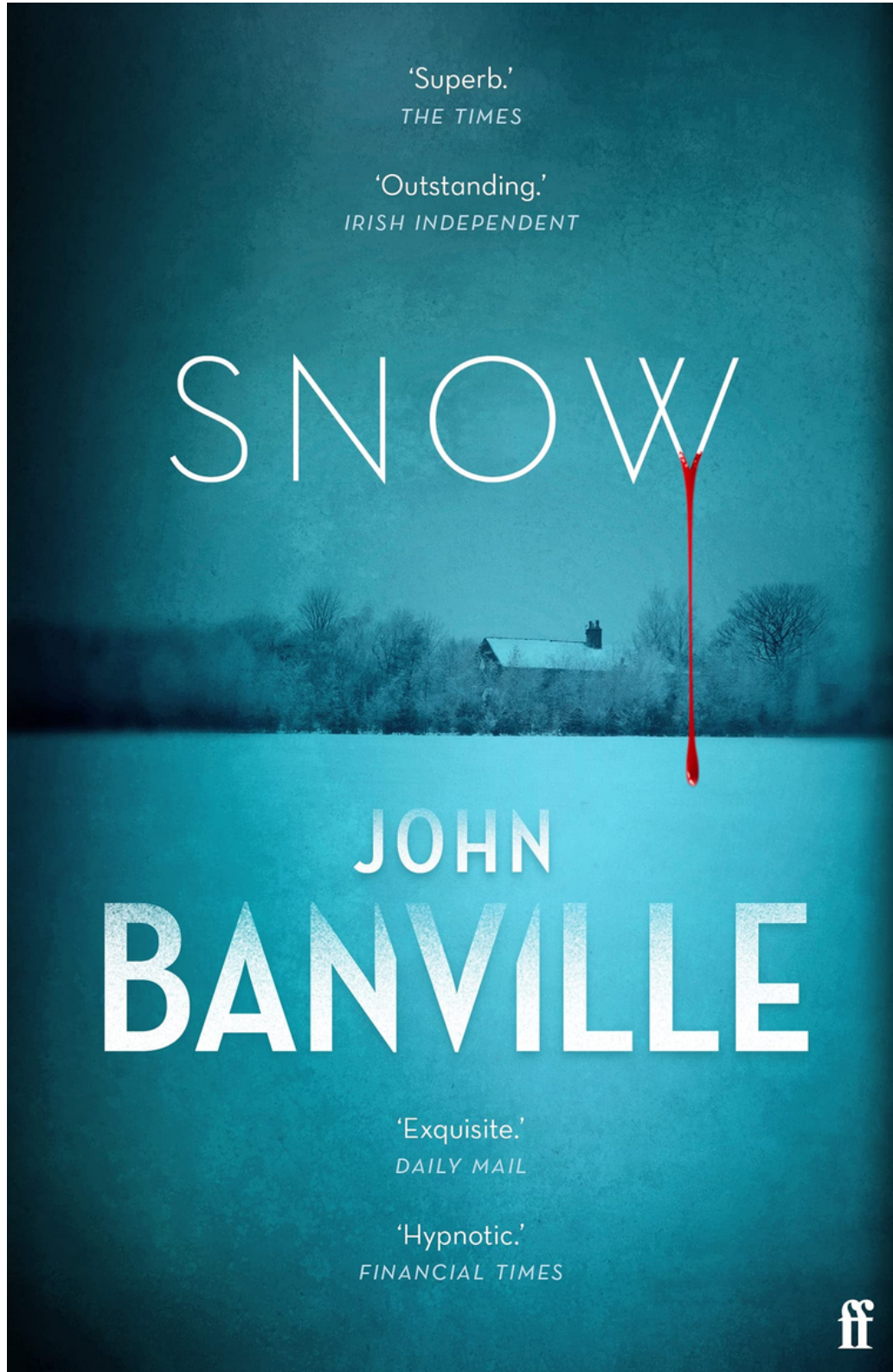




Meath County Council Library Service  
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## Meath County Council Library Service Book Club Kit



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# Notes To Readers



This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *Solar Bones* and contains spoilers

## Resources

This kit is available to download on our website



# Crime Pays for John Banville

By Tom Deignan

## Irish America interviews John Banville, Banville talks to Tom Deignan

**Why did you want to do a second Inspector St. John Strafford book, following Snow?**

I hope I won't sound facetious if I answer by asking, why not? I rather like Strafford, and certainly find him far more sympathetic than the curmudgeonly Quirke. Though Quirke will be coming back, in a novel that will be published next year – another one? I hear you say. These books are carpentry, or better say cabinet-making, since they are, or try to be, works of craftsmanship. I leave the art stuff to Banville.

**Any particular reason the latter was a Benjamin Black book and the new one a Banville?**

The one coming out next year is a sequel to a previous BB caper. This required me to go back and read one or two BBs – a thing I would never dream of doing if it weren't necessary – which to my surprise I found to be not bad at all. So I thought, why am I hiding behind a pseudonym? There's nothing here to be coy about. So I killed off my dark brother Benjamin, except in Spanish-speaking countries, where he's much too popular to die. People will of course be confused that the ever-pretentious Banville is writing crime novels, but I hope they'll get used to it.

At one point – and why, do you think – did Snow become so important to this story that you wanted it to be a recurring image ... and Joycean wisecrack ... and give the book its title?

Honestly, no, JJ wasn't at all in my mind. In fact, the original title was Snow Blind, but one of my editors suggested Snow instead, and she was right, it's a good title. It doesn't snow here any more, and I miss it, I suppose. And it seemed to create the right environment right for this very chilly plot.

**Compare and contrast Inspector Strafford with your other main mystery man, Quirke? What do you like about each? How are they similar / different? Will we be revisiting Quirke (who gets a mention in Snow) any time soon?**

Well, Strafford is a son of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy, a class, or caste, with which I have always been fascinated, especially as my roots are pure peasant. I like his diffidence, and the flashes of willfulness and menace he allows himself now and then. In next year's book, April in Spain, Quirke and he figure equally. Quirke really is dour, isn't he? Perhaps I should find a new lead character who is happily married with three adorable kiddies, lives in the suburbs, goes to Mass on Sundays, takes a dry sherry on Christmas day ... What do you think?

# Reading Group Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens with a familiar set up: a dead body in a manor. How does Banville play into classic mystery tropes in *Snow*? How does he upend them?
2. Father Tom's last words were "Confiteor Deo" or "I confess to God." What was he confessing to?
3. How do tensions between Catholicism and Protestantism force Strafford to approach the murder differently?
4. What is the importance of light in *Snow*? How does the removed lightbulb and Fonsy lighting the candle over Father Tom's head speak to this?
5. In what ways does Archbishop McQuaid's power extend past the church? What might this suggest about Catholicism's centrality in Irish life at this time?
6. What do character names—Father Lawless, St. John Strafford, Ambrose Jenkins and others—reveal about the population of this narrative world?
7. What does *Snow* have to say about justice?
8. Archbishop McQuaid says "The social contract a fragile document." What is he referring to? Does the social contract hold by the novel's end?
9. What can we glean from *Snow* about life in 1950s Ireland?
10. What do you make of the novel's simple title? How does snow function as a motif in the novel?

Source: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/5ed7d58749f36f18d80eaf28/61816477ec07f92df18dfba1\\_Snow\\_Discussion\\_Questions.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5ed7d58749f36f18d80eaf28/61816477ec07f92df18dfba1_Snow_Discussion_Questions.pdf)

# About John Banville



Banville was born in Wexford, Ireland. His father worked in a garage and died when Banville was in his early thirties; his mother was a housewife. He is the youngest of three siblings; his older brother Vincent is also a novelist and has written under the name Vincent Lawrence as well as his own. His sister Vonnie Banville-Evans has written both a children's novel and a reminiscence of growing up in Wexford.

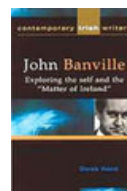
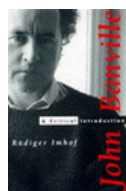
Educated at a Christian Brothers' school and at St Peter's College in Wexford. Despite having intended to be a painter and an architect he did not attend university. Banville has described this as "A great mistake. I should have gone. I regret not taking that four years of getting drunk and falling in love. But I wanted to get away from my family. I wanted to be free." After school he worked as a clerk at Aer Lingus which allowed him to travel at deeply-discounted rates. He took advantage of this to travel in Greece and Italy. He lived in the United States during 1968 and 1969. On his return to Ireland he became a sub-editor at the Irish Press, rising eventually to the position of chief sub-editor. His first book, *Long Lankin*, was published in 1970.

After the Irish Press collapsed in 1995, he became a sub-editor at the Irish Times. He was appointed literary editor in 1998. The Irish Times, too, suffered severe financial problems, and Banville was offered the choice of taking a redundancy package or working as a features department sub-editor. He left. Banville has been a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books* since 1990. In 1984, he was elected to Aosdána, but resigned in 2001, so that some other artist might be allowed to receive the *cnuas*.

Banville also writes under the pen name Benjamin Black. His first novel under this pen name was *Christine Falls*, which was followed by *The Silver Swan* in 2007. Banville has two adult sons with his wife, the American textile artist Janet Dunham. They met during his visit to San Francisco in 1968 where she was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. Dunham described him during the writing process as being like "a murderer who's just come back from a particularly bloody killing". Banville has two daughters from his relationship with Patricia Quinn, former head of the Arts Council of Ireland.

Source: [https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/91.John\\_Banville](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/91.John_Banville)

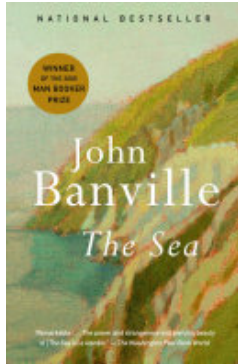
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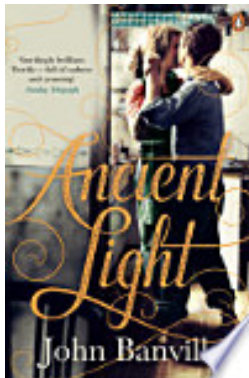
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In this luminous novel, John Banville introduces us to Max Morden, a middle-aged Irishman who has gone back to the seaside town where he spent his summer holidays as a child to cope with the recent loss of his wife.



Ancient Light is narrated by Alexander Cleave, a 60-something year-old retired actor, and takes place 10 years after the death of his daughter Cass in Eclipse.



Isabel, a young American of independent spirit, inherits a fortune thanks to the maneuvering of her sickly, angelic cousin Ralph Touchett, who hopes it might encourage her individuality, but is seduced into a cruel and airless marriage by Osmond



## Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors

John Banville ★ ★ 🔊 📱

HOME COUNTRY Ireland

BORN IN 1945

GENRES **General**

WRITES LIKE

Peter Ackroyd Sebastian Barry Richard Bausch Dermot Bolger  
Elizabeth Bowen Amanda Coe Mary Costello James Hamilton-Paterson  
Ismail Kadare Mark Lawson Martin Malone Eimear McBride  
John McGahern Alan Monaghan Vladimir Nabokov José Saramago  
William Trevor Barry Unsworth

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Some titles included in the site may be suitable for young adult readers, who are in the process of 'crossing-over' to adult novels.

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