

“Not a mere absence of sound”: Silence in John Banville’s *The Infinities*

My paper will be centred on John Banville’s *The Infinities* (2009), a novel that can be seen as the manifestation of Banville’s preoccupation with life and death, the passing of time, along with the interplay between scientific order and the illogical transcendental. By creating the figure of the mathematician Adam Godley lying in coma, silently reflecting on the concept of infinity as opposed to his finite, mortal time, and appointing the god Hermes as narrator, a curious contrast is drawn: while the world of mortals is characterised by silence and insufficient communication, the story is dominated by Hermes’s voice and manipulative actions accompanied by those of his fellow gods. In addition, the story of one day depicted in the novel is constantly interrupted by leaps into the characters’ past – the realm the dying Godley is confined to, having neither proper access to the present, nor hope for a future. These sections of remembrance take place in Godley and his relatives’ minds in an atmosphere of stagnating, silent waiting. Their memories are described in meticulous detail; however, being silent as opposed to the speaking Hermes, their accounts are embedded in Hermes’s perception of human existence, thus destabilising the validity of their remembrance. In my paper, I will examine the various forms of silence occurring in John Banville’s *The Infinities*, including the operation of a scientist’s mind, human mortality and death, as well as silence as a narrative technique, while primarily focusing on its role in remembrance and one’s relationship to time.