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The Thing on the String: the Art of Theft in John Banville's "The Blue Guitar"

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Contents

Abstract

This BA paper is an attempt to analyse the role of things in *The Blue Guitar* (2015), a novel written by Irish author John Banville. Telling a story of a kleptomaniac artist experiencing a cramp in creativity and his encounter with loss and infidelity, the novel problematizes the notion of theft, its transformation into an art form and the inter-subjective relations of things and people. In so far as the novel foregrounds man's engagement with materiality and the tensions between subjects and objects, this reading of *The Blue Guitar* will rely on Arjun Appadurai's anthropological observations about the social life of commodities, Martin Heidegger's phenomenological perspective on the thing in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971) and Bill Brown's distinction between *object* and *thing* in his *Thing Theory* (2001). The analysis sheds light on the artist's interaction with things as defined by his possessive and reverent nature, examines the problematic notion of artistic representation and concentrates on theft as a substitute for art. By analysing the artist's material and metaphorical relations with the world, this BA paper will attempt to show how the protagonist's consciousness is entangled with Picasso's iconic painting "The Old Guitarist".

1. Introduction

John Banville (b. 1945) is an Irish writer, who is known for a considerable body of writing, including novels, short stories, essays, reviews and a plethora of contributions to radio, theatre, and film. For many years, Banville was the literary editor of *The Irish Times* and now a frequent contributor to several literary journals. His work comprises six plays and seventeen prose texts, beginning with the short story collection *Long Lankin* (1970) and continuing through to his latest novel, *The Blue Guitar* (2015), which is the object of this BA paper. Banville's novels *Doctor Copernicus* (1976), *The Book of Evidence* (1989), and *The Sea* (2005) have drawn critical acclaim and won a number of awards, which include the Booker Prize (2005) and the Irish Book Award (2006, 2012 and 2013) among many others. Banville has established himself as one of the most prominent modern Irish writers such as John McGahern, Seamus Deane, Colm Tóibín and Sebastian Barry. The story is not of utmost importance in Banville's writing while language is, and, as Swedish literary scholar Hedda Friberg summates, 'the telling' holds 'the key' (2007:250). Ironic in style, Banville's writing is marked by dark humour, rich vocabulary and Nabokovian inventiveness, pastiche, the use of a baroque style and occasional ventures into magic realism. Banville's work encompasses a wide variety of topics, exploring systems of knowledge and the ability to create, often borrowing biographical plots and structural ideas of the thriller genre. Preoccupied with the problematic aspects of memory and, subsequently, the tension between truth and falsification in the attempts at description, reality and fiction in the literary and artistic expression, Banville writes about the nature of perception, the conflict between imagination and reality, existential isolation of the individual, commonly rendered through the voice of a male narrator.

Banville has endeavoured to become a European novelist of ideas, building a career in the literary world since his early adult years. Although he has always remained in Ireland, the author distances himself from a rootedness in the Irish tradition. Literary scholar Joseph McMinn notes that his novels have more in common with European than Irish sources (2002:137). However, Banville draws inspiration from Irish historic experience in *Nightspawn* (1971), which is set on the eve of the Colonels' coup of 1967. Furthermore, Banville's second novel, *Birchwood* (1973), is set in mid-nineteenth century and post-war rural Ireland, the time of famine, and, as professor Vera Kreilkamp observes, the realistic novels of Anglo-Irish decline are reinvented and subverted in the post-modern metafiction of *Birchwood*, and, later, in *The Newton Letter* (1982) (2006:74). The aforementioned novels, linked to the genre of the Gothic Big House, are

central to Banville's 'demythologising drive of an enduring Anglo-Irish big house tradition' (Ibid. p.74). As literary scholar Elke D'hoker notes, the nature of Banville's literary background is firmly rooted in both Irish and international traditions and while the majority of his novels are set in Ireland, the Western literary tradition is the source of intertextual framework (2010:350).

Banville's fiction is marked by the first-person narrative voice of a solipsistic male, often preoccupied with the workings of their own minds. The protagonists of Ben White in *Long Lankin* (1970) and *Nightspawn* (1971), Freddie Montgomery in *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and *Ghosts* (1993), Alexander Cleave in *Eclipse* (2000), *Shroud* (2002) and *Ancient Light* (2012), Max Morden in *The Sea* (2005) and Oliver Orme in *The Blue Guitar* (2015) shape the narratives through the perspective of 'a cultured, arrogant yet self - doubting, modern man who contemplates his position in an indifferent universe' (Ibid. p. 350). The monologue, with the rare occasions of a dialogue is a prevalent feature, thus filtering the characters, events and landscapes through the gaze of the protagonist. Separated from the outer world, the narrators echo, as D'hoker observes, the Romantic paradigm of the outsider, central to Irish literature, but the protagonists are not defiant heroes, rebelling against the institutions, and resemble anti-heroes (Ibid. p. 350-351). The narrators raise suspicion about the radical removal from the implied author and unreliability. Such observation may be negated as well, as D'hoker remarks, by the protagonists' extreme self-consciousness as narrators and their reappearances in different guises in Banville's fiction (Ibid. p. 357). In opposition to the predominant male gaze, the representation of women often occurs in pairs of the stereotypical whore and maiden (such as the whore and the green girl in *Doctor Copernicus*, Ottilie and Charlotte in *The Newton Letter*, Adele and Sophie in *Mefisto*). However, such reductive depiction of women is not absolute. For example, the characters of Anna and the daughter, Clare, in *The Sea*, are among 'the most fully realized female figures in Banville's fiction' (Ibid. p. 358). Although there is an abundance of female characters in Banville's writing, the story is told, and, thus, the poetics of John Banville come to light, by a strikingly familiar voice of the male protagonist. The network of recurring characters forms a sense of unity for the reader as each book 'follows on more or less from its predecessor' (Ibid. p. 345).

Banville is a writer with two different authorial identities. Also known as Benjamin Black, he attributes the inception of this new and very separate literary identity to his desire for escape. The author describes Benjamin Black as his dark twin, a bit dim-witted and of enormous build

(2008)[1], who allows Banville to adopt another voice. However, Banville sees danger in this endeavour, saying: 'Benjamin Black could seep into the pores of John Banville's skin and invade him. And, Benjamin Black could say to John Banville, in that Mephistophelian way: look how easy it is.'[2]. Even though such a split promises a wider range of freedom in themes and writing style, Banville admits that it has possibly made him more limited than he is, as it could be seen as diluting oneself[3].

Being Black and Banville at the same time could be described as being ambidextrous, being able to write with both hands, and further implies a dual nature, which is bound to seep into the work. The dualistic nature of Banville's poetics is thoroughly researched by scholars Elke D'hoker and Joseph McMinn, who have suggested a self-awareness underlying all of Banville's fiction: 'the imaginative consciousness of a divided self' (1999:161). The image of the twin is present in *Birchwood.* Gabriel Swan, a mathematical genius searching for 'order […] symmetry and completeness' (Banville 1986:19) finds that his long lost twin is the reason for the pervading sense of division and lost wholeness (D'hoker, 2010:351). The images of twins and the evil twin are recurrent in Banville's fiction (Cloe and Myles in *The Sea*, Ada and Ida in *Birchwood*) and, as Banville's narrator in *The Sea* speculates, being twins is '[l]ike having one mind and two bodies' (Banville, 2005:80). The twin may also stand as the protagonist's alter ego (for example, the characters of Gabriel Godkin and Michael, Copernicus and Andreas, Felix and Kepler, Gabriel Swan and Felix) and, thus, dramatizes 'the modern split of mind and matter in Banville's dualistic universe' (D'hoker 2010:351-352).

Banville's work has garnered a great amount of critical attention: nine monographs and more than a hundred articles), which Brian Stephen McIlroy classifies into: studies of metafictions (Deane 1977 and Imhof 1989) and poetic metaphors (McMinn 1988 and O'Brien 1989), historical character studies (Molloy, 1981), philosophical tracts (McCormack, 1987), Banville's covert political broadsides (Outram, 1988) and Banville's transitional modernist texts (Kearney, 1988) (1991:3). Ekphrasis (McMinn, 2002) and scientific art (McIlroy, 1991 and Jackson, 1997) have also been researched in Banville's work. However, as there is an abundance of approaches, our focus will be directed toward artistic influences throughout Banville's *oeuvre*.

Joseph McMinn studies the presence of paintings in John Banville's fiction, which is frequently

[1] In the documentary called *Arts Lives: Being John Banville* (2008): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJAw4Pdq9CE&t=10s Accessed 23 December 2016
[2] Ibid.
[3] Video interview *Irish Writers in America: Dennis Lehane, John Banville* (2013): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7f73TzyKvI Accessed 30 December 2016

inspired by a 'literary fascination with the imagery of great paintings' (2002:137). Although Banville's fiction seems characteristically postmodern in its self-conscious and intertextual design, the pictorial influence of Modernist art is prevailing in his novels and McMinn compares Banville's work to the early modernist tradition of Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann (2002:137). The influence of visual art in Banville's work is most evident in the *Frames Trilogy*, or often referred to by critics as the 'art trilogy': *The Book of Evidence* (1989), *Ghosts* (1993), and *Athena* (1995). D'hoker draws attention to the recurrent 'framing' of reality and a preoccupation with 'scientific theories, artworks, or narratives' in Banville's work, 'as a way of bridging the gap between subject and object, self and world.' (2010:352). The protagonist Freddie Montgomery is tried for the murder of a maid, who interrupts him in stealing a Dutch painting called *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves.* The central problem of the novel revolves around the idea of imagination. The protagonist realizes that he killed the maid because he did not imagine her life vividly enough. The painting becomes an outlet for imagination and 'Freddie thus opposes his imaginative sympathy for the woman in the portrait – he "successfully" imagines a life for her – to his failure to really imagine the life and reality of the maid' (Ibid. p. 353). In *Ghosts* (1993), Banville engages with Watteau's painting *L'Embarquement pour l'Ile de Cythère* (1717) in a narrative about a scientist convicted for murder and living on an island. Subsequent novels *Athena* and *Ghosts* center on '[a]rt, its imitation, and the relation of both to life' (Wagner 2010:234).

Despite the small amount of scholarly attention, as *The Blue Guitar* is considerably recent, the novel has received some literary criticism. *The Guardian* critic Andrew Motion states in his review of *The Blue Guitar:* 'Novels with plots that are slight or familiar-seeming tend to compensate by pumping up the idiosyncrasy of the narrative voice.'[4] Which is to say that in Motion's view, the voice of the narrator has prominent mannerisms in the narrative. The novel offers a cubist approach to 'the truth' by forming a fragmented and distorted structure which puts into doubt the reliability of the memory of one's past. *The Blue Guitar* is a book about the paramount importance of perception, the narrator's struggle to reconstruct his own narrative, all attempts at making sense and inter-subjectivity.

Banville's latest development, *The Blue Guitar,* is titled after Wallace Stevens' poem from 1936 called *The Man with the Blue Guitar,* which in turn was inspired by the Pablo Picasso painting *The Old Guitarist* from 1903-04. The novel deals with the notions of memory, truth, knowledge

[4] The review was published in The Guardian on the 28th of August 2015. Accessed on the 30th of December 2016 online: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/28/the-blue-guitar-john-banville-review-novel

and the ability to create. *The Blue Guitar* examines how the subjective perception of events distorts reality and problematizes the notion of theft, which transforms into an art form. The narrative of *The Blue Guitar* takes after Banville's art trilogy *Frames*, but the storyline in *The Blue Guitar* is more elemental. Oliver Orme, the narrator, is unfaithful to his wife by having an affair with his best friend Marcus' wife Polly. He finds himself unable to paint and eventually leaves his mistress. The word coined for Oliver Orme by Banville is that of the *painster.* In addition to conjuring up a whole world of pains and sufferings, hesitation and guilt, *painster* also refers to the archetypal figure of the trickster, one that tampers with the truth. In the novel, the trickster is the painter-narrator, who manifests as a novelist or a historian trying painstakingly to remain faithful to something known as the Truth. Banville himself has said: 'The narrator of *The Blue Guitar* is, I am happy to say, my worst monster yet, I think. A monster of ego and of selfishness, and of incoherence.'[5].

The main focus of this BA paper is to examine the narrator's artistic endeavours in relation to the things surrounding him: the first part of the analysis pinpoints the artist's interaction with objects defined by the possessive, reverent nature of the protagonist towards them, and follows the problematic notion of theft as a substitute for artistic expression. Consequently, the paper will look at how the narrator's stealing affects his outer and inner world. The second part of the analysis will focus on the entanglement between Picasso's *The Old Guitarist* and the narrator's consciousness. The relations between subjects and objects in the novel will be examined in light of Arjun Appadurai's observations about the social life of commodities. Martin Heidegger's phenomenological theory, including a perspective on things, illuminates the metaphysics of thingness and its structure. Finally, Bill Brown's distinction between *object* and *thing* in his *Thing Theory* (2001) unifies anthropological and phenomenological perspectives and offers entry into the unravelling of the correlation between Wallace Stevens' poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, Pablo Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist* and Banville's novel.

[5] A recording of the Copernicus festival 2016. *John Banville on the relationships between literature and science*. Accessed in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seoGSNr0EcQ

2. The Theory of the Thing

This BA paper will engage with the philosophy of the thing, which offers a means of entry to contemplating the relations of people and things: Arjun Appadurai's socio-anthropological approach to commodities in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986), Martin Heidegger's phenomenological perception of things in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971) and Bill Brown's *Thing Theory* (2001). The socio-anthropological, phenomenological and object-oriented philosophies of the thing offer ways to approach man's engagement with materiality, the problematic notion of substituting theft for art and the meaning of Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist* pervading John Banville's novel.

2.1. Arjun Appadurai's Theory of the Social Life of Commodities

Theorising about things has a long history amongst scholars working in different fields, such as science studies, archaeology, anthropology, literary studies, art history and material history. Each has particular concerns and ways of understanding the presence of power in objects in terms of their relations to other objects and subjects. The first theorist chosen for the analysis, the anthropology professor Arjun Appadurai (b. 1949), best known for his contribution to the theory of globalization studies, assumes the perspective on things from a socio-cultural viewpoint. Born in India, Appadurai has written on the particular ways objects circulate, interact and transform social values in India (*The Thing Itself*, 2006), but his great contribution in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986), concerning the circulation of objects in culture, will be the main theoretical focus in approaching *The Blue Guitar*.

Appadurai directs his attention to the 'social life' of objects taking place in their circulation through cultural space to establish the idea that 'commodities, like persons, have social lives' (Appadurai 1986:3). In his view, commodities are the essence of 'material culture' bearing 'social potential', 'distinguishable from "products," "objects," "goods," "artifacts," and other sorts of things' (Ibid. p. 6). Through a critique of Karl Marx and Georg Simmel on the topic of commodities, Appadurai finds convergence between the two thinkers, but directs his thought away from the preoccupation with the 'product' and defines a commodity as 'any thing intended for exchange' (Ibid. p. 9), focusing on its dynamics. For Appadurai, commodities are ever changing and may be divided into four types:

> *(1) commodities by destination, that is, objects intended by their producers principally for exchange; (2) commodities by metamorphosis, things intended for other uses that are placed into the commodity state; (3) a special, sharp case of commodities by*

> *metamorphosis are commodities by diversion, objects placed into a commodity state though originally specifically protected from it; (4) ex-commodities, things retrieved, either temporarily or permanently, from the commodity state and placed in some other state.* (Ibid. p. 16)

It is important to note that, for Appadurai, whichever the type, the commodity does not denote a kind of thing, but refers to a transient and transformative phase in the life of a thing.

Focusing on the social life of a commodity in his essay *The Thing Itself* Appadurai insists that properties of social relations are involved in the transactions of things, which define their biographies: 'today's gift is tomorrow's commodity. Yesterday's commodity is tomorrow's found art object. Today's art object is tomorrow's junk. And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom.' (2006:15). Having in mind any form of commodity exchange, Appadurai proposes that 'the commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature.' (Ibid. p. 13) and offers three aspects of 'commodity-hood': '(1) the commodity phase of the social life of any thing; (2) the commodity candidacy of any thing; and (3) the commodity context in which any thing may be placed.' (Ibid. p. 13). Noting that objects could be moved in and out of the commodity state, Appadurai writes that the commodity phase in the history of an object 'does not exhaust its biography; it is culturally regulated; and its interpretation is open to individual manipulation to some degree.' (Ibid. p. 17). The second aspect of 'commodity-hood', the commodity candidacy, refers to the symbolic, classificatory and moral criteria defining the exchangeability of things in socio-historical contexts. The third aspect, the commodity context, refers to the social space in which the commodity phase obtains its socio-historical context. Exchange in the life of a commodity is the source of its value, defining the social history and the cultural biography of the thing. Separating the two, the perspective of the social history refers to long-term shifts and large-scale dynamics, which transcend the specific biography of a thing, while the cultural biography is 'appropriate to specific things, as they move through different hands, contexts' (Ibid. p. 34). Small shifts in the cultural biography of things transform their social history, as the two are synergetic.

The social life of an object marked by non-financial exchange forms is more unpredictable. For Appadurai, the circulation of things most divorced from social, political or cultural norms is barter and, especially gift, which travels through culture in the spirit of reciprocity and sociability (Ibid. p. 11). Furthermore, the preferred forms of sacred object circulation in the medieval period were gift and theft as 'more emblematic of the value and efficacy of the object'

(Ibid. p. 24). Critic James Ferguson notes that Appadurai approaches objects as 'living beings, leading "social lives" - acquiring and losing value, changing signification, perhaps becoming nonexchangeable (maybe even sacred), only later to sink back into mere commodity status.' (1988:491). Thus, decontextualizing an object in this way transforms and, often, expands its value. However, as objects lead 'social lives', they are interdependent with subjects in the anthropological theory of Appadurai.

Appadurai approaches the circulation of objects in society to reveal the interrelationships of people. Objects do not talk about themselves, but shed light on the social relations. It is through objects that we understand the social infrastructure, the power relations in the social fabric. If we read, for example, the 'it-narratives' popular in the eighteenth century, the story is told through the perspective of an object. For instance, a watch is lost and the narrative revolves around how it changes hands. It is through this watch or, more precisely, though the relation of the watch and its possessors that we understand about the characters. The plain of the social relations is revealed through the mobility of the material culture of objects. Therefore, it involves a socio-anthropological exploration of objects and, inevitably, people. This necessitates a turn towards a perception of a more autonomous thing.

2.2. Martin Heidegger's Phenomenology of the Thing

German thinker Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), in his essay *The Thing,* which appears in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), is contemplating by way of ruminating about the essences of phenomena, the nature of the thing and trying to understand nearness in object-subject relations. Many contemporary inventions of transport and communication have an inherent promise of bringing subjects together, but Heidegger insists that that does not give us true nearness. This nearness (with no reference to physical distance) is reached by attending to what is near, and, near to us are what we call things (Heidegger 2013:164). To reveal nearness, the thing is the key. Therefore, Heidegger commences his thought on thing *as* thing.

For Heidegger, thingness is concealed and forgotten, as things are not only 'no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet at all been able to appear to thinking as things.' (Ibid. p. 168). Thus, taking the example of the jug as a self-sustained thing, Heidegger differentiates the jug from an object and searches for its thingness:

> *As a vessel the jug is something self-sustained, something that stands on its own. This standing on its own characterizes the jug as something that is self-supporting, or independent. <...> the jug differs from an*

> *object. An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-presentation. However, the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object.* (Ibid. p. 164-165)

The jug's thingness is contained in its being *qua* vessel. This means that the jug is not only defined by our perception of its ability to hold physical material, but also, it is a container that stands independently in itself, reaffirming the thing's agency. This is how American philosopher Graham Harman, who works in the field of object-oriented ontology (or 'OOO'), a school of thought which promotes the idea of an autonomous existence of objects unaffected by the relations with humans or other objects, explains Heidegger's distinction: '"Object" is a negative term, used to describe entities only in their presence-at-hand. But "thing" is a positive term referring to entities in their proper reality.' (2007:129). Thus, the jug is not brought into existence and held in its object state by *Dasein's* (Being) perception of it and stands autonomously once it has been produced by a human hand: 'the jug is not a jug because it was produced, but rather is produced because it is a jug.' (Ibid. p. 130). In this view, the thingness of the thing is independent from the thing itself and it may also be said that the thing inhabits the plain of the gift, because of its giving and pouring property, which exists before the jug is produced.

The presence of thingness reveals itself in the more narrow (than *world*) realm of art. Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art,* which explores the way truth operates in a work of art, inquires about the thingness of the work of art. Thingness allows us to access art by way of things engaging our most immediate sensations of the mind. For Heidegger, the thingly character is ever-present in all art works:

> *There is something stony in a work of architecture, wooden in a carving, colored in a painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical composition. The thingly element is so irremovably present in the art work that we are compelled rather to say conversely that the architectural work is in stone, the carving is in wood, the painting in color, the linguistic work in speech, the musical composition in sound.* (2013:19)

This thingly element of the artwork is the 'substructure into and upon which the other, authentic element is built' (Ibid. p. 20). As thingness brings us closer to art, the physical aspect of a work of art is overwhelmed by art's capacity to 'stand in the light of its being' (Ibid. p. 35). The representation of things in art comes forth to reveal the truth in the unconcealedness of their being: 'If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing *what* and *how*

it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth' (Ibid. p. 35). The moment of unconcealement in the work of art is fundamental in discovering the obscured truth (of Nature) captured in its thingness (in contrast to its interdependent physicality): 'art hidden in nature becomes manifest only through the work, because it lies originally in the work.' (Ibid. p. 68). Therefore, art itself is 'the creative preserving of truth in the work' and '*is the becoming and happening of truth.*' (Ibid. p. 69). Thus, the work of art has the potency to reveal truth.

The revelation of truth in the work of art has to be considered in the light of the Greek word *techne*, which simultaneously refers to craft and art (craftsmen and artists - *techites*). However, *techne* does not refer to a 'kind of practical performance', rather, it denotes 'a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means 'to apprehend what is present, as such' and that *techne* '*brings forth* present beings as such beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealesness of their appearance' (Ibid. p. 57). The 'uncovering of beings' or the 'nature of knowing' directs to another Greek word – *aletheia* (Ibid. p. 57), which is the unconcealedness of truth.

The revelation of truth relies on the gaze of the perceiver. Through assuming a particular position in the world and taking a point of view, we enable the world to come forth, to reveal itself to us. Depending on how we position ourselves, on our capability and how much effort we put in understanding a work of art (its thingness or, even, the world), things and the world reveal themselves to us. The revelation depends on the subject. Thingness is not determined by its own materiality. A thing reminds us of its presence, reveals its agency to man when it does not fulfil its instrumentality anymore. It is a relation between the subject and the object. On the one hand, things reveal their being to the consciousness of their perceiver, but the process is always phenomenological, marked by the human mind and the agency of the things is always unveiled to the subject.

2.3. Bill Brown's Thing Theory

While Heidegger enables us to consider the agency of a thing, surpassing its object function, Appadurai's thought centers on the culture of the material and its social aspect. American professor of English and visual arts Bill Brown goes further: in combining Appadurai's socio-anthropological gaze (because he is interested in how objects move and what this mobility exposes about human culture) and focusing on the object-subject relation, he extends and problematizes Heidegger's insight about the agency of things. Brown offers the idea that not

only do things reveal themselves to subjects, but also that through the relations of things and humans, deliberation about the objectification of people can begin.

Brown remembers the Heideggerian thing along with Appadurai's theory, in which Brown understands, that 'if the history of things can be understood as their circulation, the commodity's "social life" through diverse cultural fields', then the history in things is the 'crystallization of the anxieties and aspirations that linger there in the material object' (2015: 221). In his *Thing Theory,* Brown says that only by way of turning away from the object/thing dialectic, where '*the thing seems to name the object just as it is even as it names some thing else*' (Brown 2001:5), is illumination of the meaning of the thing possible:

> *Only by turning away from the problem of matter, and away from the object thing dialectic, have historians, sociologists, and anthropologists been able to turn their attention to things (to the "social life of things" or the "sex of things" or the "evolution of things"). As Arjun Appadurai has put it, such work depends on a certain "methodological fetishism" that refuses to begin with a formal "truth" that cannot, despite its truth, "illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things."* (Ibid. p. 6)

Brown projects a materialist phenomenology, which marks the meeting of Appadurai's and Heidegger's theories. Brown's is a 'new materialism that takes objects for granted only in order to grant them their potency-to show how they organize our private and public affection.' (Ibid. p. 7). The human-object interaction is the subject of thing theory in Brown's writing, which employs the anthropological discourse on the 'social life of things', psychoanalysis and aesthetic theory. He addresses the ways the inanimate world participates in forming and transforming human beings, the role objects occupy in the development of human belief systems through the analysis of literary texts.

Modernist writers (such as Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams or Fernando Pessoa) expressed a willingness to capture 'the thing itself' in their work, to come to something that is unmediated (or interrupted by metaphor or by language), allowing things to ground the ideas, rather than the ideas ground the things. As art critic Leo Stein puts it, 'things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project' (Ibid. p. 3), and indeed, 'all objects (not things) are, first off, iconic signs' (Ibid. p. 14), but the experience of an encounter with a thing is dependent on the 'projection of an idea (the idea of encounter)' (Ibid. p. 3). Thus, the aspiration for things grounding the ideas is problematic, because the 'very semantic *reducibility* of *things* to *objects*' is an amalgam with the 'semantic *irreducibility* of *things* to *objects*' (Ibid. p. 3). Brown notes French literary critic Michael Riffaterre's argument that poems, which grow 'solely out of a

"word-kernel" *(mot-noyau),* defy referentiality' (Ibid. p. 3) and Jacques Derrida's argument that 'throughout the poet's effort "to make the thing sign," the "thing is not an object [and] cannot become one' (Ibid. p. 3). The distinction between the object and the thing therefore must be made, and Brown understands that 'we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture-above all, what they disclose about *us*) but we only catch a glimpse of things' (Ibid. p. 4). In other words, objects function as codes for meaning, but a thing does not function as an object and reveals its thingness when we notice them, because of an interruption in their functionality. Objects asserting themselves as things is about a 'changed relation to the human subject' and 'the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, perhaps, as an aftereffect of the mutual constitution of subject and object' (Ibid. p. 4). For Brown, thingness is also what exceeds the 'materialization as objects' or the 'utilization as objects', making it a 'sensuous presence' or a 'metaphysical presence', by which 'objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems' (Ibid. p. 5).

The ideas of Arjun Appadurai, Martin Heidegger, and Bill Brown discussed in this chapter illuminate the analysis of John Banville's *The Blue Guitar.* Appadurai's socio-anthropological theory about the social life of commodities will be used in approaching the narrator's reverent perception of objects and his act of theft. Heidegger's thought on the thing, the work of art and the revelation will be employed in discussing the contradictory nature of theft as an art form. Brown's materialist phenomenology of the thing, together with a reading of Wallace Stevens' poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist*, will shed light on the process of uncovering the meaning of the blue guitar.

3. The Affairs of the Heart and Art

The main purpose of the analysis is to examine how theft, as an art form, is illuminated by the anthropological, phenomenological and converging perspectives on the *thing*. The first part of the analysis focuses on the emergence of the narrator's kleptomaniac tendencies and its transformation into an art form, and the resulting implications about the narrator's consciousness.

3.1. The Thing in the Pocket

The narrator of *The Blue Guitar* Oliver Otway Orme is an artist, a husband, a brother, a father and a thief. Set in an undetermined future and in an unnamed Irish town, the novel is structured into three chapters, where Oliver confesses his sins. The story starts in a state of post-trauma. Oliver, a formerly famous painter, marked by the loss of his daughter, betrays his wife Gloria with Polly Pettit, his best friend Marcus' wife. The trauma of losing his daughter Olivia, whose name (notice the similarity to Oliver's) suggests the kinship of spirits. Oliver subtly mentions the experience of loss, but does not elaborate extensively on the event and the impact it had. However, the loss has a great impact on him: it marks the turning point in Oliver's painting career and influences the relationship with his wife Gloria. The floundering marriage, marked by the death of their child, is further embittered by Oliver's infidelity with Polly and, Gloria's affair with Marcus Pettit, which is revealed much later. Metaphorically, Oliver steals the affections of his best friend's wife, but his stealing has a history. Oliver is also a thief quite literally, not being able to stop himself from stealing things from other people. He justifies his theft by calling it an art form. Curiously, the episodes of theft set a pattern of erotic awakening, a dimension, which is pertinent to his relation with women and art. For him, theft is a form of art and creative transformation.

This is how the narrator introduces himself: 'Orme. That's my name. A few of you, art lovers, art haters, may remember it, from bygone times. Oliver Orme. Oliver Otway Orme, in fact. O O O.' (Banville 2015:3). The narrator's initials 'OOO' may be interpreted as a nod to the object-oriented ontology, also called OOO. The name directs to an object-centered frame of mind, which helps in grasping Oliver's sensibility. Oliver is a 'picker-up of unconsidered trifles' (Ibid. p. 3) with an almost involuntary urge to steal various knick-knacks – a kleptomaniac, whose theft is not driven by financial or personal gain. Oliver's last name, Orme, an anagram of 'more' could also be a slight hint initiating a pattern of thinking about his inclination to appropriate.

The loss of his painterly inspiration and his daughter worsen his need to take, to take back what was lost, stolen from him. 'Orme' is also almost a homophone of 'arm', which links the name to the image of a stealing hand, again marking Oliver's impulse to take as an important part of his identity. Not only the stealing hand, Oliver once yielded the painting hand, which instead of taking – gives. Oliver's is the hand that draws: he is both a painter and a pilferer. Painting, making art and, in essence, creating and inventing is contradictive to theft. Indeed, as theft and art clash and merge, the painter claims that his tendency to steal is an art form. Thus, forming the conception of art in the novel, Banville entangles painting and stealing as overlapping activities, which, for Oliver, share the quality of absorbing the world into self: 'My aim in the art of thieving, as it was in the art of painting, is the absorption of world into self. The pilfered object becomes not only mine, it becomes me, and thereby takes on new life, the life that I give it.' (Ibid. p. 31). As painting and theft converge, it may be sensible to take a closer look at the nuances of each activity in the novel.

Oliver recognized the difficulty of painting early in his life, saying that drawing as a child he 'was merely happy at first, dabbling and daubing', but soon came to the conclusion that 'happiness, of course, in this context, doesn't do at all' (Ibid. p. 28). The technical side of painting soon starts to seem effortless, but not sufficient for the artist. Therefore, he comes to wonder about 'the rest of it, the bit that really counts' in painting, and 'where does that come from' (Ibid. p. 28). Oliver claims to have recognized this difficulty early on, when the inception of his true artistic work as a painter began, he realizes 'that out there is the world and in here is the picture of it, and between the two yawns the man-killing crevasse' (Ibid. p. 29). The painter struggling to convey his inner vision is met by this fracture between the world and its representation, in the midst of which sits the looming notion of death. Thus, the artist has to step over transient mortality to capture the essences of things in the world and spring them into new life. Oliver's paintings were not meant 'to reproduce the world, or even to represent it. The pictures [he] painted were intended as autonomous things, things to match the world's things, the unmanageable thereness of which had somehow to be managed' (Ibid. p. 58). As in painting, similar aims are also foregrounded in Oliver's notion of theft.

Stealing, like painting, is 'an endless effort at possession' (Ibid. p. 58) for Oliver. The act of theft is considered art when the thing is renewed or the object is transformed:

> *Just as art uses up its materials by absorbing them wholly into the work, as Collingwood avers—a painting consumes the paint and canvas, while a table is for ever its wood—so too the act, the art, of stealing transmutes the object stolen. In time, most possessions lose their patina,*

> *become dulled and anonymous; stolen, they spring back to life, take on the sheen of uniqueness again.* (Ibid. p. 16)

The artist-thief snatches the 'unconsidered trifles' and renews their lost 'patina' to pull them out of dulled anonymity. Oliver's relation to things, his act of stealing is reminiscent or Heidegger's theorizing: art transforms the object into the thing, the object into the subject-like form of a thing (an autonomous being). Oliver calls this form of theft 'transubstantiation', a religious change of substance where bread and wine are transmuted into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. For Oliver, the aspect of transubstantiation in the act of theft absolves him and allows him to free himself, at least partially, of guilt caused by sinning repeatedly.

This transformation, or even transubstantiation, happens when the 'thing that before was someone else's' becomes a 'not quite identical thing' (Ibid. p. 20) that is his. This does not end with the factual possession of the thing: '[t]he pilfered object becomes not only mine, it becomes me, and thereby takes on new life, the life that I give it.' (Ibid. p. 31). In Appadurai's terms, such commodity decontextualization as theft has the power to awaken the sacral properties of objects. Even more, considering the historico-cultural findings about the circulation of sacred objects, theft was one of the preferred ways of acquiring a relic, because material transactions were considered as devaluing the sanctity of the object. As Patrick J. Geary shows in his essay "Sacred Commodities: the Circulation of Medieval Relics", the act of theft had a great effect on commodity value (often amplifying it) and on the phase of a commodity (for example, a stolen object intended for selling or intended for domestic use, can become an object of historico-cultural significance or, even a relic). It seems that the kind of stealing Oliver performs is rooted in ancient history and shares similarities in considering the transformative phase of an object.

By stealing, Oliver aims to absorb the world into himself and 'make it over, to make something new of it, something vivid and vital' (Ibid. p. 58). He is not an ordinary thief, who is ruled by the function of objects and does not steal for financial gain:

> *Unlike the professional burglar, in his stripes and ridiculously skimpy mask, who comes home from work at dawn and proudly tumbles the contents of his swag-bag on to the counterpane for his sleepy wife to admire, we artist-thieves must conceal our art and its rewards.* (Ibid. p. 21)

The required concealment is one of the aspects of Oliver's theft, because he can never share his booty and can never tell anybody about it, which would devaluate the object stolen (some of which are: a tube of zinc white paint, a golf ball, a green-gowned figurine, a glass mouse, a salt

cellar, a German poetry book, a Louis Quatorze rosewood box, waiters' tips, pearl-handled penknife, a little crystal dish and Polly Pettit). Simultaneously, Oliver's thieving has the aspect of the erotic:

> *[T]he spasm of pleasure that ran along my veins and made the follicles in my scalp twitch and tingle when I folded my fist around that smooth little statue and slipped it into my pocket was as old as Onan. Yes, that was the moment when I discovered the nature of the sensual, in all its hot and swollen, overwhelming, irresistible intensity.* (Ibid. p. 35)

The thief feels head-spinning pleasure as the thing is transformed. This pleasure moment in stealing originates from a desire to be discovered:

> *A large part of the pleasure of stealing derives from the possibility of being caught. Or no, no, it's more than that: it's precisely the desire to be caught. I don't mean that I want actually to be seized by the scruff by some burly fellow in blue and hauled before the beak to have the book thrown at me and be given three months' hard. What, then? <…> Doesn't a child wet the bed half in hope of getting a good smacking from his mama?* (Ibid. p. 36-37)

It seems that the suspense of waiting for the punishment for his sin of stealing excites Oliver. However, these pleasures are not the only aspects that drive him.

Oliver understands that theft can manifest in many forms, from 'the whimsical through to the malicious', but for him 'theft that is utterly inutile' is the one that matters and the objects he takes 'must be ones that can't be put to practical use' (Ibid. p. 23) by him. For instance, the first object he stole as a child, a tube of zinc white paint in Geppetto's shop, marks Oliver's first factual theft. However, he does not consider it the first thing he stole, because the act was motivated by a desire for the object itself, its function as a commodity, even though the young Oliver's act of theft had an impact on the object and, in Appadurai's terms, enriched the white paint tube's 'social life' (as short as it was) as a commodity. Oliver left his imprint on the biography of the object and moved it from the phase of a commodity to a stolen object, marked by secretive possession and then quickly back to a commodity by using it up, because he stole the paint and quickly utilized it, so as not to be caught with the evidence. At the time, Oliver was driven by desire and did not have the effect on the thing that he later considers art.

For the mature Oliver, stealing is an act of artistic nature when the thing is not taken for its commodity value. In this respect, Oliver's relation to things is reminiscent of Brown's theorizing on the separation between the object and the thing. To enforce this distinction, the narrator is guided by the idea that the object or thing has to be fully enjoyed for its sheer materiality, its existence in the world and not its function. Oliver's first theft as art was the

stealing of Miss Vandeleur's green-gowned figurine. As a teenager, he would visit a boarding house by the sea, which was looked after by Miss Vandeleur, a woman reminiscent of a 'ravaged version of the flower-strewing Flora' (Ibid. p. 32) in Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera*. One day, he finds himself in the attic of Miss Vandeleur, the owner of a boarding house by the sea and a keen collector. Oliver finds two figurines, one with a green gown and one with a blue gown. After some trepidation, he snatches the green-gowned, left-leaning figurine. The image of the twin figurines is a significant one, because Oliver reveals that there had been a tragedy in Miss Vandeleur's life: 'a pair of twins had deliberately drowned a playmate, as I recall—in which Miss Vandeleur had been somehow implicated.' (Ibid. p. 32). Oliver's decision to take not both, but one figurine was intentional, as he wanted the theft to be registered by the owner, who, ironically, never did miss it. Oliver personifies the green-gowned figurine as a 'she' and affirms its relation with Nature. The ekphrastic description of the green-gowned figurine and the verbalization of its existence on another plain transforms its state from an item of a collection to a personified object positioned in the plain of Nature. The figurine is like 'the leaves of May' (Ibid. p. 35) and the imagery seems to be derived from Nature itself: the feminized 'she' described by the 'green of her gown' and the 'dusting of leaves' (Ibid. p. 36). The language itself is derived to attribute subjectivity to the material object. Oliver's treatment of the figurine may be interpreted in the light of Brown's idea that things become subjects when they subordinate the perceiver to its will. Seen this way, Oliver's theft of the figurine becomes, in a sense, the art of giving agency.

However, a contrasting instance of Oliver's theft can be located. While Oliver personifies Miss Vandeleur's green-gowned figurine, recognizing her inherent subjectivity, he objectifies his lover, Polly, and remains blind to her agency as a female subject. More specifically, he denies her subjectivity by considering the act of infidelity without addressing her participation as an independent subject and considers her as a stolen object: 'I did steal her, picked her up when her husband wasn't looking and popped her in my pocket. Yes, I pinched Polly; Polly I purloined.' (Ibid. p. 24). What is more, a pun is involved in Polly's surname. While 'Polly' is a conventional name the English give to their pet parrots, the surname 'Pettit' may be pronounced as 'pet it', which would suggest a range of sensibilities in terms of Oliver's attitudes to Polly. First, he treats her as his darling, but also no better than a pet animal, especially, after their affair is revealed to Marcus. There is a sexual dimension, too, petting being suggestive of fondling, touching, presence to hand. This may be related to Oliver's tendency to be interested in much younger women (Polly and Gloria are at least two decades younger) as aesthetically beautiful

objects. If Polly's surname is to be pronounced in a francophone fashion, then 'Pettit' correlates with the French word 'petite', meaning 'small', which reinforces the idea of Polly as a thing of portable dimensions, easy to procure and, even, to put in his pocket: 'I was the one who had brazenly pocketed his goose-fleshed, pale and bouncy little wife.' (Ibid. p. 67). In the acts of stealing the figurine and Polly, Oliver performs an interchange of subjectivity. When thinking about the objectification of people, Brown's idea that things become subjects when they subordinate the perceiver to their will, extends to the objectification of a subject, whose consciousness is captured by the perception of the object and is subdued to its will. However, Polly is not immobilized (like other things stolen by Oliver, for example, the figurine, which remains hidden and is brought up in the end as Oliver rids himself of all the stolen things) and bent to Oliver's will. This is revealed in the incident of the book theft and Oliver's exposure as a kleptomaniac.

The theft of the book owned by Prince Freddie Hyland resonates with significance. The incident is set in the house of Polly Pettit's parents. After leaving her husband Marcus for Oliver, Polly flees to her parents, taking her child Pip and Oliver together with her. Their stay at the house is interrupted by the visit of Freddie Hyland, a prince of the Regensburg family, who, some time ago, lent a German poetry book to Polly's father, Mr. Plomer. A day before the visit, an encounter between Oliver and Mr. Plomer happened, which was the moment the artist resolved to steal the book. Going through the corridor bleary-eyed, Oliver happened upon Mr. Plomer holding 'a book, a quaint little volume bound in faded crimson cloth' (Ibid. p. 137) and later snatched it. As a material object, the book changes hands: from Freddie Hyland to Polly's father, to Oliver. These are the three men most important in Polly's life: her father, present lover (Oliver) and lover to-be (Freddie), between whom there is a subtle hint of a hidden rivalry. The movement of the book as a material object reveals the relationship in which the three men are engaged, which is that of rivalry with regard to the affections of Polly.

The book is not only a material object – it is a book of poetry. The old man reads a passage for Oliver from the old German poetry book and explains that the poet 'speaks of the earth—*Erde*—wishing to become absorbed into us.' (Ibid. p. 138) and then expounds: '[i]s not your dream, he says—says to the earth, that is—to be one day invisible. Invisible in us, he means.' (Ibid. p. 138). To internalize all that is in the earth, all that which is invisible to the human eye – this is the aim of the artist in the poem. The essence of the *earth* (*Erde*) is hidden to the human eye and contains in itself that, which has to be revealed to us. This is reminiscent of what Heidegger says about the work of art as the book of poetry enables the unconcealment of the

world. Thus, here Oliver quite straightforwardly tries to capture the hidden essence of the *earth* in stealing Freddie Hyland's poetry book. Oliver's stealing has a pervading sense of the struggle to absorb things into self and the theft functions as a testament affirming the thing's subjectivity, transforming its object state into a thing capable of revelation.

The stealing of this book results in Oliver being caught: Polly's daughter Little Pip sees the theft and tells her mother, who confronts Oliver and, in the end, he gives her the book back. The 'little crimson-covered volume' becomes 'inert and exhausted' (Ibid. p 178) to Oliver, when he hands it to Polly. Greatly humiliated and shocked, Oliver finds out that most of the people closest to him have known of his stealing for a long time. The book becomes evidence of his theft – the book of evidence (a possible nod to Freddie Montgomery in Banville's *The Book of Evidence*). At that moment, he promises to himself: 'I shall not steal again.'(Ibid. p. 178). This renunciation is followed by another significant turning point – the ending of Polly and Oliver's affair. He says to himself that 'Polly herself had suffered another, a final, transformation in my eyes' (Ibid. p. 178). The catastrophic repercussions of swiping a seemingly random object become very significant in Oliver's life. For him, an act of stealing is an act of art, of creation, but a book of poems is a work of art in itself. In this regard, through theft he engages in art in a double sense. It is possible, therefore, that he annihilates the poetic word, the power of revelation that is promised by the book of poetry. By way of stealing it, because he steals it not for the poetry within, Oliver lies to himself. As the words of Mr. Plomer's quote strike him, they do not manifest in Oliver in any other way and the book does not have any effect. Arguably, he remains blind to the power of disclosure that the book of poems bears. In other words, Oliver does not respond to the unconcealment that the book of poems brings forth; he is myopic – shortsighted to the truth and small-minded when it comes to imagination, which may explain why he finds himself unable to paint in the first place.

Oliver identifies his kleptomaniac tendency as an artistic expression, but the description of his stealing as an art form is, it seems, inadequate. The theft-art does not legitimize itself as an art form and functions as a self-justification to absolve himself from the sin of stealing. According to Oliver, there is theft for the functionality of the object and theft as art, but neither of the two ever enable transcendence for the thing or a revelation of truth for Oliver himself. He does not allow himself to see the truth, which is painful. The death of his daughter is so deeply ingrained in Oliver (*de profundis*) that he refuses to delve into essences. Oliver avoids the truth and shies away from the essences so as not to drown in grief, because there is an abyss, a spiritual void, within him. Therefore, he chooses surface, but that means that he lies to himself and to us; he

is an unreliable narrator. Oliver does not let things reveal themselves to him and objectifies his lover. As a result, he does not realize his own objectification of self. According to Heidegger, art is a thing but he does not leave off at that and talks about the revelation of truth in a work of art. In Heideggerian terms, Oliver does not enable revelation, does not allow the world to reveal itself. He stops halfway through and does not carry out the act of creation, the transformation of the thing does not happen. Plagued by the pain of loss, he struggles to feel and by way of stealing and hurting others, attempts to spring himself back to life and escape his state of apathy and meta obliviousness: 'Sometimes I have the suspicion that there is a lot I miss in the day-to-day run of events' (Ibid. p. 23). In Banville's novel, the artistic imagination and the act of creation are not unequivocal. Having in mind that Oliver is an unreliable narrator, we cannot fully accept his reductive conception of art. The story and the title of the novel direct us to particular art referents, which problematize Oliver's interpretation, his gaze, his field of vision and his perspective on subject-object relations.

3.2. The Thing on the String

The Blue Guitar is an intertextually dense novel with references to many artworks (i.e., *The Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia* by Édouard Manet, the tale of the Fisher King, among many others). The focus of this section will be the art referents, which pave the way for more profound insight into Oliver's perception and his state of mind: *The Old Guitarist,* a painting by Pablo Picasso, which inspired Wallace Stevens' poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. The works shed light on Oliver's perspective on subject-object relations and his way of perceiving death, artistic imagination, revelation and truth.

The title and the epigraph of the novel ('*Things as they are, / Are changed upon the blue guitar*') direct the reader's gaze to Wallace Stevens' *The Man with the Blue Guitar*. The poem summons the image of Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist* (see appendix), also called *The Blind Guitarist* and painted in 1903-04 as a piece of the painter's Blue Period: 'In 1901, Picasso experienced the blow of the death by suicide of his friend Casagemas, a fellow-artist and his first companion to Paris. In love, Casagemas shot himself because of his impotence. The effect on Picasso, as has plausibly been argued, was brutal and long-lasting.' (Hilton 1975:23). The grieving Picasso set out to 'make a good painting that would function as a convincing memorial to his friend' (Ibid. p. 23). The paintings of the period depict the figures of 'introverted, medieval types [...] homeless, impoverished [...] in postures of self-constraint, of self-enclosure, turning away from the world either through blindness, or reddened eyes, or through the lowering and shutting of the eyes while the figure listens rather than looks' in a sparse Environment' (Caws 2005:34). The figures in the paintings of the Blue Period may be interpreted as 'expressing the growth of spirituality as the corporeal wanes' (Podoksik 2005:47) and as the founder of analytic psychology Carl Gustav Jung has commented, 'a descent into hell' (Ibid. p. 30). Banville, too, seems to create a similar kind of grief-induced descent. Oliver describes his version of eternal damnation:

> *I envisage my suffering soul not plunged in a burning lake or sunk to the oxters in a limitless plain of permafrost. No, my inferno will be a blamelessly commonplace affair, fitted out with […] streets, houses, people going about their usual doings, birds swooping […] For although my presence goes unremarked, and I seem to be known by all who encounter me, I know no one, recognise nothing, have no knowledge of where I am or how I came to be here. […]I'm a stranger in this place where I'm trapped, […] although perfectly familiar to everyone, everyone, that is, except myself.* (Banville 2015:126)

This hell, a state very real and present for Oliver, seems to be recognizable in Picasso, more particularly, his Blue Period.

The man and his guitar are the focal points in *The Old Guitarist*. The blue man, hunching over his guitar seems to go through a waning of his life force. The old man's bodily limpness and the blue monochrome palette, except the brown guitar, suggest death. The guitar may be interpreted as a subject and the old man as an object in the painting (suggested by the variation of colour). The relation between the painting and Oliver sheds light on his body and consciousness. Oliver is like the man in the painting because he is suffering from a creative cramp in his object state (he is still stealing things, as if trying to gain their thingly power or, particularly, the thingness of the blue guitar). It is ironic that in seeking to empower himself through things Oliver ends up depriving himself of his own humanity. Oliver is still, cemented in the artistic act and unable to produce. Here, the guitar signifies life and the spirit of creativity in its purest form. In Heideggerian terms, the guitar becomes a mode of revelation, whereby we understand Oliver's struggles to capture the thingness of the guitar, which holds his artistic spirit correlates with his grief for the lost daughter.

Driven by sorrow, Gloria and Oliver travel to Aigues-Mortes, a city in southern France because '[s]orrow encourages displacement, urges flight, the unresting quest for new horizons.' (Ibid. p. 93). It is the same place of their 'first dallyings' where they vowed to love each other and it seems inevitable to Oliver that they would hurry back to the place in an attempt to escape the pain: 'as if to annul the years, as if to wind time backwards and make what had happened not happen.' (Ibid. p. 93). Aigues-Mortes is also the locus of Oliver's last painting, which he describes as 'the unfinished piece that finished me for good', which depicts a 'blimp-colored guitar and the table with the checked cloth that it rests on; look at the louvred window opening on to the terrace and the flat blue beyond; look at that gay sailboat.' (Ibid. p. 103). Here, the novel reimagines Picasso's painting and becomes a monument of his 'rigor artis' (Ibid. p. 90) and the lost Olivia, who endures inside him 'like one of those miraculously preserved saintly corpses that they keep behind glass under the altars of Italian churches' (Ibid. p. 92). Oliver's painting holds a guitar on a table and a sailboat far in the sea, without the presence of any person (subject). This extends to all of his paintings and Polly observes 'you only paint things, […] not people, and even when you do you make them look like things.' (Ibid. p. 111). It seems Oliver is only capable of seeing things, because he keeps assigning objectivity, which signals artistic incapacity ('I'm incapable of so much' (Ibid. p. 150)) and a gap in his psyche, which inevitably resurfaces in his actions (his numerous affairs, apathetic nature, stealing) and his work. Thus, a

look at the color blue and the guitar in the paintings of Picasso and Oliver may shed light on Oliver's perception of the world through his grief and artistic eye.

Blue has very ambiguous semantics. William A. Gass in his *On Being Blue* (2014) offers interpretations of blue in various backgrounds. 'True blue' may refer to that which is 'genuine', but then there's 'blue movies', which proposes a sexual edge. Blue seems to contrive a bond between melancholy and sex, as Gass says: 'So *blue*, the word and the condition, the colour and the act, contrive to contain one another, as if the bottle of the genii were its belly, the lamp's breath the smoke of the wraith.' (2014: 11). The saying 'being blue' is commonly used to express the condition of 'being sad'. It may also be possible to talk about 'blue' as a determiner for location. For Gass, 'To be in the blue is to be isolated and alone. To be sent to the blue room is to be sent to solitary, a chamber of confinement devoted to the third degree.' (Ibid. p. 18). Blue is the colour in the innards of things, the essences: 'blue is the color of the mind in borrow of the body; it is the color consciousness becomes when caressed; it is the dark inside of sentences, sentences which follow their own turnings inward out of sight like the whorls of a shell, and which we follow warily.' (Ibid. p. 57). In Banville's novel, Oliver would always notice the blueness of the world: 'The clouds were breaking, and […] I could see a patch of pure autumnal blue, the blue that Poussin loved, vibrant and delicate, and despite everything my heart lifted another notch or two, as it always lifts when the world opens wide its innocent blue gaze like that.' (Banville 2015: 57). For Oliver, blue is the colour that marks the possibility of the world unveiling itself to him. Blue also foresees a divine breakthrough in his artistic consciousness: 'Because blue contracts, retreats, it is the color of transcendence, leading us away in pursuit of the infinite.' (Gass 2014: 76). In the beginning of his career, Oliver says he was 'working a storm in those days, half the time in awe of my gift and the other half in a blue terror' (Banville 2015: 92). For Oliver, blue is the terror of the subliminal, beauty and death coming together. Blue constantly reappears when the topic of death is approached in the novel. Three months after the affair with Polly has been revealed, Oliver attends the funeral of Marcus, who drove off a bridge in drunken heartache. The funeral landscape is 'bluely agleam' and Oliver cannot decide whether the sky is cerulean, cyan or simple cornflower (Ibid. p. 183). For Picasso and Banville, 'Being without Being is blue' (Gass 2014: 12) and the colour signals an opening of consciousness to receive the revelation of death.

Blue also has an important role in Stevens' poem, which employs the visual aspect primarily through references to Pablo Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist.* The guitar is brown in the painting, but the 'blue' in Stevens is 'a color indicating imagination' (Cook 2007:114). Picasso's

work depicts an old man painted in blue hues, who is bent over his instrument in a manner that almost resembles a dead man as if the music were interrupted mid-play and the brown guitar, the instrument of imagination, is separated from its blue-hued owner. Curiously, though, in Picasso's painting, the guitar is not blue. This discrepancy marks the crossing between language and a visual object. Looking at the phrasing of 'the man with the blue guitar', the emphasis is given to the adjective 'blue' rather than the noun 'guitar', which, in a way, denies agency to the guitarist, suggesting that the artist does not have complete ownership or control over the creative process.

A silent stillness reminiscent of death pervades Picasso's painting, Stevens' poem and Banville's novel. The stillness of the old man with the guitar is akin to the stillness of Oliver's mind. In the novel, the processes of painting and stealing have the aspect of stillness, each very different. Painting was accompanied by the phenomena of stillness into which he was 'able to make some sort of temporary escape' (Banville 2015:100) from himself. It is a 'peace and quiet' unachievable by 'any other means' (Ibid. p. 100). The stillness in the painting 'differed entirely, in depth and resonance, from the stealthy hush that accompanies a theft.' (Ibid. p. 100). The stillness of stealing is that of stealth, but the stillness of painting transports: 'At the easel, the silence that fell upon everything was like the silence I imagine spreading over the world after I am dead.' (Ibid. p. 100). It was the city of Aigues-Mortes, where Gloria and Oliver 'plighted' their 'troth' in the early days of their relationship and it was the same place they came to grieve after the death of their daughter Olive. The toponymy of the name offers the meaning of the Latin *Aquae Mortuae* as 'dead water' or 'stagnant water', for the city is known to have been a place of marches and undrinkable water. Similarly, the relationship of Oliver and Gloria is rooted in a stillness, a life 'among the dead' (Ibid. p. 90). The image of the dead water is also important in looking at Oliver's halted development of inter-subjectivity:

> *School-yard bullies soon learned to fear the knout of my sarcasm. Yes, I think I can say I was in my way a tough little tyke, whose fear was all internal, a smoking underground swamp where dead fishes floated belly-up and high-shouldered birds with bills like scimitars scavenged and screamed. And it's still there, that putrid inner aigues-mortes of mine, still deep enough to drown me.* (Ibid. p. 139-140)

Thus, this state is related to Oliver's stillness as a painter, which resembles the image of *The Old Guitarist* – a rigor mortis of the artist – the blue 'Rigor artis' (Ibid. p. 90). However, it is important to direct the gaze to Wallace Stevens and consider how inspiration and the 'rigor artis' are problematized in the poem, which lends an excerpt to the epigraph of the novel.

The title of the novel together with the epigraph ('Things as they are, / Are changed upon the blue guitar.') direct to Wallace Stevens' *The Man with the Blue Guitar*. Wallace Stevens' poem consists of thirty-three poems of different length, which use tetrameter couplets. These are 'made very flexible through variety in the feet, skilful use of syntax and enjambment and intermittent rhyme, both end and internal.' (Cook, 2007:113). The form of the poem serves to consolidate the play of a guitar as 'sounds and rhythms throughout indicate the kind of music each poem is playing, and sometimes the volume.' (Ibid. p. 114) The blue guitar seems to be a central object, an instrumental thing, which functions to achieve something for or through the creator or the poet. Looking through the remarks of Glen MacLeod (1987), Jacqueline Vaught Brogan (1987), Eleanor Cook (2007), Simon Critchley (2005), Daniel Tompsett (2012) and Edward Ragg (2010), it is clear that Wallace Stevens has managed to capture an enigmatic world of a creator, which 'despite proffering visual or physical imagery, remains hard to 'see'' (Ragg 2012: 60). The instrument of the guitar does not seem to be merely introducing a carnival atmosphere, as Brogan suggests, 'the guitarist and / or the guitar are used explicitly to examine the relative worth of art and reality' (1987: 233). The guitar is played by its possessor in a similar way anything is played by any artist. Cook compares the actor with the musician: 'The word "play" is also repeated, as Stevens enlarges the sense of playing a guitar to encompass an actor playing a role, and, at large, poetry as play that is also serious in the paradox known as *serio ludere*.' (2007:113). Thus, in the world of *The Man with the Blue Guitar* the playing of the instrument of the guitar is key.

The guitar is an instrument for the hand, but, to use Heideggerian terms, it is not just present to hand, it is a work of art and a medium of creation. The guitar is not only a wooden object for the production of sound – it also acts as an instrument for transformed representation and is instrumental to any whim of the creator. The guitar may be interpreted in the light of Brown's thing theory to see whether it is more reminiscent of a thing or an object. For Brown, objects function as codes for meaning, but things do not function as objects and reveal their thingness when they exceed their 'materialization as objects' or the 'utilization as objects', making them a 'sensuous presence' or a 'metaphysical presence' (2001: 5). The object of the guitar asserts its thingness through a 'changed relation to the human subject' and 'the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the physical world emerging, perhaps, as an aftereffect of the mutual constitution of subject and object' (Ibid. p. 4). This is to say that the guitar's being is revealed upon playing; it is a thing more than it is an object. When still and dormant, it may be seen as a material object, but when

considered in light of its creative possibilities, it transcends its own objecthood and reveals its own being and a certain truth about the world. As Critchley asserts, when the man with the blue guitar plays his instrument, when he finds the right note, then he will sound 'sudden rightnesses' and will achieve 'the finding of a satisfaction' (2005: 39). This satisfaction is not merely an attempt for pleasure, it is a 'sudden rightness' (for Gass, it would be the 'true blue'), which is a truth of imagined reality that causes immense cathartic pain and pleasure. As Critchley reminds us, the poet has to 'say things exactly as they are, as they are recognized by the men of the time. And yet, those things are changed upon the blue guitar, becoming beyond us, yet ourselves.' (Ibid. p. 39). The things become a production that is very close to the reality, almost a perfect duplicate, yet it is beyond it, and may represent a truth that is not present in the world represented, which is also the goal of the painter and, more particularly, Oliver. When the guitarist in the poem is suggested to 'not play things as they are' (Stevens 1990:183), he is implied by his audience to be failing to represent how particular things *really* are. This suggested attack is quickly evaded by the guitarist by 'asserting 'reality' in general ('things as-they-are') is transformed through performance, whilst specific 'things' remain literally 'as they are'.' (Ragg 2010:62) The evasion is partly a result of fearful realisation that failure in representation is inevitable and partly because the product of representation can never be a duplicate: 'But play […]/A tune upon the blue guitar/Of things *exactly* as they are' (Stevens 1990:183). Stevens' guitarist himself further admits his failure that he 'cannot bring a world quite round,' and that he can only 'patch it' as he 'can', which is very close to what Oliver experiences in the novel. Oliver suffers a breakdown in imagination, which is greatly influenced by the loss of his daughter. The failure at representation, together with the foregrounded issue of imagination connect Stevens', Picasso's and Banville's works. However, Banville entangles these issues by introducing the act of theft as art and puts forth the idea of a new form of imaginative process. Yet, Oliver's claim does not hold its promise and stealing does not seem to be actually manifesting as a mode of artistic expression, because a stolen object does not in fact allow a revelation of the world for Oliver. While this does not reject the possibility of theft as art, it begs the question whether Oliver's failure to create (in theft and in art) is only rooted in his grief.

Oliver's mind is enfolded in a stillness ('aigues-mortes') and seems reminiscent of the consciousness of the things he wants to steal – the consciousness of an object waiting to be noticed, to be claimed and brought to life. Here, Bill Brown's ideas about subject-object relations shed light on Oliver's state as an object. Brown writes that objects have the power to

‘organize our private and public affection’ and questions ‘how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects.’ (2001: 7). Furthermore, following Jean Baudrillard’s ideas, Brown proposes the object’s capacity to absorb the subject: ‘“The fate of the object,” to Baudrillard’s knowledge, “has been claimed by no one.” And, yet, the very grandiosity of Baudrillard’s claim about *the* object (and the “potency of the object”) threatens the subject no more than it threatens (by absorbing) both objects and things.’ (Ibid. p. 8). Thus, the possibility that Oliver is trapped in an object state has to be considered.

The first theft (of the zinc white paint tube) that Oliver committed as a young boy is key to understanding Oliver’s objecthood. He remembers the owner of the shop: ‘His real name was Johnson or Jameson or Jimson, I can’t remember exactly, but I called him Geppetto because, with his fuzzy white sidelocks and those rimless specs perched on the end of his long thin nose, he was a dead ringer for the old toy-maker as illustrated in a big Pinocchio picture-book that I had been given as a gift one Christmas.’ (Banville 2015: 19). Oliver then ominously adds: ‘By the way, I might say many things about that wooden boy and his yearning to be human, oh, yes, many things. But I won’t.’ (Ibid. p. 19). Geppetto’s character in the novel stands as a patron for the inception of Oliver’s thieving and connects it with *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. The creation of a wooden boy, who seeks to become a real boy correlates with Oliver’s internal struggle. He feels as if the identities (‘the ingrate son, the false friend, even the failed artist’ (Ibid. p. 167)) that he creates for himself are to pass for a real person. Oliver keeps knocking against his wooden self: ‘keep knocking a knuckle against myself, as it were, to check that I was still a person of at least some substance, and that often, getting back only a hollow sound’ (Ibid. p. 167). Oliver is Pinocchio himself. Just like the wooden boy’s lies are exposed by his elongating nose, Oliver’s lies are unveiled: his infidelity and the straightforward lie to his friend Marcus, when he comes for consolation after the painful news that his wife is unfaithful with another, unknown man. Furthermore, Pinocchio transforms from a wooden toy into a person, but Oliver is in an inverse process; in *The Blue Guitar*, the relationship of the father and the son of the *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is reversed: the father is transforming into an object form of a subject and the daughter is in another plain, invisible. Geppetto brings wood to life – a thing becomes a human being and in *The Blue Guitar*, the daughter’s absence slowly drains her father of life. The daughter becomes a thing through death and has on Oliver such a great impact that he also chooses the life of a thing entrapped by woodness.

Pinocchio's name carries in itself an amalgam of meanings for matter and seeing. The name 'Pinocchio' is constructed from the Italian *pino* 'pine' and *occhio* 'eye'[6]. This directs our gaze to two essential paths in deconstructing Oliver's psyche. First, if attention is focused on the wood of the 'pine', Micheal Marder in *The Philosopher's Plant* comments on the Greek *hylē*, the word for matter, which also refers to 'timber' (2014: 39). Marder looks at the Aristotelian interpretation of matter, which 'does not refer to just about anything with volume and mass; nor does it describe a physical extended substance. Instead, it has to do with the stuff of which a thing is made, the thing's "material cause." Matter is simply materials (bronze, stone, and so forth) before they are shaped into a recognizable form.' (Ibid. p. 30). This allows Marder to come to the idea that 'matter is essentially wooden' (Ibid. p. 30). If matter is wood then wood is what matters in the novel and the next important step is to distinguish and see what is revealed through some of the pivotal manifestations of wood of *The Blue Guitar*, which are the guitar, the cross, the canvas, the myrtle tree and the aforementioned Pinocchio.

After Olivia's death, Gloria and Oliver has a fight over a 'potted ornamental tree', which is a myrtle tree according to Oliver. The plant began to decline, because it 'had been invaded by parasites, minuscule spider-like creepy-crawlies that flourished on the undersides of the leaves and were gradually sucking the life out of them' (Banville 2015: 95). While this fascinated Oliver, Gloria was desperate to save it and was infuriated when he suggested that her priorities were 'in the wrong order' and questioned whether 'the pretty spectacle the tree provided for us more important than the myriad lives she was destroying in order to protect and preserve it' (Ibid. p. 96). Gloria started weeping and, later, Oliver understood that 'she was thinking of our lost Olivia' (Ibid. p. 96). Here, the immortalized daughter becomes the essence residing in the matter – the wood of the myrtle tree. Thus, the tree has the capacity to capture one's spirit and stand for immortality in the novel.

While a tree can be described as a living being, the wood that is cut loses its vitality and becomes an object. However, its being may be altered by means of artistic and sacral transformation. For example, the cross, an image which is important when looking at Oliver's sister Olive, who used to make canvases for him, worked as a clerk in a timber factory and later becomes a craftsperson of crucifixes. Visiting his sister, Oliver is stunned by her occupation (making crucifixes) and the wood-shop becomes the locus, where Olive makes him understand how much he was loved by the people that surrounded him. This sets off a shift in Oliver's inter-

[6] In an online dictionary: https://www.wordnik.com/words/Pinocchio Accessed on the 20th of April

subjectivity. Such a change, which is marked by the image of the cross, signals revelation. Marder writes that the sacral form of wood is revealed through the visualization of the cross: 'No longer a part of a living tree, wood seems to be little more than dead matter. Not only a human body but also wood is resurrected by and on the cross' (2014: 62). The wooden cross, therefore, has the capacity to reveal the essence of being and the world.

The wooden guitar has a similar capacity, which manifests through its ability to reveal the world through art. The guitar reveals the artistic act's capacity to transform. It reveals the being of wood, its ability to be more than the material form of wood. When speaking about the guitar, it is important not to only look at the instrument itself, but also the wood that it is made of. Heidegger talks about the impossibility of technology as such and refers to the Greek word *techne,* which stands for craft and art (2013: 57). Thus, an object carrying artistic faculty (like the guitar) cannot be reduced to its instrumentality. The essence of the guitar is not in its instrumentality, but that it is a mode of revelation, which has its own way of unveiling the world. When looking at the essence of the guitar, the linguistic aspect is also important. The etymology of the word 'guitar', from the Hindi and the Persian 'sitar'[7], means 'three-stringed'. The 'tar' referring to 'string' comes from the 'PIE root *ten', which is 'to stretch'[8]. The etymology of the word 'guitar' may suggest a correlation between the guitar and the canvas: stretching the strings of the instrument and also stretching the canvas. The guitar can be interpreted as a metaphor for the canvas of the artist. The surface of the wooden canvas is paint on wood. Thus, the *hylē* of wood is painted shut, closed away and the Heideggerian revelation through art appears. However, in the context of the novel, if we consider the guitar as a metaphor for the canvas of the painter, the metaphor could be inverted, because it is Oliver's last painting depicting a guitar that marks the end of his career as a painter. The guitar, which captures the artistic consciousness, encloses Oliver's ability to paint. In this respect, the canvas may be considered a crib, suggestive of the child who is no more. Seen as a crib, the canvas ultimately reveals itself as a coffin. The wood matter of the canvas, the crib, the guitar, the myrtle tree, the crucifix and Pinocchio connects all of them in their capacity to enclose consciousness.

Turning to the 'occhio' of Pinocchio, which refers to the 'eye', it is fair to say that Pinocchio turns into a boy when he learns to see like a human being. It is the seeing that Oliver does not

[7] In the online etymology dictionary: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=guitar Accessed on the 20th of May 2017
[8] In the online etymology dictionary: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sitar&allowed_in_frame=0 Accessed on the 20th of May 2017

possess throughout the novel and possibly gains the ability just in the last pages of *The Blue Guitar*. From early days, Oliver has had 'wooden' eyes, those, which can only see the matter of things. He only saw the surface, material form rather than substance, the object rather than the thing. Revelation unveils essence, meanwhile, Oliver stays on the surface to attain it: 'I realised that in seeking to strike through surfaces to get at the core, the essence, I had overlooked the fact that it is in the surface that essence resides: and there I was, back to the start again.' (Ibid. p. 58). For Oliver, essence is solid, 'as solid as the things it is the essence of' and brings him to the devastating conclusion that 'there was no such thing as the thing itself, only effects of things, the generative swirl of relation.' (Ibid. p. 57). This Appaduraian understanding of things as commodities limits Oliver's outlook, more particularly, his approach to things, which manifests in his kleptomanic tendency, is obscured by the claim that theft is art: 'stealing things was an attempt to break through the surface, to pluck out fragments of the world's wall and put my eye to the holes to see what was hiding behind it.' (Ibid. p. 140). He does not manage to reach the essence, because Oliver does not succeed in arriving at the thingness of the thing: 'No things in themselves, only their effects!' (Ibid. p. 57). Oliver's approach to the surface of thing correlates with a modernist perspective. The artists of the Avant-garde played with surfaces and rejected depths, evoking a mode of seeing in which the world reveals itself, but Oliver is imprisoned within the depths of his own interiority – his wooden self. However, he rejects the notion of theft as art at the end of the novel, when he performs his 'auto-da-fé of illicitly acquired objects' (Ibid. p. 249). The burning of the stolen things would allow him to 'burrow back into [the] past and begin to learn over again all [he] had thought [he] knew but didn't' (Ibid. p. 249). Oliver thinks that this 'great instauration' might even allow him to 'learn to paint again, or just learn, for the first time, and at last.' (Ibid. p. 249). At last, like Pinocchio, Oliver becomes a 'real boy'.

The Blue Guitar tells a story of an artist who is incapable of seeing. Oliver dehumanizes and transforms himself into a thing, because he cannot pierce through the 'matter' of the thing in his artistic ventures (theft as art, painting) and does not see what matters – he cannot attain the Heideggerian revelation of the world. This results in his lack of inter-subjectivity and destructive nature (of self and others) and ultimately unravels Oliver when he is seized by the grief of the lost daughter. Oliver is effectively the thing on the string – Pinocchio – a puppet on the string and the man on the strings of the guitar in Picasso's painting.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this BA paper has been to present how Banville constructs the problematic notion of artistic representation and theft as a substitute for art in his novel *The Blue Guitar*. The analysis attempted to demonstrate the artist's material and metaphorical relations with the world in the light of Arjun Appadurai's socio-anthropological approach to things, Martin Heidegger's phenomenological theory of the thing, and Bill Brown's distinction between *object* and *thing.* The theoretical premises offered an entry point to show how the protagonist of *The Blue Guitar* is subordinated to the will of the object in his struggle to absorb things into self and reach the revelation of the world through the mediums of theft as art and painting as he yields the hand that *draws*, which is to say, simultaneously paints and pilfers. The analysis of the protagonist's theft as an artistic endeavour offers a perspective on the process of stealing as creation of art. While our interpretation of the narrative does not negate the possibility of seeing theft as art, the protagonist emerges as an unsuccessful artist, because he is unable to reach the Heideggerian thingness of the thing and is blind to the unconcealment of the world through a work of art. In Banville's novel the theft-art does not legitimize itself as an art form and functions as a self-justification to absolve the protagonist from the sin of stealing. The cause of Oliver's artistic failure is twofold, manifesting through his grief and his objecthood of self.

The novel itself is envisioned through the lens of grief – the narrative starts in a state of post-trauma, because the narrator tells the story after the death of his daughter. The pain of loss entraps the protagonist in a state of stillness, cemented in the artistic act and unable to create. This is a significant point of access in the process of interpreting the novel in the frame of Picasso's painting *The Old Guitarist* and, subsequently Stevens' poem. Here, the metaphoric guitar signifies life and the spirit of creativity in its purest form. In the light of Brown's thing theory, the guitar transcends its own objecthood, unveils its thingness in terms of its creative possibilities and the guitar's being is unveiled upon playing. In Heideggerian terms, the guitar is a mode of revelation. The blueness of the guitar suggests a variation of artistic imagination, truth and sadness. Thus, Banville's protagonist struggles to capture the thingness of the guitar, which holds the artistic spirit and the unconcealment of the world in order to overcome his failure as an artist and the sorrow of the lost daughter. However, his failure to create (in theft and in painting) is not solely rooted in his grief.

In seeking to empower himself through things, the protagonist ends up depriving himself of his own humanity. Brown suggests that inanimate objects have the power to constitute and organize

human subjects. Arguably, Oliver was entrapped by thingness from a very young age, since the moment he stole the first tube of paint in Geppeto's shop. The owner's name provides the intertextual layer of Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, which illuminates the analysis by offering an interpretation of the protagonist as Pinocchio. The woodedness of the boy directs the gaze to the Aristotelian *hylē* (timber), also referring to 'matter'. Thus, we see how the protagonist fails to reach the thingness of the thing in his artistic ventures because he considers himself as matter, the physical substance of things.

This BA suggests that Banville's protagonist is imprisoned in his interiority and grief, which hinder his inter-subjectivity and artistic expression, making him resemble the thing on the string (Pinocchio – the wooden puppet) and the man on the strings of the guitar in Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*. The novel tells us about the power of art and artistic failure, raising the question whether the presence of things can substitute the void opened by the absence of loved ones or, rather, if art could fill in that void. *The Blue Guitar* also raises the question whether theft as an art form is possible. For the artist, the aim of capturing thingness lies at the centre of the creative process. Consequently, creating art and stealing objects are corresponding activities because they enable an encounter with thingness. The idea of theft as an act of art enables the syllogism that art is an act of theft, which participates in an attempt at possession – the artistic aim of capturing the things of the world. Therefore, art is always ambiguous, because it is a form of a lie, which uncovers the truth. At the same time, though, some aspects of the novel have not been touched upon in this BA thesis. For example, the aspects of exile, the picnic (with references to Claude Monet's *The Luncheon on the Grass*), the interaction of two separate realities through mirrors (with references to René Magritte's *Not to be Reproduced*) are among many others that remain concealed.

Summary in Lithuanian

Vagystė ir vaizduotė Johno Banville'o romane „The Blue Guitar"

Šiame baigiamajame bakalauro darbe nagrinėjamas žymaus airių rašytojo Johno Banville'o romanas *Mėlynoji gitara* (angl. *The Blue Guitar*). Banville'is savo kūryboje nagrinėja pažinimą ir gebėjimą kurti, remdamasis mokslininkų ir menininkų biografijomis bei Europos ir Vakarų kultūros intertekstais. Vladimiro Nabokovo kūrinius primenančiai poetiškai prozai būdinga įtampa tarp vaizduotės ir realybės, joje kuriamas tiesą ir jos falsifikavimą kūryboje tiriantis naratyvas, dažnai perteikiamas solipsizmo persmelkto vyro balsu. *Mėlynosios gitaros* pasakotojas – kurti nepajėgiantis tapytojas, kuris gedi dukters, ir svetimauja su geriausio draugo sutuoktine. Nuo mažens Oliveris vagia daiktus ir teigia, kad tai meno forma. Po dukters mirties Oliveris ipakeičia tapybą vagystėmis, kurios, sykiu su netekties skausmu ir neištikimybės padariniais, tampa jo sąmonės krizės priežastimi. Šiame darbe tyrinėjama vagystės kaip meno formos problematika. Pasitelkiant Arjuno Appadurajaus antropologinius tyrimus, Martino Heideggerio fenomenologines įžvalgas ir Billo Browno daiktų teoriją, darbe taip pat parodoma skirtis tarp objekto ir daikto suvokimo, subjekto virsmo objektu idėja ir daikto transformacija į meno kūrinį, kuris įgalina pasaulio atvertį (angl. *the revelation*). Sekant romano intertekstus, aiškinamasi, kaip mėlynosios gitaros metafora atskleidžia kūrybos ir sielvarto ištakas bei skilusią pasakotojo sąmonę. Darbe aiškinama, kad Oliverio sąmonė yra įkalinta daiktiškume, menininkas skaudina jį mylinčius žmones, praranda įkvėpimą kurti ir nepajėgia pasiekti atverties. Romane išryškinamas ryšys tarp vagystės ir kūrybos akto bei juos siejančio daiktiškumo, ir atskleidžiamas meno moralinis dvilypumas.

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Appendix

The Old Guitarist (1903-04) by Pablo Picasso