistently gives an ontological rather than a mathematical interpretation to the question of theoretical convergence over time: the question is always whether our theories can be said to converge as an independently existing truth about reality, to a theory independent external world" (2003, p. 34). To illustrate this argument, it is possible to give the following example: Einsteinian paradigm does not have to follow the same theories approved as scientifically true by the Newtonian paradigm. One paradigm might not be the continuation of the previous one, not in the way of challenging it but being on a different discursive and methodological level. Banville draws the parallelism between scientific and literary discourses at this point. In the novella, the letter writing, biography, autobiography, memoir and fiction, all exist together as different intertexts and discourses. What the reader is expected to do is both to distinguish one from the other and also to validate their existence in the same fictional temporality.

Newton, in September 1693 wrote a wrathful letter to his friend, John Locke, accusing him of having attempted "to embroil [Newton] with women" (qtd. in Westfall, 1986, p. 534). This alleged misjudgment made by Locke was a shock for Newton who was known to have died a virgin. It was also thought that Newton's midlife crisis derived from the fact that he was having a mental breakdown; another speculation was that he was poisoned by mercury and for this reason having occasional mood disorders (Westfall, 1986, p. 537). *The Newton Letter* actually emphasizes Newton's midlife crisis in the fictionalization of a parallel life to Newton's. Banville turns the factual source that Newton had a period of midlife crisis because of this or that reason, into something literary reflective of this crisis and Newton's letter to Locke who had no objective proof for his claim about Newton's indecency.

The protagonist of Banville's letter, writing from somewhere in the Arctic region, is an unnamed historian. He tries to write to Clio, whom he calls "my teacher, my friend and my inspiration" (2001, p. 507), about what happened to him in the Fern house near Dublin. He goes there hoping to finish his biographical book on Newton that he's been working on for seven years. Just after he rents the lodge, things start to go wrong. The addressee of the letter, Clio is the Muse of History. However, Clio creates an ironic situation in the novel: instead of inspiring him to write his work on Newton, she drifts him to other places where he experiences a total distraction. For the narrator, Clio

follows and probably inspires him to write this long letter addressing her: “[...] How did you track me down, did I leave any bloodstains in the snow? I won’t try to apologize. Instead I want simply to explain, so that we both might understand[...].” (2001, p. 507). This is Banville’s plea to problematise the turmoil of various generic experimentations. On the one hand, there is historical account left incomplete in the mid way (by the unnamed historian), on the other hand fictional and nonfictional genres embrace each other in the structuration of the novel.

Like Newton, the narrator finds himself in a disordered mood and actually starts to embroil himself with women, whereas Newton was only accused of doing so. The narrator begins an affair with Otilie, the niece of Charlotte Lawless who owns the Ferns with her husband Edward, leaving his preoccupation with the validity of scientific certainties about Newton aside. In the mean time, he falls in love with Charlotte, and thinks of her while making love to Otilie. During his stay in the lodge, contrary to the expectations of the readers, he becomes totally preoccupied with his affairs with these two women and the relationships of the household rather than Newton’s biography. He starts to acknowledge and venture out into another “paradigm.” He makes so many false judgments about the people around, while constructing his own illusory web of fictional world related to the family. Earlier in the novel he had imagined himself as the hero of a romance, writing to Clio “[...] It all has the air of a pastoral mime, with the shepherd’s wife and the shepherd, and Cupid and The Maid, and, scribbling within a crystal cave, myself, a haggard-eyed Damon” (2001, p. 516). He also points out that “It’s just that another kind of truth has come to seem to me more urgent, although, for the mind, it is nothing compared to the lofty verities of science” (2001, pp. 522-523). After receiving a copy of another biography of Newton written by a colleague called Popov, he starts to look down upon both biography writing and science. Popov reminds him of an embalmer. He quotes from him, and later states that “[t]hat is what I was doing too, embalming old Newton’s big corpse, only I *did* have the grace to pop off before the deathshad grin was properly fixed” (2001, p. 522). Now he is happy because he has already left the discourse of a biographer which would sound foolishly realistic. He rejoices the moments he spends there with these people about whom he forms various realities. The language he employs while writing to Clio echoes the one to one correspondence between words and the life outside and it projects his peace of mind. While conversing with Edward, Edward asks: “Getting fond of us, are you?” and he answers, “Peace and quite: that kind of thing” (2001, p. 530).

The narrator mentions the story of Newton’s dog, which starts a fire by overturning a candle. For him, all is “rubbish, of course even the dog is a fiction, yet I find myself imagining him [...] standing aghast in the midst of the smoke [...]” (2001, p. 523). He now starts to question the historically accepted details about Newton’s life. Ironically

enough he in the meantime weaves his romantic story, the content of which will turn out to be realistically invalid: "My papers lay untouched on the table by the window, turning yellow in the sunlight [...] my real attention was elsewhere, suspended, ready to give itself with a glad cry to what was coming next [...] Consider: A day in June, birds, breezes, flying clouds, the smell of approaching rain. Lunchtime [...]" (2001, p. 524).

The narrator is not aware of the fact that he is quite wrong in his ideas about the people around. He thinks that Edward is an idle fortune hunter, but is far from realizing that he suffers from cancer. Edward, like Newton and the narrator, leaves his work; he abandons writing poetry. The narrator believes that the child Michael is the illegitimate son of Edward and Otilie, however, he is in fact, adopted by Charlotte from an unknown couple, who once visited the Ferns. The other issue which misleads the narrator is about the family's religious background. They are not Protestants as he thinks they are, but a Catholic family at the edge of an economic crisis. The narrator's other misjudgment is about Charlotte whom he believes to be detached and lady-like, however she is a valium addict. The people and their relationships are totally misleading for the historian.

The textual layers shaping the novel are multiple. They are both fictional and nonfictional. For instance, the other literary link that the novella further problematizes is the second letter Newton wrote to Locke. Newton in fact wrote only one letter to Locke, the second is purely fictional and Banville explains this with a very short note at the end of the novella: "The 'second' Newton letter to John Locke is a fiction, the tone and some of the text of which is taken from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* ('The Letter of Lord Chandos')" This fictional letter written in 1603 is addressed to Francis Bacon. There Lord Chandos tries to explain to Bacon his state of mind, his confusion and preoccupation with the difficulty he has in giving meaning to the words and voices he hears around (Hofmannsthal 129-141). The letter stands for Hofmannsthal's own withdrawal from writing poetry, it also gives voice to the psychological chaos of faith and stylistic crisis of finding proper expressions to convey meaning in language. Lord Chandos explains it as: "But it is my inner self that I feel bound to reveal to you – a peculiarly, a vice, a disease of my mind, if you like – if you are to understand that an abyss equally unbridgeable separates me from the literary works lying seemingly ahead of me as from those behind me" (Hofmannsthal) and later in the letter he further illustrates his state of mind as: "In those days I, in a state of continuous intoxication, conceived the whole of existence as one great unit: the spiritual and physical worlds seemed to form no contrast, as little as did courtly and bestial conduct, art and barbarism, solitude and society [...] in all expressions of Nature I felt myself" (Hofmannsthal). This situation parallels another mental crisis and technical problematisation in the novel. Banville allusively refers to the tone of the narrative in "Lord Chandos Letter" and similarly the narrator boldly explains this confusion to Clío as, "I dreamed up a horrid

drama, and failed to see the commonplace tragedy that was playing itself out in real life. You'll ask, where is the connection between all that, and abandoning of a book? I don't know[...] I trudge back and forth over the familiar ground, muttering I am lost" (2001, p. 567).

The biographer narrator inadvertently parallels Newton's 1693 crisis with his own mental aloofness. While inscribing the mental breakdown of the scientist into his own text, he starts to experiment on the boundaries of a new genre, autobiography. But it is rather surprising that he keeps referring to Newton's second but wholly fictional letter which is the imaginative repercussion of Hofmannsthal's "Lord Chandos Letter." This fictional letter is addressed to John Locke and highly inspired by "Lord Chandos Letter." This genre shift demonstrates itself when the narrator subjectifies Newton's life and text in his own. According to the narrator, Newton, being under the influence of "Locke's challenge of the absolutes of space, time and motion on which the picture of the mechanistic universe in the *Principia* is founded" (2001, p. 545) makes excursions on the banks of the Cam and he talks to the tradesmen and the sellers, not to the men of science. It is possible to say that Banville makes explicit, rather ironically, how discourses can shift in a fictive narrative. By referring to Newton's crisis, the narrator quotes from Newton's letter to Locke: "My dear Doctor, expect no more philosophy from my pen. The language in which I might be able not only to write but to think is neither Latin nor English, but a language none of whose words is known to me, a language in which commonplace things speak to me [...]" (2001, p. 545).

The tone and the style of the extract lay bare the tightly woven self-reflexive and heavily intertextual nature of the novel. The tone of Hofmannsthal's text leaves its marks on the historical fiction about Newton's nervous breakdown and explains the reasons for the conceptual change and stillness in the biographer's life. At this point, it is really interesting to observe Banville's cross-disciplinary experimentation at the end of which the novella is born as an offspring of Kuhn's scientific theory and the theory of poststructuralism. Banville fabricates his own paradigm in terms of re-conceptualizing a crisis in modernist knowledge and discourse. Hence, this attitude of the writer which is modeled on Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift and the intertextual nature of poststructuralism that he acknowledges in the novel are paralleled. Banville both thematizes and displays, in his use of various genres and in borrowing from the other texts, that a text, in this case the text is the narrator's Newton biography, can be interpreted differently when literary and discursive paradigms change. Kuhn suggests in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that the unity of the members of particular communities is based on the acquiescence of "a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustration of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications" (1962, p. 43). Banville demonstrates how slippery and fluid the boundaries

between the paradigms can be in his use of intertexts. While displaying this, he puts forward his own aesthetic paradigm loaded with intertextual references whereby he fills the gap opened by realistic discourses. This attitude is close to the poststructuralist discursive paradigm that challenges the conventions and grand narratives from within.

Intertextuality applied ontologically in discursive level of the texts reminds one of the discontinuous paradigm shifts. Another text Banville borrows and adds to narrative formation of his text is Goethe's *Elective Affinities* first published in 1809. Banville inserts the characters and the relationships of Goethe's novel into his own text. The character names are the same as in Goethe's work: Charlotte, Eduard and Otilie. The term *Wahlverwandtschaft*, meaning "elective affinity" in English, was a technical term of the eighteenth century chemistry and it is also the title of the novel in German. The Captain and Eduard in Goethe's work explain the term as: "[...] in our chemical world too there exist intermediaries for combining together those things which repulse one another [...]" and Captain continues,

Those natures which, when they meet, quickly lay hold on and mutually affect one another we call affined. This affinity is sufficiently striking in the case of alkalis and acids which, although they are mutually antithetical, and precisely because they are so, most decidedly seek and embrace one another, modify one another, and together form a new substance. (1971, p. 53)

Captain, on the next page of Chapter IV further clarifies the affinity between two different substances with an example directly taken from chemistry:

[...] what we call limestone is more or less pure calcium oxide intimately united with a thin acid known to us in a gaseous state. If you put a piece of this limestone into dilute sulphuric acid, the latter will seize on the lime and join with it to form calcium sulphate, or gypsum; that thin gaseous acid, on the other hand, escapes. Here there has occurred a separation and a new combination, and one then feels justified even in employing the term 'elective affinity,' because it really does look as if one relationship was preferred to another and chosen instead of it. (1971, p. 54)

And accordingly, the gaseous acid which is left over after this dialectic process joins up with water and it will serve for other purposes.

Rüdiger Imhof bases this link between early nineteenth century piece of fiction explaining a scientific fact and twentieth century postmodern fictional work on the way they foreground "conflict." For the critic, the conflict that Banville borrowed from *Elective Affinities* is based on the conflict between appearance and reality (1989, p. 146). As stated earlier, the biographer is in complete confusion while creating the fictional world of his own through attributing certain meanings to the people at Ferns and their relationships and making up certain realities about them. So, what appears to him as real is the opposite of what they actually are. The scientific explanation of elective affinities

made by the Captain might be read to some extent as parallel to Kuhn's paradigm change. In the history of science there are certain frameworks following one another either as a reaction to or as a continuation of the previous one and Kuhn evaluates this shift as an approach towards truth. The acknowledgement of a paradigm and its application on a particular scientific theory and practice signal an improvement in science. Likewise in elective affinities certain substances might be left out, but there is always a new combination at the end. The novella itself is in a way a product of the elective affinity which takes place between biography and autobiography, letter and memoir. Banville combines the former pair of genres in such a manner that an autobiographical account about the experience of writing a biography constitutes the subject matter of a letter. As a biographer he, whom one normally associates with history and truth, in a way invalidates his own account in the end saying that he did not mention his feelings during the process of producing this letter: "I wish I could have erected a better monument to [Edward] than I have behaved, so that you would see the cruelty of it, willful blindness" (2001, p. 568). This means that he had been selective while he was recording his emotions to Clio when he was in the Fern house. Just like Newton's questioning his own theories for a certain period of time, Banville's letter writer/narrator articulates the dilemma between absolutes in science and relativity in philosophy: "[...] But space, and time, and motion, 'beats, soft beats, soft heartbeats,' can only be relative, for us, [Newton] knew that, had to admit it, had to let them go, and when they went [...] everything else went with them [...]" (2001, p. 555). Banville's borrowing the theory of elective affinities also points to the relationship of the narrator with Otilie and Charlotte. His constant enthusiasm with the passion he experiences in the Ferns is preferred over working and intellectual performance that he was supposed to show in his Newton biography. This means that there is a certain elective affinity between the narrator and the people living in that particular environment, which prevents him from continuing his work

The protagonist/narrator loses his objectivity towards the biographical work he has been working on for seven years. This is the basic reason or fictional plea for the generic variety used in the text. However, he does not seem to be aware that Newton's crisis had a severe impact on his own life. The close affinity between these two people, a scientist and a scholar, is quite obvious. The narrator explains his feelings as, "Newton was my life, not these dull pale people in their tumbledown house in the hollow heart of the country. But I didn't see it as this stark alternative: things take a definite and simple shape only in retrospect [...]" (2001, p. 524). The mood of the narrator is compatible with the challenge Locke makes of the absolutes of time, space and motion on which Newton's *Principia* is built. His reality seems quite relative when he makes such remarks as: "The event I read of in the newspapers were, not unreal, but only real out

there [...] Ferns, was strange beyond expressing, unreal and yet hypnotically vivid in its unreality [...] the future had ceased to exist. I drifted, lolling like a Dead Sea swimmer, lapped round by a warm blue soup of timelessness" (2001, p. 544).

The novella therefore becomes the embodiment of scientific inspirations and literary experimentations of Banville, thus it blurs the distinction between the words, objective and subjective, by privileging the latter over the former. Acknowledging Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift as its wider context, the novel makes an attempt to problematise both fictional and non-fictional genres such as biography, autobiography, memoir and letter writing, and creates a paradigm of its own. Within this paradigm science and literature become so concentric that relativity has a great share in Banville's understanding and interpretation of both. The other point which unites science and literature, as demonstrated in the novella, is the challenge they pose towards rational totalisations while reading them as deceptive, unknowable and elusive. *The Newton Letter* is a quite short but at the same time dense novella opening up new perspectives in the reevaluation of any written formulas, scientific or literary.

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