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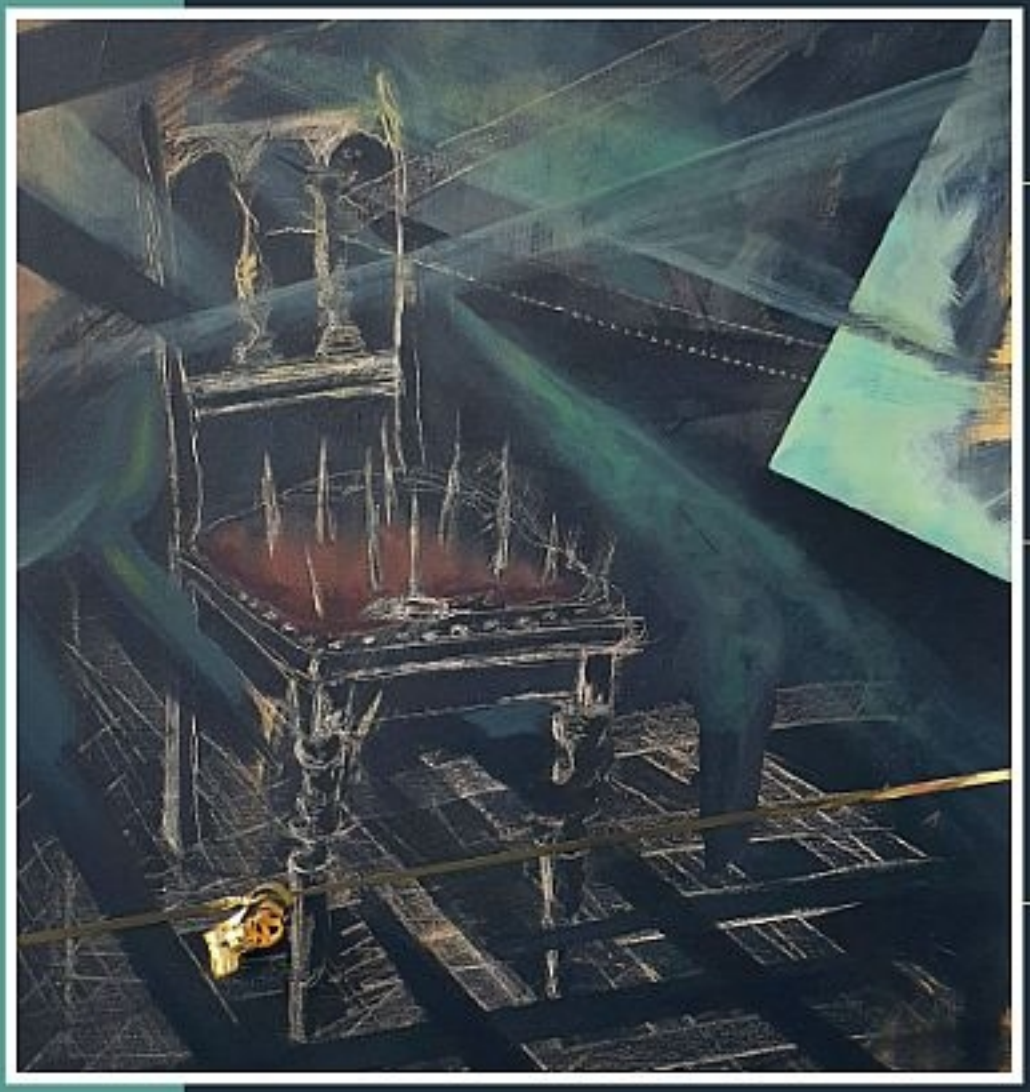

Gender and Violence in Iain Banks' Fiction

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Contents

1. Introduction

Iain Banks' literary works have not been particularly understudied since his spectacular arrival on the scene with *The Wasp Factory* in 1984. In the early days of his literary career, most critics were concentrating on the analysis of his mainstream works, due to Banks' nationality analysing them within the context of the Scottish literary tradition[1]. After Banks' untimely death in 2013, critical output on what could now be considered his complete works increased. However, most edited collections and single-authored monographs religiously maintained the division between his science-fiction novels, mostly set within the Culture-universe and published under the name Iain M. Banks, and his non-SF[2] or mainstream novels published without the middle initial.

For example, Katarzyna Pisarska analyses all of Banks' 'mainstream' works in her extensive study *Mediating the World in the Novels of Iain Banks. The Paradigms of Fiction* (2014). She attempts to define different generic influences on Banks' non-SF-works: according to her, elements of myth, romance, fantasy, gothic fiction, black comedy, coming-of-age, utopia, and thriller result in a complex transgeneric conglomerate (Pisarska 20)[3]. In 2018, the collection *The Science Fiction of Iain M. Banks* was published. Its chapters concentrate on Banks' Culture series, with a preceding summary of the author's life including a timeline of writing periods and publication dates, personal accounts of Banks by his friend and fellow writer Ken MacLeod, and an interview with Banks centring on the Culture, his anarcho-socialist post-scarcity utopian society. In 2021, Joseph Norman's investigation of utopian processes in Banks' Culture series was published, titled *The Culture of "The Culture"*. The division between the author and his

1 A range of studies on Banks as a Scottish author include: Thom Nairn, "Iain Banks and the Fiction Factory" (1993); Alan MacGillivray, "The Worlds of Iain Banks" (1996); Berthold Schoene-Hardwood, "Dams burst: Devolving Gender in Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory*" (1999); Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (1996); Cristie Leigh March, *Rewriting Scotland: Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway, and Kennedy* (2002); Isobel Murray, *Scottish writers talking: 2, Iain Banks, Bernard Mac Laverty, Naomi Mitchison, Iain Crichton Smith, Alan Spence in interview* (2004); Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fiction: Film, Television and the Novel* (2004).

2 SF is, among critics and within this study, used as an abbreviation for science fiction.

3 Pisarska's analytical focus is on world building and mediation; she categorises Banks' 'mainstream' output into four different types, namely "Alternative Worlds", "Community Worlds", "Mythological Worlds" and "Apocalyptic Worlds" (41-79). Within those worlds, she focusses on different motifs, which she then subjects to a structural-semiotic and mythological analysis (31-32) only touching upon gender specific analyses in a few cases, namely whenever female protagonists are involved.

work has historically been difficult for Banks scholars since the author himself spent much time and energy explaining and defining his work in progress and in retrospect, particularly concerning the Culture. In 1994, he posted "A Few Notes on The Culture"[4] to contextualise and explain the intergalactic society he had begun introducing readers to with the publication of *Consider Phlebas*, the opening novel of the Culture series, in 1987. Numerous interviews were conducted with him over the time of his writing career, focussing not only on the Culture in particular but also on the placement of his works within the Scottish literary tradition and potential literary references to social issues and politics of the time.

Banks was outspoken about having difficulties to be regarded as part of the Scottish literary tradition[5], and he was very much outspoken about his political standpoint and his dislike of Margaret Thatcher, stating in a 1990 interview that he "hate[s] Thatcher and detest[s] the Tories," comparing them to hyenas, which "go for the young and the weak, the sick and the old, which the Tories seem to do as well" (Banks quoted in Caroti 13).

> In the last interview he gave before his death, the author Iain Banks admitted feeling 'half a second' of elation when he learned that Margaret Thatcher had died. [...] 'Then I realised I was celebrating the death of a human being, no matter how vile she was. And there was nothing symbolic about her death, because her baleful influence on British politics remains undiminished. Squeeze practically any Tory, any Blairite, and any Lib Dem of the Orange Book persuasion, and it's the same poisonous Thatcherite pus that comes oozing out of all of them.' (Kennedy and Kelly n.p.)

Facing his own imminent death after publicly disclosing his terminal cancer diagnosis, Banks, lifelong sympathiser of left-wing politics, did not hold back on voicing what he would be spared:

> I wont [sic] miss waiting for the next financial disaster because we still haven't dealt with the underlying causes of the last one. Nor will I be disappointed not to experience the results of the proto-fascism that's rearing its grisly head right now. It's the utter idiocy, the sheer wrong-headedness of the response that beggars belief. I mean, your society's broken, so who should we blame? Should we blame the rich powerful people who caused it? No, let's blame the people with no power and no money and these immigrants who don't even have the vote, yeah, it must be their fucking fault. (Kennedy and Kelly n.p.)

4 While the domain the article was posted on is no longer available, it is preserved in its original form on www.vavatch.co.uk/books/banks/cultnote.htm.

5 "I don't really know enough about Scottish literature, so I'm very dubious about saying 'Yes, I'm part of this tradition.' I'm certainly part of the English language tradition. I've been a lot more influenced by *Catch 22*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *The Tin Drum*, and almost anything by Kafka, than by anything in Scottish literature apart from the single influence of *Lanark*" (Banks quoted in Robertson 27).

It does not take a scholar to conclude that the eras of Thatcher and Blair influenced Banks' literary production. His public distaste of their politics also influenced critical approaches to his works, leading to numerous analyses of political commentary within Banks' mainstream and science fiction output. SF critics like Simon Guerrier (1999) concentrated on discussing the Culture as a socialist utopia, as a critical but generally positive counterdraft of the world Banks lived in at the time. Banks' works outside of the Culture have repeatedly been judged as explicitly anti-Thatcherite, a feature that Martyn Colebrook (2010) includes in his praise of Banks' works as transgressive, rule-breaking, and shocking:

> Iain Banks' literary oeuvre can be seen as a continuous celebration of the transgressive, through fiction that firmly acknowledges the rules and then promptly breaks them. With a mordant wit, a furious pace of narrative that ranks with the best thriller writers and an acute awareness of the contemporary, Banks' relentless witticisms, cerebral wordplay and tangential asides leave the reader unsettled and overwhelmed. A key feature of Banks' writing which ensures his cultish status is his desire to shock. *Song of Stone* and *The Bridge* are heavily involved with the violence and sexuality of subconscious and primary human impulses; *Complicity* is an ultra-violent, outraged scream against Thatcherism; and *Dead Air* deals with those who hold power over others, be that sexual, intellectual, financial or political. (Colebrook, "Reading Double" n.p.)

In 2014, *The Transgressive Iain Banks* was published, an edited collection of essays on Banks as "a Writer Beyond Borders" (Colebrook and Cox title page). As the title suggests, the collection focusses on the transgressive potential all of Banks' fiction demonstrates, therefore challenging the established distinction between the Iain Banks and Iain M. Banks works. In 2015, Simone Caroti's critical introduction to the Culture series appeared, tracking the unfolding and development of the Culture series chronologically from *Consider Phlebas* (1987) to *The Hydrogen Sonata* (2012). In 2017, Paul Kincaid's *Iain M. Banks* was published, a survey primarily about Banks' science fiction works, touching upon some mainstream novels as Kincaid follows the timeline of Banks' life. Particularly referring to elements of the fantastic and the supernatural in the first three novels published under the name of Iain Banks (without the 'M.'), Kincaid also questions the clear-cut distinction between SF and 'mainstream' in Banks' oeuvre, thereby continuing the argument he developed in his article "Far too strange – the early fiction of Iain Banks" from 2012.

With this myriad of criticism on Banks' science fiction and his 'mainstream' works already in existence, and the possibility of their generic intersection recently begun to address, is there even a need for another study on Banks' fiction?

There is, because among the various characteristics of Banks' writing that have not yet been examined closely enough, a thorough analysis of the display of violence and gender in his works is the most salient gap in research. Conse-

quently, my study focusses on violence and gender in Banks' works. Detailed depictions of violence have been integral to Banks' fictions since the very beginning. With *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and its protagonist Frank Cauldhame, a youth engaging in astonishing forms of compensatory violence based on an alleged castration in childhood, (just to find out that all of it was his father's fabrication, who raised his biologically female child as a castrated male) Banks set the scene for a thoroughly disruptive and progressive literary engagement with gender. Received as postmodern gothic disruption of the status quo, critics were determined to analyse Banks' following works with an emphasis on his progressive portrayal of gender, transferring his "progressive agenda" (Norman, *The Culture of "The Culture"* 163) onto the analysis of his science-fiction novels: "Banks applied feminist principles to the Culture, for example, critiquing the patriarchal, sexist values of much SF from the Golden Age and Pulp era, and portrayed the Culture as fundamentally pacifist, with no need for martial structures" (*The Culture of "The Culture"* 24).

Although numerous critics[6] agree on the progressiveness of gender portrayal in Banks' works, stressing that the author "identified himself as an atheist, humanist, and feminist throughout his life, as well as a socialist with complex left-wing political views" (*The Culture of "The Culture"* 5), there has not yet been a comprehensive analysis of gender in Banks' fiction. Also, it has never been studied how the prevalence of violence in his oeuvre goes together with an assumedly progressive gender portrayal, which is curious since violence is almost always 'gendered' and can thus not be read independently of gender in literary analysis (Dornberg 11). From a sociological viewpoint, forms of violence and binary constructions of gender correspond and gain significance because of their reciprocal conjunction (Bereswill, "Sexualisierte Gewalt und Männlichkeit" 112).

Berthold Schoene-Harwood's article "Dams burst: Devolving Gender in *The Wasp Factory*" (1999) has been the main point of reference for the analysis of gender in Banks' works for over two decades. Schoene-Harwood asserts that *The Wasp Factory* interrogates patriarchal gender norms and reopens the discourse around norms and deviances, centres, and margins, thus problematising stereotypical perceptions of gender as well as the established patriarchal order "and its subversive regeneration from within" (Schoene-Harwood 146).

Combining an analysis of genre markers with the interrogation of gender representation, elements of gothic fiction[7] in Banks' works have been connected

6 For example: Joseph Norman (2021); Sara Martín Alegre (2021); Folkert Degenring (2008, 2010); Paul Kincaid (2013, 2017).

7 Unrelated to the analysis of gender, Gothic traits in Banks' fiction have been repeatedly examined, for example by Victor Sage (1996), David Punter (1999), Duncan Petrie (2004), and Martyn Colebrook (2010).

to the analysis of masculinity within the oeuvre. Essays by Scott Brewster (2006) and Kirsty Macdonald (2007) critically approach Banks' masculine gender portrayals by analysing them as 'gothic masculinities'. Brewster, whose analytical focus lies on *The Wasp Factory* and who briefly refers to *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge* later on, mainly concentrates on the implementation of gothic motifs in the novel and their effects on Frank's coming-of-age and identity formation; he focusses on the effects that growing up in a paternalistic world full of misinformation and secrets have on Frank, who counteracts his lack of reference and control with the creation of a closed, self-referential ritualistic system (Brewster 180-183). Analysing gender in *The Wasp Factory*, Macdonald draws on established theories by Judith Butler, Marjorie Garber, and Jack Halberstam, deriving her definition of 'gothic masculinities' from Schoene-Harwood and Sigmund Freud. She situates androgyny outside of the gender binary and inside of the sphere of gothic liminality, concluding with the assessment that humans are "too inherently gendered to allow for liminality" (Macdonald, "Anti-heroes and Androgynes" 49). Georgina Bozsó builds on Macdonald's study by interrogating the gender performances of the Cauldhames in "Manifestations of Masculinities in Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory*" (2017), deducing that binary constructions of sex and gender cannot serve as a stable basis for the family's identity formation (145).

Most criticism on gender in Banks' novels evolves around the conception and display of gender in *The Wasp Factory* and, if applicable, uses the novel as blueprint for the comparison with one or two other novels, thereby employing Schoene-Harwood's 1999 article as a vantage point[8]. More comprehensive studies seldom touch upon the subject of gender and generally remain within the established distinction between Banks' science fiction and mainstream novels, dealing with either one or the other[9].

This project does not adhere to the distinction of Iain Banks' and Iain M. Banks' novels. However, regarding the history and conventions of the different genres Banks' novels are numbered among and influenced by, differences and distinctions in terms of gender representation might apply. Science-fiction literature has the potential to serve as an unlimited cognitive and moral playground

8 For example: Scott Brewster (2006); Kirsty Macdonald (2007); Folkert Degenring (2008, 2010); Sarah Falcus (2013); Georgina Bozsó (2017).

9 Martyn Colebrook and Katharine Cox's edited collection *The Transgressive Iain Banks. Essays on a Writer Beyond Borders* (2013) is an exception to this rule. 3 out of the 12 articles analyse SF novels alongside mainstream novels. The collection contains Sarah Falcus' essay "Contesting Gender in *The Wasp Factory*, *Whit* and *The Business*". Her findings are, however, not extrapolated to gain general insight into matters of gender representation in Iain Banks' novels.

for the reworking of any social or cultural concept, including gender, which can play an integral part in drafting new societal structures in utopian and dystopian worlds:

> In its simplest terms, sf and utopian fiction have been concerned with imagining progressive alternatives to the status quo, often implying critiques of contemporary conditions or possible future outcomes of current social trends. Science fiction, in particular, imagines change in terms of the whole human species, and these changes are often the results of scientific discoveries and inventions that are applied by human beings to their own social evolution. (Csicsery-Ronay JR 113)

One might assume that, compared to the unlimited potential of a science-fiction setting, Banks' literary depictions of gender in the 'mainstream' novels could only be more limited and conservative. As *The Wasp Factory* demonstrates, this is not necessarily the case. However, as has been argued before, *The Wasp Factory* (among many others of Banks' early novels) carries generic influences of the fantastic and the postmodern gothic among other genre markers. I will therefore start with a brief introduction to the genres most frequently connected to Banks' works in chapter 2. After outlining the generic origins, I will also outline potential gender stereotypes that emerged in specific generic traditions, thus connecting the genre overview to the gist of my analytical focus. After the introduction to Banks' genres, I will investigate the 'transgressiveness' that Colebrook and Cox (2013) attest to Banks' works, defining the term transgression and shedding a light on the subversive potential transgressions of genre and gender might carry.

Chapter 3 is devoted to an in-depth introduction to gender as a sociological concept. Briefly outlining the works of Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, Erving Goffman, and Judith Butler, which were essential to the genesis of gender as a workable concept, I will then add to that foundation by introducing sociological, psychological, philosophical, and literary approaches to the connection between gender and violence. I will take a special look at violence and masculinity[10] as well as at violence and femininity, and I will discuss sexualised violence as the pinnacle of the intersection of gender and violence. My method of analysis can be characterised as an interdisciplinary attempt to combine sociological, psychological, and philosophical insights on gender and violence in qualitative literary analysis.

10 I use the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to maintain terminological coherence with the theory and criticism introduced in this study, at the same time being critically aware that both terms signify and reproduce the binary construction of gender difference. However, I will use these terms in order to facilitate a critical and precise analysis of traditional gender stereotypes. During my analysis, I aim at emphasising the constructedness of gender difference and the active process of assigning gender to behaviour and emotions by using the terms 'masculinisation' and 'feminisation' wherever possible.

After establishing a theoretical framework, the ensuing literary analysis will be divided into five consecutive parts. Starting with a thorough analysis of gender in its interconnection with violence in Banks' first published 'mainstream' (*The Wasp Factory*, 1984) and science-fiction novel (*Use of Weapons*, 1987) in chapters 4 and 5 respectively, I will examine to what extent gender stereotypes are (re)produced in these novels, in how far violence is gendered, and how it, in turn, plays a role in the production of stereotypical gender performances, how the traditional sex- and gender binary is addressed, and whether there is evidence of a departure from traditional binaries and attributions that carries the potential to subvert gender norms. Subsequently, in chapter 6, I will analyse if and how androgyny is realised as a 'space in between' the gender binary in the SF novel *Excession* (1996) and how gendered violence is used to support a stereotypically masculine gender identity within a biologically female body. With knowledge thus gained about the relevance of violence for gendered character conception, I will conduct a cross-sectional analysis of sexualised violence in Banks' science-fiction and mainstream novels in chapter 7.

A critical assessment by Sarah Falcus (2013) serves as a starting point for my investigation of gender and violence:

> Gender is a complex subject in the 'mainstream' novels of Iain Banks. It is not unusual to find women as victims of male sexual aggression [...]. Whilst this may highlight the repression and dangers of patriarchal masculinity and exposes women's subordination in this system, it nevertheless runs perilously close at times to the traditional portrayal of women as little more than sexual objects, perhaps producing a vicarious pleasure in the reader. (Falcus 123)

Falcus makes an important point for any analysis focussing on gender in Banks' novels, mainstream and SF alike: with the frequency and intensity gender stereotypes and sexualised violence are displayed in the novels, there is only a fine line between critically addressing and reproducing the traditional status quo. In the acknowledgements preceding her doctoral dissertation *Culture-al Subjectivities*, Jude Roberts echoes this uncertainty by thanking Iain Banks for being "gracious and infuriating in (almost) equal measure" (*Culture-al Subjectivities* 4).

I intend to present a detailed and conclusive analysis of the ambiguous representation of gender in Banks' fiction, bridging the established separation between science fiction and 'mainstream' and highlighting the importance of violence in the literary construction of gender, to be able to critically evaluate the perceived 'progressiveness' of the gender portrayal in his oeuvre, assessing the extent to which it does reproduce gendered stereotypes, or realises the subversion of the traditional gender binary.

Jude Roberts' "Iain M. Banks' Culture of Vulnerable Masculinities" (2014) is the only article explicitly addressing the reproduction of stereotypical hege-

monic masculinity in Banks' novels. With recourse to Judith Butler's theories on gender performance and vulnerability, she attempts to refute the accusation, drawing a more complex picture of masculinity based on the vulnerability of the male body when subjected to or witnessing violence in *The Player of Games* and *Use of Weapons*. Her line of argument will be of relevance throughout my examinations of masculinity and violence, but particularly regarding the analysis of sexualised violence in chapter 7. In chapter 8, I will discuss Sara Martín Alegre's interpretation of the Culture as an anti-patriarchal society[11], drawing on the findings of my previous analyses and extrapolating a cohesive assessment of the gendered character conception within and outside of the Culture series. Concluding, I will revisit my initial theorising of genre and gender in order to evaluate the productivity of the theoretical framework for the conducted literary analyses.

11 In her 2021 article "The Culture against Patriarchy: Djan Seriy Anaplian, Pariah and Defector in Iain Banks's *Matter*", Martín Alegre analyses the eighth instalment of the Culture series to support her claim that "Iain M. Banks's science fiction does not at all exclude the feminine" but expresses "a firm anti-patriarchal position" (95). I will provide my own reading of *Matter* in chapter 8, critically discussing Martín Alegre's assessment.

2. Iain Banks vs. Iain M. Banks

Iain Banks' works have been published as two different genres in the UK and Europe. His science-fiction novels were published under the name Iain M. Banks, the 'M.' standing for Menzies, his adopted middle name, probably serving as a nod to his Scottish heritage. Iain Banks, without the 'M.', is used in the publication of his 'mainstream' novels. The term 'mainstream' serves, in this case, only to distinguish his science-fiction novels from 'the rest' – regardless of whether those novels are considered realist fiction, coming of age novels, or experimental genre-blenders. There are conflicting answers to the question whether this was his initial idea or rather the doing of his main publishing house, Little Brown Group. However, the genre separation seems somewhat ironic. Ever since Banks' 'mainstream' work had started to get critical acclaim in the mid and late 1980s, critics increasingly emphasised its genre-transgressing potential: "in particular, Banks' first three novels, which remain grouped under the 'mainstream' label, contain heavy doses of horror, fantasy, and SF" (Caroti, *The Culture Series of Iain M. Banks* 9). Not only does *The Wasp Factory* (1984) indulge in gory portrayals of compensatory violence, it also depicts the world of a highly unreliable first-person narrator whose recollection of his life story borders on the fantastic more than once. One narrative strand in *Walking on Glass* (1985) is set in an environment resembling a gothic labyrinth, its narrative structure being, to say the least, Kafkaesque[12]. Most of the plot of *The Bridge* (1986) relies on extensive dream sequences set in a world resembling, but not identical with, our own. Many of Banks' 'mainstream' works from the 90s and the 2000s display similar genre-transgressive tendencies, though more subtly and potentially not to the same extent.

With the increase of the academic reception of Banks' science-fiction, it became evident that elements of fantasy, fairy tales, and myth too permeated those novels (Hubble 62). Most critics are of the opinion that Iain Banks consciously implements both stereotypic genre conventions and the transgression of genre boundaries in a playful and ironic way. It stands to reason that Banks, choosing to disregard generic boundaries by repeatedly transgressing or transitioning through generic conventions, is no exemption to a literary tradition that is continuously reinventing itself ever since its very beginning. One could therefore ask whether the whole matter of genre, subgenre, and generic conventions has remained a helpful category of literary analysis.

12 Contrarily to the novels' promotion within the UK, in Germany *Walking on Glass* was distributed and partially received as science fiction.

Tzvetan Todorov, French-Bulgarian philosopher and structuralist literary critic, anticipates this train of thought in his introduction to *The fantastic. A structural approach to a literary genre* (1970), rhetorically asking for the reason to "raise these outdated problems" (8) and quoting the eminent authority of narratology, Gérard Genette, to provide an answer:

> 'Literary discourse is produced and developed according to structures it can transgress only because it finds them, even today, in the field of its language and style' ([Genette] *Figures* II). For there to be a transgression, the norm must be apparent. Moreover, it is doubtful that contemporary literature is entirely exempt from generic distinctions; it is only that these distinctions no longer correspond to the notions bequeathed by the literary theories of the past. (Todorov 8)

To consider the effects of both reproductions of generic traits and transgressions of genre within Banks' works, an introductory framework of genre, its theory, and the conventions of the different subgenres used or referred to within Banks' oeuvre will be provided hereafter. This is also relevant regarding the intertextual tradition of literary creativity:

> Dealing with any text belonging to 'literature,' we must take into account a double requirement. First, we must be aware that it manifests properties that it shares with all literary texts, or with texts belonging to one of the sub-groups of literature (which we call, precisely, genres). It is inconceivable, nowadays, to defend the thesis that everything in the work is individual, a brand-new product of personal inspiration, a creation with no relation to works of the past. Second, we must understand that a text is not only the product of a pre-existing combinatorial system (constituted by all that is literature in posse); it is also a transformation of that system.
>
> We can already say, then, that every literary study must participate in a double movement: from the particular work to literature generally (or genre), and from literature generally (from genre) to the particular work. (Todorov 6-7)

In the following, I will introduce definitions and conventions of the (sub)genres that have been identified within Banks' oeuvre. After outlining an introductory framework to science fiction, fairy tale, myth, and gothic fiction, I will discuss a theoretical basis for transgressions, transitions, and mergers within Banks' fiction and consider the productive potential of genre transgressions, finally approaching deconstruction as a necessary instrument for the subversion of preconceptions.

2.1 Genres in Banks' Fiction

From antiquity onwards, poets and philosophers have concerned themselves with genre (Caraher 29). In some respects, it seems to speak to innate desires, necessitated through the human urge to break everything down to its key components, to classify and 'create order'. It is also fuelled by the need to compart-

mentalise and focus our efforts of understanding (cf. Brigg 2002; Crimmins 2009). Without genre, literature would be one overwhelming bulk of what is and what could be, whereas "[w]hen we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a very particular enterprise: we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them" (Todorov 3).

Genres are necessary to develop literary groups characterised by similarities. Those groups can then be studied under the pretext of their historical, social, and political context, and the works of literature within these groups can be analysed concerning their intertextual connectivity. Like most man-made tools of classification, genre is primarily constructed retrospectively and arbitrarily; but at the same time, existing genres affect the production and publication of literature still in the making: certain authors are marketed as science fiction authors, which is why their works will be considered first and foremost under a pretext of the history and the conventions of the SF genre. Others, like Margaret Atwood, are continuously resisting the label 'SF author', even though their works display a great number of motifs associated with this genre[13]. While this affects the way genre is received and taught in academic contexts, there is a growing tendency among scholars, literary critics, authors, and readers alike to challenge prevailing notions of genre and its boundaries and reintroduce fluidity and flexibility to the discourse (Scott 17). As Brian Caraher summarises, genre theory itself historically developed as a description of a flexible and evolving system of classification:

> Genre theory possesses one of the oldest pedigrees in the history of Western, Eurocentric literary and cultural criticism. Aristotle's *Poetics* (circa 330 BCE) […] offers a study of actual genres developing historically and in relation to cultural practices and individual innovators. […] For Aristotle, genres have histories and cultural motives and may evolve and cross-pollenate depending upon a variety of specific social factors and happenstances. Later critical writings of Horace, Scaliger, Sidney and Pope among others, however, tend to codify and systematise classical and neoclassical notions of genre. The developmental, fluid, changing, even combatative sense of genres once found in the work of Plato and Aristotle unfortunately became lost to the reificiation and conservation of classical genres as templates for later, neoclassical ideals of literary practice. (Caraher 29)

Up to (and including) Northrop Frye's formalist hold on genre theory in the 1950s, the field became increasingly static and inflexible. Frye's highly influential *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) reformed the 'high fashion' of archetypal criti-

13 Atwood's rejection of the SF term is a continuous topic of discussion among genre scholars; therefore, it is used here exemplarily in terms of marketing strategies. A 2013 article contains an audio interview with Atwood referring to her preferred terminology 'speculative fiction' and her discussing this topic with Ursula K. LeGuin: https://www.wired.com/2013/09/geeks-guide-margaret-atwood/.

cism (Schroeter 543), but it is in some ways a product of literary theory in transition from author-centred, biographical approaches towards formalist and text-centred modes of analysis, caught in the process of "coming to terms with developments in modern social sciences and with the historical development of genres in time and cultures" (Caraher 30-31). Frye's work prominently influenced literary criticism in general and genre theory in particular until the 1980s, when deconstruction approaches (such as Derrida's) made their mark on literary analysis and reception. Contemporary genre studies are a field vastly broadened, focussing mostly on specification, diversification, and connecting genre to social and cultural tendencies (Crimmins 46). Although the matter has thus become increasingly difficult and time-intensive to grasp, distinguishing literary genres still has a practical value for any form of literary study. It allows a thorough focus on a specific set of literary features. It frames a space of action for the interpretative efforts, and it adds a scholarly negotiated set of background information to the imaginary playground on which the analysis takes place. Analysing how a genre affects the creation of meaning (by the text as well as by the reader) allows the researcher to dive into the realms of individual psychology and produce potentially comparative results at the same time. "[L]iterature has always tied the question of genre to the question of what literature itself is […]. Indeed, the ability to know what a literary genre is (and to know what the true genres are) is a measure of the extent to which one knows in what literature inheres" (Dowd 21). The study of genre is thus, at the same time, as essential to our understanding of literature as it is challenging. Genre is, however, also a means to create order and meaning and establish identity, as Foucault describes: "the history of the order imposed on things...of that which for a given culture is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities" (Foucault quoted in Dowd 11). Derrida emphasises the importance of variety and imperfection in genre theory, applying the terms 'purity' and 'impurity' as a literary substitute to the universally applicable concepts of law and counter-law, as Crimmins explains:

> Law and counter-law form a coequal pair. A specific genre demands, at once, purity and impurity from each of its instances: each instance must be like the others and also different from them. If there were no impurity the genre would collapse into self-identity. If there were no purity the genre would cease to function. […] Like identity and difference, the law and the counter-law are intertwined at their most fundamental; neither may appear without beforehand summoning the other. (Crimmins 50)

Coming back to Todorov's demand to first present the norm, or, in Derrida's terms, the 'law', to make the divergence visible, in the following I will highlight genre markers and briefly summarise generic conventions. I will also present difficulties of categorisation, which will consequently lead to the topic of trans-

gression, including an approach to how (gendered) genre markers can serve to stabilise or undermine the boundaries of genres.

Science Fiction

It is likely that no literary genre has resisted the grasp of definition as long as science fiction has. In its status as an almost indeterminable genre, it enjoys the freedom of unlimited creation and exploration of completely foreign imaginative spheres since it is set in alternate worlds, outer space, different galaxies, and in past, future, or no temporal correlation whatsoever to our own world. Science fiction literature enjoys growing popularity amongst all age groups, employing methods of "estrangement and cognition" (Suvin quoted in Clute et al. §2) and thereby facilitating literary experiences of traditional themes and motifs in new and unusual settings.

There are no set boundaries that limit the creational force of science fiction literature, for the genre mostly eludes a consistent workable definition (Clute et al. §17). SF literature is therefore in an advantageous position when it comes to concerning itself with paradigms of our time, like gender representation and performance:

> In ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Welterfahrungen gelingt es der Science Fiction, auf Einflüsse wissenschaftlicher, kultureller und politisch-sozialer Paradigmen und ihren [sic] Veränderungen, die auch hervorgerufen wurden von Erkenntnissen der kritischen Ansätze feministischer Theorien, zu reagieren und diese für ihre Zwecke, wie etwa der Repräsentation neuer Strukturen und Ordnungen, von Utopien und Dystopien, zu nutzen. (Köllhofer 20)
>
> In analysis of past and present world experiences, science fiction manages to react to influences of scientific, cultural, political, and social paradigms as well as their changes, partially evoked by findings of critical feminist theory, and to employ these for its own purposes, like the representation of new structures and orders, in utopias and dystopias.[14]

SF has the potential to serve as an infinite cognitive and moral test area for any cultural or social paradigm, be it speculative or historical. A factor that adds to this highly creative potential is the circumstance that science fiction did not develop purely and exclusively as a literary genre[15], as Attebery and Hollinger note; it "spills over into other genres […]; it freely exchanges techniques and

14 Own translation.

15 Arguably, multimodality and intermedial exchanges and influences shape most genres in our time. However, the rise of SF is historically linked to the rapid and extensive scientific advances of the last century as well as to the globalisation of economic processes and the ever-expanding television and media coverage, particularly of the mid-century Soviet and US-American space programs.

ideas with nonfictional forms such as scientific popularizations and utopian tracts" (6). Additionally, the existence of aliens, intergalactic travel, and futuristic technology does not automatically make a story into a piece of science fiction. Historically, since its very origins, science fiction has displayed a sense of big adventure, already immanent in what Hugo Gernsback referred to as 'scientifiction' in 1926:

> By 'scientifiction' I mean the Jules Verne, H G Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story – a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision ... Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading – they are always instructive. They supply knowledge ... in a very palatable form ... New adventures pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow ... Many great science stories destined to be of historical interest are still to be written ... Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but progress as well. (Gernsback quoted in Clute et al. §3)

Here, Gernsback also introduces the didactic component of science fiction, reading its instructiveness as a sign of social progress. In fact, science fiction is often regarded as the fictitious playground on which contemporary social tendencies are played out to their (extreme) end. Dystopic visions hereby seem more prominent than utopias, maybe implying that humanity is more easily impressed by a glimpse towards its imminent downfall than by fictionalised ways toward general social improvement. On the other hand, Köllhofer (2008) describes a recent development towards 'heterotopias' through the connection of utopian and dystopian elements that promotes the coexistence of different concepts within the same work, which might "accelerate the disappearance of the unified subject" (Köllhofer 57).

With SF's introduction to the US classrooms in the 70s, the attempts to find a workable academic definition grew more rigorous:

> To teach a subject you need to know what it is; and, especially in the case of sf (which blurs so easily into Fantasy on one side and Postmodernist fictions – Fabulations – on another, Technothrillers and political thrillers on a third, mainstream works about scientific discovery on a fourth, not to mention Lost-World stories or Utopias or Future-War stories or stories set in the prehistoric past), you also need to know what it isn't. Thus, in academic definitions there was a new emphasis on drawing the boundaries of sf more precisely, in terms of its literary strategies as well as its ideational content, sometimes using a vocabulary already developed in different spheres of literary criticism by structuralist and other critics. (Clute et al. §9)

As previously mentioned, SF critic Darko Suvin tried to frame the genre in between the concepts of estrangement and cognition in 1972; the former is understood in a Brechtian sense here and could be substituted by the term *Verfremdungseffekt* (Clute et al. §10), whereas the latter describes rational understanding. As many others, this attempt to grasp the genre fails to succinctly distinguish science fiction from fantasy, particularly the kind concerned with a quest

for knowledge. According to James and Mendlesohn, the difference between fantasy and science fiction lies in the configuration of the 'unlikely': whereas unlikely occurrences, systems or structures in fantasy literature are oftentimes explained by magic, the unlikely in science fiction "is grounded in the scientifically possible" (E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 1) – imagining scientific progress that seems far away in our world but is still theoretically possible.

It seems that particularly formalist attempts to pin down the genre are destined to be insufficient since science fiction does not seem graspable as a linguistically homogenous form of writing. Since Suvin,

> the clearest (or most aggressive) definitions [have often proven to be] the least definitive, although many sceptics have been attracted to Damon Knight's 'Science fiction is what we point to when we say it' or Norman Spinrad's 'Science fiction is anything published as science fiction'. Both these 'definitions' have a serious point, of course: that, whatever else sf may be, it is certainly a publishing category, and in the real world this is of more pragmatic importance than anything the theorists may have to say about it. On the other hand, the label 'sf' on a book is wholly subject to the whims of publishers and editors, and the label has certainly appeared on some very unlikely books. An additional complication arises because some writers fight hard to avoid the label, perhaps feeling that it might deleteriously affect their sales and/or reputations. (Clute et al. §16)

Science fiction literature still suffers from a niche-effect and is slowly recovering from a tradition of negative perception among readers of literary fiction. The book trade and many critics of the past centuries have established a distinction between genre fiction and "'popular' literature (detective stories, serialized novels, science fiction, etc.)" (Todorov 6) and literary fiction (which is generally regarded as having literary merit).

In November 2017, *The Guardian* interviewed Chris Gavaler, member of the English department of Washington and Lee University and author of "The Genre effect", a study he conducted together with Dan Johnson of the Department of Psychology in order to test "how identifying a text as science fiction makes readers automatically assume it is less worthwhile, in a literary sense, and thus devote less effort to reading it" (*The Guardian* n.p.). In the interview, Gavaler explains they found that "words such as 'airlock' and 'antigravity' are cues for test subjects to assume a story isn't worth a careful read" (Flood n.p.). Consequently, readers sporting this prejudice would be less likely to buy anything published or otherwise listed under the SF-label. Assumptions like this could have influenced the politics of Banks' publishing houses: distinguishing between Iain M. Banks for science fiction and Iain Banks for mainstream fiction could have been an attempt not to taint the author's mainstream works with the readers' constraint against science fiction.

Prejudiced perceptions like this are starkly contrasted by the distinct anticipatory potential of the science fiction genre. As Köllhofer (2008) points out, the

genre is almost predestined to transcend elements of our social perceptions and habits through the critical and undaunted treatment and further development of contemporary political and social problems. For example, regarding technological, social, global, and economical changes, prospective developments can be anticipated by thinking contemporary developments through to their (imagined but logically verifiable) end in the context of a literary work of art (Köllhofer 19). This makes the genre particularly interesting from a gender studies point of view, despite its rather sexist history: "Traditionally, sf has been considered a predominantly masculine field, which through its focus on science and technology, 'naturally' excludes women and by implication, considerations of gender" (Merrick 241).

Designed by men for a predominantly male readership, many science fiction works up to the early 1970s reinforce traditional gender performances with only small potential for derivation: the story is centered around male characters, one of them being the protagonist and stereotypical hero of the story; the female character (if existent) is either the prize for the successful completion of his quest, the insufficient "other" of his world, or even a threat to his existence (Carrasco Carrasco 204). Thus, the displayed normative gender roles were traditionally restricted to a very narrow field of action.

On the other hand, science fiction literature by women (as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and even feminist science fiction (as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*) already existed well before the 1950s and shall at this point not be ignored; still to date, works of this kind are, by percentage, greatly outnumbered by non-feminist works (Donaweth 215). Feminism in science fiction was not a matter of academic interest until the late 1960s, when feminist science fiction evolved alongside second wave feminism, with Western women drawing attention to the cultural expropriation of their bodies. With the development of the academic field of Women's Studies in the 1970s, feminism in science fiction as well as feminist science fiction gained a foothold in the literary scene (Donaweth 218-220). Since the 1980s, in particular through postmodern science fiction, gender and its performances have become an important theme within the genre.

Space Opera

Space opera is understood as a subgenre of science fiction. In 1941, science fiction and fantasy author Wilson Tucker coined the term rather pejoratively, calling it "hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn, spaceship yarn" (Tucker quoted in Sawyer 505). Science fiction scholar Gary Westfahl presented his take on the subgenre alongside Tucker's:

> First, space opera involves a 'space-ship': like the nautical fiction from which it borrows terminology and tropes, space opera depicts journeys through uncharted realms in vessels bringing humans into contact with the mysterious stuff separating their safe harbours. Even narratives occurring on the surfaces of alien planets must have nearby spaceports, creating the possibilities of departures to or arrivals from other worlds. Stories on worlds without access to space travel, or stories featuring travel to other planets by mystical means, are better termed planetary romances.
>
> Second, space opera is a 'yarn' – an exciting adventure story. Typically positing a universe filled with human or alien spacefarers – some hostile, some friendly – space opera is a literature of conflicts, usually with violent resolutions. [...]
>
> Third, space opera tends to become 'hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn'; like westerns and domestic dramas, it often succumbs to formulaic plots and mediocrity. (Westfahl 197-198)

Westfahl tries to explain Tucker's repulsion in the last part of his definition: within the science fiction genre, space opera was the subgenre traditionally the least respected because it was mostly employing stereotypical characters and presenting uninventive narratives. This definition, however, which is comparable to prejudging notions of science fiction in comparison to literary fiction, does not do justice to the subgenre in its manifold forms of appearance. Scowled upon in its early stages of existence, the term's negative connotation started to dismantle increasingly "as fans started to use the term for stories that they liked rather than despised" (Sawyer 505). Still carrying stereotypical implementations, since the 1990s the term has been used to refer to SF stories "committed to action and adventure, focused upon the heroic, and frequently tak[ing] a series or serial form which allows for either a sense of escalation or constant variations on a comparatively narrow set of themes" (ibid.). Banks' Culture novels are consensually assembled under the space opera label, which is specifically applicable to *Consider Phlebas*, the first novel of the series. It gives an explicit forum to action and adventure sequences, and its main characters (humans and 'aliens' alike) are adventurous spacefarers through and through. The meticulous attention to detail that was paid in creating the story worlds of the Culture novels fits perfectly into the fashion of "wide-screen baroque" (Aldiss quoted in Sawyer 508) that was coined by renowned British SF author Brian Aldiss and has since become a key identifying feature of space operas created within the last couple of decades. Those stories' attention to and love of detail explore a narrative broad screen

> to impressive effect. The use of space and space travel as a default location for a sf story, of large concepts and conflicts, and of increasing detail and scale – building up from rather than merely imitating earlier examples – seems to have created a subgenre which is by no means 'outworn.' Space opera has developed a kind of shared 'otherworld' in which readers can share their familiarity with a megatext while they observe their own world's issues transformed. (Sawyer 508)

As Andy Sawyer adds to his résumé of the subgenre, "stereotyped space opera has minimal characterization, and vast settings of interstellar conflicts between clearly defined 'good' and 'bad' sides" (Sawyer 505). In his essay on the equation of femininity and 'alien' otherness ("*Women, Aliens and Monsters*", 2010), Folkert Degenring identifies the subversive potential emerging from space opera's strong genre-specific fixation on binary opposition. According to him, the inversion of traditional genre and gender attributions and the dissolution of binary structures can serve to abolish the generic display of stereotypical power dynamics and open the genre towards he exploration of new character and quest conceptions, and in doing so create room for the acknowledgement of the genre's discursive imprint, making way for new literary reflexions. He sees this kind of development within the new or postmodern space opera, *Consider Phlebas* being one of its founding texts, and compares the evolvement of this new subgenre to the emergence of historiographic metafiction from the genre of historic fiction within literary postmodernism (Degenring 106).

In her influential work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon, probably one of the most prolific scholars on postmodern literature, laconically describes postmodernism as "the most over- and underdefined" term in "both current cultural theory and contemporary writing" (3). Resulting from the cultural and social aftermaths of both world wars, fascism, and the holocaust, Stuart Sim considers a general "scepticism about authority, received wisdom" as well as "cultural and political norms" (3) a central trait of postmodernism. Identifying Friedrich Nietzsche's call for a "re-evaluation of all values" (quoted in Sim 3) as "a battle-cry for the movement" (ibid.), Sim highlights the deconstructivist nature of the postmodern discourse, which busies itself with questioning any political ideology or religious theory claiming the possession of the ultimate truth. Just as postmodernism is "contradictory and works within the very systems it attempts to subvert" (Hutcheon 4), thereby breaking with the modernist ideal of 'making it new' and thus questioning the possibility of original creation, postmodern space operas renounce conventions of traditional space opera *despite* presenting plot structures similar to the traditional narratives. Those structures are then subtly reduced to absurdity by means of irony and cynicism, decentring the narrative to make room for formerly marginalised topics and characters:

> Stories aspire to the epic scope of classic space opera but may be tempered by a hard-edged cynicism, deeper than the self-serving pragmatism of Ruritanian space opera, or even grave pessimism about humanity's future. Instead of featuring only humans and human aliens, authors embrace extreme variety in forms of intelligent life – humans, aliens, machines or combinations thereof – crafted by evolution, technology or bioengineering. Other heresies include a universe where humans are not dominant, means of transportation other than starships, a rich texture of literary and cultural allusions and an

> overtly serious intent juxtaposed with a lingering aura of escapist adventure. (Westfahl 206)

In that way, postmodern space opera inherits dominant features from traditional space opera, by and large treating this inheritance in ways that counteract their former effects, while at the same time expanding the scale of motifs, themes, and characters and nevertheless maintaining that distinctive sense of great adventure. One of the most important features of postmodern space opera is the bending or even overt counteracting of the binary in any occurring form, which makes this subgenre increasingly interesting for gender analysis. However, in their longstanding histories, fairy tales and myths have heavily contributed to the establishment of said binary since they have been dominantly shaped by the societal need for structure and moral guidance.

Fairy Tale

Our literary heritage developed from a culture-specific but globally applicable tradition of oral storytelling. Most of the oral tales contained myths and legends, examples of good conduct, and "provided guidelines on how to overcome serious challenges, survival struggles, or master problematic interpersonal relations" (Jones and Schwabe 3). Of course, myths, fairy tales, and fables are not categorically the same or freely interchangeable, but in the history of their oral and written development they are intertwined in so far as it is nearly impossible to date the origin of certain stories or distinguish the 'original' from the 'derivation':

> [C]onstant interplay and mutual influence renders it impossible to describe the fairy tale, within the broader context of the folktale, as an exclusively literary or an exclusively oral phenomenon. It also makes it virtually impossible to date the origin of any one tale. […] [T]he very structure of some tales and the vivid power of some of their characters have guaranteed their survival through both oral and literary transmission. (Davidson and Chaudhri, "Introduction" 2)

The ability to differentiate between fairy tale and myth seems to be of great importance for most literary scholars; however, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp argues that there is no objective reason for it. According to him, the classification is arbitrary: what is known as folktale in one society may be a myth in the other. Motifs and forms reappear in other myths and tales of the same community since the oral tradition furthers the remoulding and transformation of the mythical (Propp 176). Vladimir Propp's work is a good starting point for any academic attempt to grasp the structure and form of fairy tales. His formalist *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) charts 31 different character functions which define the plot of oral and literary fairy tales. Although his analysis concentrates on Russian folk tales, his results are applicable to Western fairy tales without

alterations, so that "[e]ven a long literary fairy tale such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* can be fruitfully analysed according to Propp's system" (Philip 40). According to Propp, "the fairy tale in its morphological bases amounts to a myth" (Propp 176), which again invokes a sense of blurred boundaries and problematic classification:

> The definition of the fairy tale, as opposed to any other kind of narrative, is fraught with problems. The standard term among folklorists is the German *Märchen*, which is perhaps best translated as 'wonder tale'. They are stories with an element of fantasy or magic, located in the world of 'once upon a time'. *Märchen* are only one kind of oral narrative. A folklorist may collect from a single informant myths, fairy tales, local, aetiological, religious and historical legends, tales of ghosts, fairies and witches, jokes, nursery tales, and anecdotes from personal experience. The artificial dividing lines between these categories of story inevitably blur; narrators may even claim the fantastic events of fairy tales as their personal experience. (Philip 39-40)

In his essay "Creativity and Tradition in the Fairy Tale" (2003), Neil Philip emphasises the juxtaposition of generic fluidity on one hand and the distinct structural peculiarity of fairy tales on the other hand. He celebrates the intersections with other (oral and written) forms of storytelling, which ultimately results in his statement that "[t]ransformation is the key to the fairy tale, and fairy tales have been endlessly transforming themselves throughout history and, by some strange alchemy, endlessly staying the same" (Philip 40). This very distinctive structure, supported by a specific linguistic register, is probably the only aspect of fairy tales most definitions would agree on. Without a doubt, most Western readers would expect the phrase 'once upon a time', maybe even followed by 'far, far away', to be the introduction to a fairy tale. The memorability of those phrases is high, they are therefore suited to produce a certain frame of reference among readers, for example to raise the anticipation of something magical, mystical, or otherwise inexplicable, something far removed from the readers' own worlds, since the "tales invite […] human beings to propel themselves into a fantastic world filled with supernatural creatures, demons, and deities" (Jones and Schwabe 3). At the same time, in opposition to the estrangement reached through the incorporation of mythical figures, a fairy tale register also has a homely, nostalgic effect, allowing readers to recognise familiar narrative and linguistic patterns, potentially invoking memories of their own past, their childhood days and stories told and retold by generations within the family.

> The formula 'Once upon a time' launches us immediately into a highly specified fantastic world, which is an escape from our own but an escape through a diametric fantastic reversal, so that the narrative world actually explores the underside of our conscious world. This world of escape is a controlled world, controlled not by the archfiend within us but by the conventions of the fantastic genre itself. Where we had always sensed disorder, suddenly we see there can be order. Even though the fairy tale is based on poetic invention, it represents a reality, however fictionalized. (Carpi 6-7)

This controlled world that establishes order does so not only through the conventions of the fantastic but also through the social traditions and cultural norms conveyed throughout the long history of fairy tales. The moral and didactic properties of fairy tales are particularly relevant concerning the gender images they portray. Because of their seemingly vital role in child rearing, fairy tales tend to impart gender stereotypes to broad levels of the population (Röhrich 114). "By the nineteenth century, the most influential body of popular tales, the Grimms' collection, labelled a girl bad and a boy bold for one and the same deed," fairy tale scholar Ruth Bottigheimer declares, explaining that this "curious polarization corresponded to social assumptions about gender in nineteenth-century Germany and Western culture as a whole in that period"[16] (37). According to German fairy tale scholar Lutz Röhrich, the desired key qualities of women in fairy tales include unswerving loyalty, total willingness to sacrifice, selflessness, the ability to suffer, and endurance, particularly within quest narratives, where women are on the mission to deliver their brothers, fathers, or (potential) husbands from misfortune. Many of these tales cast their heroines as girls during puberty who are coming of age and are marriageable upon completion of the quest (Röhrich 115-116).

Providing a brief overview of feminist fairy tale scholarship since the 1970s, Donald Haase places an emphasis on the findings of Canadian folklorist Kay Stone, who conducted empirical studies in reader-response criticism investigating the effects gender stereotypes in fairy tales had on women in North America:

> [Kay Stone's] initial studies confirmed that in North America a woman's experience of fairy tales relied on Grimm and Disney, whose tales did evince a paucity of active heroines. So the fact that many of Stone's respondents admitted to being influenced by the passive heroines they had encountered seemed to substantiate the role played by the classical fairy tale in promulgating gender stereotypes. But already in that early work Stone noted that some women whom she had interviewed about their childhood experience of fairy tales 'performed a fascinating feat of selective memory by transforming relatively passive heroines into active ones' ("Things" 49). In subsequent work, Stone explored this ambiguity, which attested ultimately not only to the variability of interpretation but also to a woman's ongoing and potentially liberating engagement with fairy tales over the course of her lifetime. (Haase 26)

16 Bottigheimer reasons that these assumptions about gender were initially a product of the increasingly bourgeois and urbanised society of the 18th century whose gendered divisions into spheres she derives from Jürgen Habermas, defining the masculine sphere as "public, dominant, held to be rational and to exist on a higher intellectual plane" and the feminine sphere as "reserved, natural, contained, and subservient, considered irrational and close to nature" (49).

Stone's studies illustrate the transformative individual potential of reader-response criticism, while at the same time acknowledging the existence of a fixed set of female gender stereotypes in fairy tales. Most fairy tale scholars try to navigate the ambiguity that results from the fairy tales' vital part in the upbringing of children: on the one hand, "the inscription of patriarchal values in the classic fairy tale" as well as the "appropriation of the genre by male editors and collectors" (Haase 14) should be critically addressed, while on the other hand the convergence of morality and luck historically played a significant role in the perception of fairy tales as an educationally valuable genre (Röhrich 180) with the pedagogical potential of raising children's critical awareness of injustice and violence (211). In the 1970s, feminist scholarship approached the genre from two completely opposing stances. While some critics "argued that folktales and fairy tales can advance the cause of women's liberation, because they depict strong females" (Haase 1), others tried to assess the damage the conveyed feminine gender stereotypes might have done to Western cultural norms and values[17].

Both approaches will become relevant when analysing the occurrence of fairy tale tropes that affect the characters' gender representations in Iain Banks' fiction. The 'mode of appearance' of fairy tale elements in postmodern literature is fittingly illustrated by Cathy Lynn Preston: "In postmodernity the 'stuff' of fairy tales exists as fragments (princess, frog, slipper, commodity relations in a marriage market) in the nebulous realm that we might most simply identify as cultural knowledge" (210). Embracing the postmodern literary conventions, Banks incorporates longer and shorter fairy tale references to varying degrees in his novels, but predominantly displays them in the Culture series. These references oftentimes blend with markers of the fantasy genre, which is closely connected to the dichotomous concept of estrangement and cognition Darko Suvin

17 Donald Haase gives a critical summary of what he calls "oversimplifications" (3) with which feminist criticism encountered fairy tales during the 1970s:

> In 1974, for example, Andrea Dworkin's *Woman Hating* echoed Lieberman's thesis by asserting that fairy tales shape our cultural values and understanding of gender roles by invariably depicting women as wicked, beautiful, and passive, while portraying men, in absolute contrast, as good, active, and heroic. Similarly, Susan Brownmiller, in the course of her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), offered the tale of 'Little Red Riding Hood' as a parable of rape and argued that fairy tales – particularly classic tales like 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White' – train women to be rape victims (309-310). And in 1978 Mary Daly began the first chapter of *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* by pointing to the fairy tale as a carrier of the toxic patriarchal myths that are used to deceive women […] (44). (3)

Haase nevertheless admits that the genre has a "problematic relation to social values and the construction of gender identity" (ibid.) and advocates for more complex critical approaches.

uses primarily to classify science fiction literature, and at the same time fantasy is regarded as fairy tale's direct literary descendant.

Fantasy

"Out of fairy tales and myths grew the genre that is now referred to as fantasy" (Jones and Schwabe 8), a genre that shares much with science fiction, in terms of publishing, sales, reputation, academic reception, and, lastly, the difficulties of definition. Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, two of the most prolific scholars on science fiction and fantasy literature, name the "presence of the impossible and the unexplainable" as the "most obvious construction of fantasy" (E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 3). This 'construction' at the same time serves as the basis in distinguishing fantasy from SF, which, in turn, "may be about the unlikely, but is grounded in the scientifically possible" (E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 1). In his elaborate article "Do you believe in magic? The Potency of the Fantasy Genre" (2016), Matthias Stephan explains the structural principle in creating the different narrative worlds of fantasy and SF literature, explaining Darko Suvin's concept of "nova" by referring to the supernatural elements that distinguish SF and fantasy from realist texts:

> The secondary world is that world created by the introduction of magic, essentially (supernatural) nova, and then added to a verisimilar world that the reader is familiar with. This allows the writer to not create everything, and instead rely on some aspects familiar to the reader (and also limit the amount of estrangement to those aspects critical to the story/plot/narrative or interesting for the explication and creation of the nova). Such verisimilar instruments could be the use of forests, deserts, oceans with similar tropes and stereotypes to those we are familiar with in 'realist' texts, to methods of transportation, weapons, and even physical laws and principles. The violations (nova) of the familiar (verisimilar) are those things that require explanation (supernatural in fantasy, pseudo-scientific in sci-fi). (Stephan 7)

Stephan's summary is also based on Suvin's concept of estrangement and cognition, therefore emphasising the potential structural similarities of SF and fantasy literature. However, fantasy literature bears distinct traits of its own, but the notions of what those distinct traits exactly are, vary greatly among the different academic approaches. For example, fantasy scholar Kathryn Hume regards fantasy literature as a response to literary mimesis (*Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, 1984), and Tzvetan Todorov limits the fantastic to a space in between 'the uncanny' and 'the marvellous' (*The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 1973). Based on Todorov, British academic Rosemary Jackson (*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1981) describes fantasy as a "literature of desire", arguing that "fantasy is innately subversive, in that it offers alternatives to and an escape from the 'real world'" (Jackson quoted in E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 4). Among con-

temporary critics of fantasy, such as Brian Attebery, Farah Mendlesohn, and Edward James, the terminology 'fuzzy set' has gained a certain foothold. The term is used to graphically describe the number of works considered fantasy literature, creating the image of a corpus 'fuzzing' out increasingly with greater distance to the core. According to Mendelsohn, 'fuzzy sets' exist in a plurality and determine fantasy "by the mode in which the fantastic enters the text" (E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 4). Mendlesohn and James agree on "understand[ing] fantasy as a conversation that is happening, as we write, between the authors of the texts and the readers" (4-5). Attributing elusive qualities like this to a genre does not necessarily simplify definitory approaches but rather illustrates the difficulties scholars encounter when trying to portray fantasy as a whole, encompassing subgenres such as children's stories, young adult fantasy, high fantasy, sword and sorcery, animal magic, urban fantasy, and many more.

However, in regard to the interplay of violence and gender in Banks' novels, Rosemary Jackson's assessment of fantasy literature as "innately subversive" (quoted in E. James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction" 4) is interesting in so far as it indicates potential for the renegotiation of gender stereotypes. According to Clute and Grand's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1999), gender representation in fantasy literature cuts both ways:

> Fantasy as a genre is generally perceived as more hospitable to women than science fiction and horror, and more flexible in the choices it offers than historical fiction or romance, yet the standard patriarchal bias imposes limitations which are seldom subverted or even questioned. Whereas sf has the potential to question gender roles and try to envision new ways of living, fantasy looks to the past, seeking out patterns and archetypes. (Clute and Grant 393)

If gender roles in fantasy literature are rooted in the historical past, writers can only gain inspiration from historical accounts or mythical stories of matriarchal societies when creating female characters or conceiving societies outside of the patriarchal norm (393-394). Apart from that, certain fantastic motifs, like the sword, can serve as a tool to circumvent the social hierarchy of the story world, but the disruption of the patriarchal norm only works for the individual (female) carrier, on a grander scale, the societal structure of the story world remains unaffected. Magic is another motif that sets individual women apart and potentially elevates them in the social hierarchy, but at the same time magic evokes certain archetypes:

> In the past, female magic users were seen in archetypal terms, according to their effect on the hero of the tale. Either they were evil or, as 'good fairies', they were effectively desexed by being presented as extremely small, old, ugly or immaterial. In modern fantasy the female magic user may well be the protagonist, often from a pariah elite, persecuted for her powers or her religion. (394)

The stereotypes of the evil witch and the good fairy are a staple in fantasy literature, in contemporary young adult fantasy often evolved into the good witch versus evil wizard topoi. Concerning the use of or talent for magic, gender stereotyping is also prevalent: female characters are often associated with "'natural' or earth-magic" (394), while male magic users engage in "book learning aimed at controlling universal powers" (ibid.). Similarly, the motivation to use magic seems to be gender coded: "Unless she is perceived as evil, a woman uses her powers for the good of others, either to help her community or to provide back-up strength to the hero" (ibid.). Additionally, according to Clute and Grant, the paths of the male and of the female fantasy hero diverge after the successful completion of their quest. Whereas the male hero's story will end after the completion of his quest, the female protagonist has to master the 'reintegration' into her community: "Knowing too much, or knowing something different, makes a woman an outsider" (ibid.). Throughout the centuries, knowledgeable women posed a threat to (patriarchal) communities, a threat only enhanced by the (suspected) wielding of supernatural forces, making them appear dangerously *uncanny* to their surroundings.

The Gothic

Taking its name from the second edition of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto. A Gothic Story* (1765), the gothic mode of writing experienced a first peak during the European Romantic period (Hogle, "Introduction" 1). Onwards through the literary productive Victorian Era, the gothic persisted, experiencing a new height in modern and postmodern literature. In an effort to characterise fiction that is "primarily or substantially Gothic" (2), Jerrold Hogle names a set of recurring features of gothic novels: a remote, ancient or antiquated setting, such as a castle, an old house, a graveyard, an island, or an antiquated and forgotten setting of the modern world, like a decaying storehouse or laboratory (ibid.). "Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise" (ibid.). In gothic novels, conventional reality and the possibility of the supernatural blend into each other, blurring boundaries between the psychological and the physical. Emphasising the recurrence of what "can no longer be successfully buried from view" (ibid.), Hogle's characterisation of the gothic is based on Freud's "The 'Uncanny'" (1919). Examining the psychological roots of the horror typical for gothic literature, Freud defines the 'uncanny' as a particular sense of dread connected to the defamiliarisation of the formerly familiar, often together with the involuntary return of what was formerly repressed (Freud, "Uncanny" 13). Tying those aspects together, he introduces 'the

double' as an uncanny concept, describing it as "a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect" (10). After its creation and subsequent repression, upon its return the double, however, becomes a "vision of terror" (ibid.).

The gothic motif of the double, or *doppelgänger*, has gained a certain foothold in Western literature, and according to Colebrook it is particularly prominent in the Scottish literary tradition:

> The related tropes of the Other and the doubled character are deployed by earlier Scottish writers to heighten the Gothic horror of their texts. Robert Louis Stevenson presents these tropes in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), as does James Hogg in *Private Confessions and Memoirs of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Moreover, the Gothic convention of fracturing and doubling identity, and the related convention of the unreliable narrator are connected to important aspects of Scottish culture. […] [T]he strategies of the Gothic narrative echo the Caledonian *antysyzygy* [sic]. (Colebrook, "Journeys" 218)

'Caledonian antisyzygy', a term coined in 1919 by Gregory Smith in *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, is often used to describe "the recurrent dichotomy of the realist and fantastic modes in Scottish fiction" (Schoene-Harwood 133). The merger of realism and fantastic is thus not only an explicitly gothic trait but has also been recognised as a recurring phenomenon in the Scottish literary tradition, connecting both on a substantial level.[18]

The gothic relates to gender and sexuality primarily through the trope of the *other*, with early gothic novels painting the female as anxiety-inducing, in its threat only surpassed by the incongruence of gender and (heteronormative) sexuality, or by the ambiguity of gender and sexuality. The ambiguous representation of gender has a longstanding tradition in gothic literature, and since the 18th century, it has been used in gothic novels to explore "the workings of patriarchal politics" (Heiland 5). The gothic was among the first genres to, if not critically interrogate, at least interestedly play around with the traditional gender binary, thereby making gender stereotypes visible. Early gothic works depicted the transgression of traditional gender norms as a means to create fear:

> The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny. Further, and importantly, these acts are often violent, and always frightening. For gothic novels are above all about the creation of fear – fear in the characters represented, fear in the reader […]. (ibid.)

18 However, Schoene-Harwood makes clear that he regards the Caledonian antisyzygy as a "stereotyping myth", since its coinage "applied as a term of critical convenience that explains the occurrence of practically any kind of contradiction, incongruence or irreconcilability in Scottish literary representation" (133).

Although the gothic is very much concerned with transgressions of established boundaries of all sorts, including nationality, sexuality, and identity (Heiland 3), in the end most narratives reestablish the social status quo: "Early gothic novels make absolutely clear the genre's concern with exploring, defining, and ultimately defending patriarchy" (8).

Depicting the gendered body as a site where fearful transgression, mutation, or violation is enacted, leads to the coinage of the term 'body horror', which has transcended into contemporary gothic horror fiction and cinema, "where corporeality constitutes the main site of fear, anxiety and sometimes even disgust" (Aldana Reyes 393). Thus, the horrifically estranged body becomes monstrous and other, and the 'monster' itself is the centre of interpretation:

> Within Gothic novels, I argue, multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot. Gothic novels produce a symbol for this interpretive mayhem in the body of the monster. The monster always becomes a primary focus of interpretation, and its monstrosity seems available for any number of meanings. (Halberstam 2)

Jack Halberstam makes it clear that the corporality of the monster is a canvas for the projection of any form of otherness. While the stereotypical realisation of this monstrous otherness did undergo changes throughout the centuries[19], deviant sexualities and genders have remained constants as gothic monstrosities (3-4). As readers and spectators, we are safely removed from the dangers these deviances entail. We are invited to experience the horrors by proxy, while the qualities of our experiences are necessarily dependant on the characters we chose (or are offered) to identify with: one can indulge in the power that lays within the transgressions of the monstrous other or immerse oneself in the fear that comes with the dread of monstrous invasion[20]:

19 For example, the frequency of depiction of racial otherness subsided in the wake of the postcolonial movement, after having been a staple in gothic monstrosity during the 19th century, as epitomised by the racialised description of Count Dracula and his vampire ladies.

20 "Horror, I have suggested, exercises power even as it incites pleasure and/or disgust. Horror, indeed, has a power closely related to its pleasure-producing function and the twin mechanism of pleasure-power perhaps explains how it is that Gothic may empower some readers even as it disables others. An example of how Gothic appeals differently to different readers may be found in contemporary slasher movies like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978). Critics generally argue that these films inspire potency in a male viewer and incredible vulnerability in a female viewer. However, […] the mechanisms of Gothic narrative never turn so neatly around gender identifications. A male viewer of the slasher film, like a male reader of the nineteenth-century Gothic, may find himself on the receiving end of countless acts of degradation in relation to monstrosity and its powers while the female reader and spectator may be able to access a surprising source of power through monstrous forms and monstrous genres." (Halberstam 17-18)

> The Gothic, in other words, inspires fear and desire at the same time – fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibly latent perversity lurking within the reader herself. […] The monster, of course, marks the distance between the perverse and the supposedly disciplined sexuality of a reader. Also, the signifiers of 'normal' sexuality maintain a kind of hegemonic power by remaining invisible. (Halberstam 13)

Gothic transgressions thus carry subversive potential, which has historically, as well as in mainstream contemporary horror cinema, seldom been realised – instead, gothic transgressions were and are mostly used to reinforce the societal status quo. Some postmodern and contemporary realisations of the gothic, however, distinctly employ the subversive potential gothic transgressions carry; for example, narratives categorised as postmodern, (post)feminist, or queer gothic use familiar gothic tropes to problematise heteronormative romance plots and patriarchal hierarchies (cf. Braidotti 2002; Wisker 2018). In 1999, Glennis Byron and David Punter already noted a frequent (postmodern) gothic engagement in "the unbinding of coherent sexual identities" (8), and Kirsty Macdonald goes so far as to attest Iain Banks and his contemporary Scottish poet and novelist Christopher Whyte a skilfully ironic realisation of the postmodern gothic mode, stating that their works are "providing the potential for a reconsideration of sexuality and gender", thus "widening the scope of Scottish fiction" (37):

> [They] exploit the distinctive Gothic tropes of excess, transgression and anxiety concerning the female, as referred to as central concerns by a number of critics of the Gothic, in their often ironic and consistently interrogative portrayals of and confrontations with heterosexual male identities. (ibid.)

Gothic (gender) transgressions can therefore be read at least twofold: as a chance for critical societal interrogation or to reestablish the gender binary by displaying the horrors of boundary violation. As Banks' fiction has repeatedly been described as particularly 'transgressive' in terms of technology, culture, nation, and corporeality, it will be interesting to see where this transgressive fiction posits itself, if it favours realisations of the subversive potential over the reestablishment of traditional social hierarchies,or if in the aftermath the transgression only served to highlight the limit thus transgressed.

2.2 Transgressions and Limits

Martyn Colebrook and Katharine Cox are the editors of *The Transgressive Iain Banks. Essays on a Writer Beyond Borders* (2013). The volume assembles essays on Banks in a Scottish context, geographical as well as political; it considers his work in relation to games and play and, most important for this chapter, features essays on genre and gender transgression. It is also, to date, the only collection of essays explicitly attempting to bridge Banks' mainstream and sci-

ence fiction outputs, as Cox states: "there is little sustained criticism of his writing. To date (2013) there is no single-authored monograph that considers his work in general" (Cox 89-90).

Katharine Cox's "Textual Crossings: Transgressive Devices in Banks' Fiction" reads some of his works against the background of Michel Foucault's "A Preface to Transgression" (1977), concentrating on *Use of Weapons*, the third Culture novel. Although Foucault's text is mainly concerned with transgression in relation to sexuality, which will be reviewed in the next chapter, his grasp of the term is also applicable to genre studies. Foucault defines transgression as a brief and dynamic movement across the limit: "Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses" (Foucault 33-34).

Here, transgression and limit are defined in opposition, at the same time creating a complete ontological dependence, both "pointless" without the other (Foucault 34). What is most important in this approach to transgression is that the act of transgression itself does not annihilate the limit but rather reinforces it, as Cox points out: "the limit itself is not eradicated, rather Foucault's 'flash' serves to highlight and affirm the limit itself" (Cox 88). Foucault elaborates on this 'flash', the moment of transgression, limiting it temporally to a moment of "extremely short duration" (34) and evoking the metaphoric image of transgression as a wave in order to illustrate the temporality and also the impermanence of transgression. Immediately after the moment of transgression, the line closes again, reinstating the limitation it was before, "return[ing] once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable" (ibid.). In Foucault's perception, transgression has no permanent effect on whatever rule, border, or social agreement might be violated by it; contrarily, it emphasises the limitations of everything in existence:

> Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, […] [it] is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor a victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world) […]. Transgression contains nothing negative but affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. (Foucault 35)

Even if, as Foucault argues, transgression is not motivated by or even incapable of having a permanent effect on the entity to be transgressed, it speaks to the mutability of said entity. In a legislative context, transgression is defined as the breaking of laws, disregarding jurisdiction or simply committing crimes (Wolfreys 3). For example, in the form of political activism, transgression of the law can ultimately have an effect on said law – its phrasing, its area of applicability, its existence. "[T]ransgression can be motivated by a desire to resist oppression and to address inequality; it can be both utopian and democratising in its aims and

intentions, if not its operation" (Gwynne 1). In effect, transgression not only draws attention to the line or limit transgressed, reaffirming it in the process, but it can also motivate change. Within the moment of Foucault's 'flash', the line crossed is highlighted, and when the wave breaks and the sea retreats, the line is reinstated, present. After the initial shock of transgression, what remains the centre of attention is the limit transgressed. This limit can then be evaluated concerning its actuality and its relevance within whatever discourse it was first constructed and is now applied to. Concerning the ever-changing realms of genre, transgressions further the discourse and the actuality of theories, highlighting both the evolvement, traditions, and norms of certain genres as well as its limitations and the reproduction of stereotypes.

Transgression, Transition, and Merging

"[G]enres should not intermix. And if it should happen that they do intermix, by accident or through transgression, by mistake or through a lapse, then this should confirm, since, after all, we are speaking of 'mixing', the essential purity of their identity" (Derrida 57).

Similar to the Foucauldian limits, genres are not abolished by the act of transgression. When authors transgress the borders of a certain genre, they reach into another – it is therefore not the construct of genre that is transgressed, only its respective content. Authors breaching a genre boundary oftentimes find themselves in a contextually related (sub)genre, thus moving around in the 'neighbourhood' within the interconnected web of genres outlined above. Consequently, the terminology of transition or merging comes into play. Neither of the terms carries the connotation of violation that 'transgression' implies, and they are suitable to describe a more peaceful, subtle form of the "mixing" of genres. Without being highlighted by the Foucauldian 'flash', genre transition becomes a subtler, more implicit business. This is particularly important regarding the analysis of Banks' science fiction, and the Culture novels as part of the space opera subgenre, where 'quieter' genre breaches occur, mostly in form of little excursions into the realms of fantasy and fairy tale and subtle employments of religious and secular myths. However, Banks' first three 'mainstream' novels (*The Wasp Factory*, *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge*) explicitly display traits traditionally regarded as speaking to the conventions of the aforementioned genres; here the term transgression would be the most appropriate to characterise the blatancy of the break with the constraints of realist fiction.

Concerning the web of interconnected genres and subgenres and the ease with which some of the inter-generic transitions and transgressions take place, Derrida's notion of the purity of a genre identity comes back into focus. On the one hand, this 'purity' makes traits and conventions of a certain genre identifi-

able within another genre, thus confirming the "mixing" of both. On the other hand, his demand that "genres should not intermix" carries additional semantic content in its French original: "he also referred to the notion, available only to the French language, that the two meanings of genre in that language (gender and genre) were not to be mixed" (Dowd 20). The impossibility of this demand leaves his intention open to discussion. As Jonathan Crimmins emphasises, the equation of genres and genders is prominent within Derrida's work. Despite Derrida's questionable standing towards female sexuality[21], the comparison of the arbitrariness of both genre and gender is an interesting point of venture for this work:

> As types, Derrida suggests, both gender and genre are classes in which an element 'belong[s] without belonging, participate[s] without belonging' [appartient sans appartenir, participe sans appartenir] […]. Read through the lens of his later work – *Specters of Marx*, *Politics of Friendship*, and *Rogues* – this phrase appears to be a description of the democratic citizen, who participates in the State without belonging to it as a subject. (Crimmins 47)

Along these lines of argument, transgression of gender and genre would then be an act of disobedience within a system that both categories belong to and participate in "without belonging" (s.a.). By placing both genre and gender simultaneously in- and outside of a greater classifying system, the inherently necessary transgression opens up space for the complete subversion of this superordinate instances.

Chances of Transgression

From a hermeneutic point of view, transgressions are an important part of the reading experience. They heavily influence interpretative approaches and, in the aftermath of interpretation, shape the gained knowledge, thus adjusting the reader's expectations towards the genre, as Peter Brigg explains:

> Genre study […] is an act performed by every reader who ever picks up a text, for only by placing the text in the reader's personal extra-text – the sum of their reading in the genre and their cultural moment's understanding of it – can the reader interpret the text. Classification is only the first step in genre study. The act of understanding a text begins there but is played out as readers implant the text in their extra-text, are assisted in grasping the text through their existing knowledge of the conventions of its genre(s), consider the transgressions against that extra-text as vital signposts in the meaning of

21 "In 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman,' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses the problem of Derrida's use of metaphors that appropriate the anatomy of women yet retain a masculinist point of view. Trying to decide whether this appropriation renders deconstruction useless to feminism, Spivak adopts a pragmatic approach in which feminists attend to masculinity's self-critique 'even as we recognize that it is irreducibly determined to disable us'" (Crimmins 46).

> the text, and come away from the reading with a forever slightly modified extra-text knowledge of the genre. (Brigg 7)

Again, genre is emphasised as a necessary tool for classification, which forms the first step of the hermeneutic reading experience. After assessing the new text on basis of the genre conventions the readers are already familiar with, the transgressions against these conventions are the experience forming the readers' extra-knowledge. This new knowledge is both the product of the process of reading, assessing, and understanding and the new starting point for any further reading experience within the same or even a similar (sub)genre. Peter Brigg, who formulated this visualisation of the hermeneutic circle as a part of his attempt to bridge science fiction and 'mainstream', also transfers this circular model to the process of writing literature. He claims that writers themselves come from a background consistent of their own and "other writing and the characteristics of existing genres, including their expected audiences, as a priori facts of creation" (7). Venturing onwards from this background, conscious of the corpus of texts that have defined the genre this far, "the extra-text becomes vital to the writer, framing the formal conventions and presenting the possibilities of the fruitful act of transgression" (Brigg 7). According to Brigg, the chances of transgression are to create something divergent, something new, not distinctly 'other' but slightly modified compared to the texts already existing within the genre. This would then be considered as the 'natural' process of literary evolution and cater to the understanding of genres as distinguishable but dynamic, evolving, and interlinked.

Concerning Banks' fiction, the assessment of transgression must go a bit further. In his work, transgression is a chance to provoke, to invert boundaries, subvert conventions, and pervert the common taste. In regard to genre, however, Banks seemed to like a challenge for himself and his readership. Reinventing and reforming space opera, as explained above, formerly an ill-famed subgenre of a genre (SF) with mediocre credit among readers of literary fiction, Banks' narratives both make use of themes and motifs of myths and fantasy and incorporate linguistic and formal references to fairy tales. These transgressions and mergers served to co-found what Degenring and Westfahl call the 'postmodern space opera'.

In terms of his 'mainstream' output, genre transgressions both allowed for a vigorous entry to the literary scene and produced receptions torn between "an amusement at the satire of violence and disgust at violence being portrayed comically" (A. M. Butler 19) – particularly *The Wasp Factory* not only displayed traits of fantasy and SF but was also received as a cross-medial reference to 80s movies and video games. In the UK of the 1980s, those had fallen into serious disrepute caused by the explicit portrayal of violence. The National

Viewers' and Listeners' Association referred to a number of films, mostly low-budget horror and exploitation productions distributed via VHS, as "video nasties" and saw them as the source or amplification of 'loose morals' within British society of the time, asserting that they were propagating the abasement of morality (Downing 170). Banks' literary debut was judged by the *Sunday Express* as "a bit better written than most horror hokum but really just the lurid literary equivalent of a video nasty" (A. M. Butler 19).

Banks' transgressions are provocative and generate strong reactions. They bring the limits transgressed back into the public focus. They magnify the vulnerability of limitations and borders and reintroduce the aspect of violation to the discourse of transgression. Banks' forms of transgression are explicit, playful, and ironic. "Typically, transgression is most explicit in the play of his authorial persona, his genre-crossing fantastical fictions and the exploration of his textual and sexual games" (Cox 97). Consequently, the matter of transgression will be revisited within the following introduction to gender theory, since it carries significantly different implementations concerning not only gender identity and performance but also sexuality and violence.

3. Gender and Violence

"When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male or female?' and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty" (Freud, "Femininity" 113). With these words, Sigmund Freud opened his lecture on "Femininity" as part of a series of introductory lectures about psychoanalysis. Whereas this specific lecture has since been the subject of many controversial discussions among feminist and gender studies scholars, the sentence cited above still describes an undeniable social reality. The unequivocal distinction between male and female is one of the key aspects of social reality, affecting the judgement of oneself in equal measure as the judgement of the surrounding individuals. Clearly recognisable and socially acceptable gender identities, which correspond to the culturally established gender binary, are still predominantly regarded as necessary for social stability. Western societies are built around a constant division of masculine and feminine spheres, frames of action, and even clear spatial segregations in retail sectors, labour division, and consumer-oriented marketing (Rössler 307). "[G]ender is [not necessarily] always and everywhere the most important social identity, but it is the most pervasive, visible, and codified" (Shields 302) – gender is therefore crucial to identity formation processes in a societal as well as in an individual context.

In the following, sociological approaches to the concept of gender will be introduced, starting with the works of Candance West, Don H. Zimmerman, and Sarah Fenstermaker in the late 1980s, who built on theories established by Erving Goffman between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. Their works have greatly influenced and expanded an academic field which, at the time, was mostly focussing on women's studies. Their theories on sex, gender, and their essential social relevance have diversified the academic focus and supported the emergence of the broader and more inclusive field of gender studies.

Further, this chapter will include excerpts of Judith Butler's phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and literary dissections of gender since her deconstructivist analysis of gender has continually sparked controversy since the 90s. From chapter 3.2 onwards, the works of masculinities studies researchers such as Raewyn Connell, Arthur Brittan, and Harry Brod will be combined with a sociologist and criminologist focus on the conjunctions of gender and violence, where the studies of James Messerschmidt, Mechthild Bereswill, Lizzie Seal and others will provide specific insight. Excerpts of Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* will be revisited throughout the chapters to depict the inextricable interweaving of gender and cultural production and to help facilitate the implementation of sociological and criminological theories in literary studies.

3.1 Theories, Constructions and Hierarchies

Candance West and Don H. Zimmerman set a new standard in the academic perception of gender with their influential article "Doing Gender" in 1987:

> Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements, and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society. (West and Zimmerman, "Doing Gender" 126)

The article itself, as well as the concepts introduced within, have since caused controversy not only in sociological fields of research and have been much revised and expanded in the following years. In 2002, these revisions were combined in *Doing Gender, Doing Difference. Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change*, edited by Sarah Fenstermaker and Candance West. Here, Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman approach "the accepted cultural perspective on gender[, which] views women and men as naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being", thereby not only acknowledging the predominantly binary construction of gender but also addressing the commonplace biological essentialist notion that sees women and men as having "distinctive psychological and behavioral propensities that can be predicted from their reproductive functions" (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 5). West and Zimmerman approach the established (and determinist) binary of sex and gender through breaking the concept into thirds: they additionally introduce the "sex category" in between the two as realisation, or proxy, of "sex" in everyday life:

> *Sex* is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. The criteria for classification can be genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, and they do not necessarily agree with one another. ("Chapter One" 4)

This definition is already drawing attention to the discursive construction of sex. The biological criteria to be investigated are agreed upon previously, and there is even a margin for error or inconsistency, which hints at the inadequacy of the determination (e.g., in intersex cases). Sex category, in West and Zimmerman's perception, is built upon what is assumed to be the biological sex, after the initial classification, which remains invisible in everyday life:

> Placement in a *sex category* is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking. ("Chapter One" 4)

The membership in one of two sex categories would thus be socially assumed through the outer appearance of a person, indicated by factors such as height, build, pitch of voice, facial hair, etc. This second distinction may also include hairstyles and clothing since those are elements of visual display and fit only partially into the categories of "attitudes and activities" tied to the concept of gender by West and Zimmerman:

> *Gender*, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category. (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 4-5)

All three categories place special emphasis on the social environment as definitory authority: through the external determination of the biological sex, through the external judgement of the identificatory displays of membership in a sex category as 'correct', and through the social and cultural limitations installed via 'appropriate' gender activities. All three categories serve to implement the naturalisation of gender, at the same time instating biological and behavioural norms. This then leads to a social perception of gender as essential to human nature and being, particularly through the creation of difference between women/female and men/male by 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 13) as well as through enforcing the active, determinist, and repetitive aspects of 'doing' gender on a broad social scale.

West and Zimmerman's three categories are based on the insights of sociologist Erving Goffman. In his article "The Arrangement between the Sexes" (1977), he coins the term "sex class" as a purely sociological referent to the binary gender categories infants are placed in at birth:

> the placement [is] accomplished by inspection of the infant's naked person, specifically its genitalia, these being visibly dimorphic – a placement practice not dissimilar to that employed in regard to domestic animals. This placement by physical configuration allows a sex-linked label of identification. (Goffman 302)

This comparison to domestic animals is quite striking: it allows for parallels being drawn to social control, regulations, and limitations. In the keeping of most domestic animals, whether in flocks or in herds, the females are constituting the group, while males will either be kept for breeding purposes, spatially separated from the group for most of the time, or will be castrated and reintegrated into the group. An external choice is made as to what will be their individual purpose, and their living space will be determined according to this decision. Goffman makes clear that the spatial segregation is equally predestined in the case of humans:

> [B]roadly speaking the social roles of men and women are markedly differentiated, this, incidentally, giving to women the lesser rank and power, restricting her use of public space, excluding her from warfare and hunting, and often from religious and political

> office; and that more than the male, the female finds her life centered around household duties. This complex of arrangements is a central theme in human social organization, embarrassing the distinction between savage societies and civilized ones. The reason for these facts would be interesting to know, if in fact, anyone is ever able to uncover them. (306)

Throughout the article, Goffman emphasises that the division of spheres into public (male) and private (female) does not cater to any biological or sexual necessity or specific demands of the sexes but is rather 'naturalised' through institutionally reinforced social and spatial segregation. This becomes abundantly clear in his example of the universality of separate male and female bathroom facilities:

> The *functioning* of sex-differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that *biologically* recommends segregation; *that* arrangement is totally a cultural matter. And what one has is a case of institutional reflexivity: toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference. (316, emphasis original)

This perception is shared by West and Zimmerman, who use Goffman's deliberations as a vantage point to elaborate on the importance of 'difference' in the 'doing' of gender as well as in its structural production. According to them, gender is 'done' in the precise moment when the differences between women and men are socially created and reinforced, "differences that are not natural, essential, or biological" (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 13). The social focus on the differences instead of the similarities between women and men serves to naturalise the gender binary in the public and thus in the systemic perception, creating the notion that gender is 'essential' as well as essentially binary. From this basis, the normalisation of asymmetrical power relations derives:

> [D]oing gender also renders the social arrangements based on sex category accountable as normal and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organizing social life. Differences between women and men that are created by this process can then be portrayed as fundamental and enduring dispositions. In this light, the institutional arrangements of a society can be seen as responsive to the differences – the social order being merely an accommodation to the natural order. Thus if, in doing gender, men are also doing dominance and women are doing deference (cf. Goffman 1967), the resultant social order, which supposedly reflects 'natural differences,' is a powerful reinforcer and legitimator of hierarchical arrangements. ("Chapter One" 21)

Comparable to West and Zimmerman, Judith Butler's elaborations on gender, performativity, and sexuality are also concerned with matters of power, particularly discursive and definitory power, but in addition to that her theories offer a change of perspective. (In)famously deconstructing the sex-gender binary, Butler has coined the term 'performativity' to explain how gender becomes visible to individuals and in the cultural perception. In the 1999 preface to *Gender*

Trouble (which was first published in 1990), Butler explains that the idea for her concept of gender performativity stems from a literary source, namely Kafka's short story "Before the Law" (1915). In it, a man stands before the open gate of 'the law' for decades, pleading for entrance, which is repeatedly denied by the gatekeeper. Butler was primarily inspired by Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the text (cf. "Prejuges: Devant la Loi", 1985), who concludes that "the anticipation conjures its object" (Derrida quoted in J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv). In this specific case, the expectation of *authority*, which the waiting man attributes to both the gatekeeper and 'the law' situated behind the gate, is the only source of said authority, the reason why it exists. Butler took the idea of 'anticipation conjuring its object' to challenge essentialist presumptions of gender:

> I wondered whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (*Gender Trouble* xv)

The idea of gender being 'created' in between individual agency and social and cultural expectations resonates with West and Zimmerman's approach. Although Butler's theories are predominantly based on the works of (French) poststructuralists and draw on psychoanalysis, while West and Zimmerman come from a distinctly sociological point of view, themselves conceiving "of gender as departing from fixed social functions" (Moloney and Fenstermaker 192), both approaches are similar "in their understanding of gender as a workable concept […] [and] similarly critical of the conventional distinction between sex and gender" (ibid.). Butler explains that in the way most gender theorists regard the traditional binary, sex and gender cannot be treated as completely separate entities since both continue to stand in a mimetic relationship toward each other in which gender is derived from or restricted by sex:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (*Gender Trouble* 9, emphasis original)

Through separating sex from gender, while still inherently reproducing the binary, feminist discourses support the patriarchal perception that there are only two genders, which are standing in definitory and sexual relation to each other, so Butler argues. She disagrees with the assembly of men in one and woman in another homogenous group, which results in the presumption of a "unity of experience" (*Gender Trouble* 30) within those groups:

> Gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. That institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system. (*Gender Trouble* 30-31)

In Butler's approach, heterosexuality is the core stabiliser for the patriarchal gender binary. It serves to distinguish individual gender performances into regular (heterosexual) and deviant (homosexual), the latter being conceived as "culturally unintelligible" and therefore "impossible" (*Gender Trouble* 203) – thus rendered unspeakable and invisible within the academic discourse. Obviously, here Butler herself operates within a binary construction of sexuality that excludes other forms of sexual identification – although not deliberately, as she insisted later. In her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, she mentions the inclusion of transgender and intersexuality, gender dimorphism, and the explicit support of bi-visibility among many other elements she would add if she were to rewrite *Gender Trouble* (xxvii). She acknowledges the gender and sexual identities mentioned above as excluded from cultural and scientific discourses because of their assumed 'cultural unintelligibility' – a notion that would certainly be shared by most feminist theorists working in transgender and intersex studies. Butler's more recent work, *Undoing Gender* (2004), addresses various critical theories arisen in response to *Gender Trouble* and engages in attempts to clarify the concept of gender performativity via the exemplification of several case studies. She argues that the maintenance of the framework of 'sexual difference' is necessary for the feminist discourse to be able to face

> the continuing cultural and political reality of patriarchal domination, because it reminds us that whatever permutations of gender take place, they do not fully challenge the framework within which they take place, for that framework persists at a symbolic level that is more difficult to intervene upon. (J. Butler, "Undoing Gender" 255)

Hereby, Butler strictly distinguishes between sexual difference and the categories of men and women, which she rather reads as emergent "social norms" and "ways in which sexual difference has assumed content" ("Undoing Gender" 254-255). Generally, she sees the development of both theories, gender performativity on the one hand and the framework of sexual difference on the other, motivated by the intention to

> combat forms of essentialism which claimed that gender is a truth that is somehow there, interior to the body, as a core or as an internal essence, something that we cannot deny, something which, natural or not, is treated as given. The theory of sexual difference makes none of the claims that natural essentialism does. At least one version of

> sexual difference argued that it was the 'difference' in every identity that precludes the possibility of a unified category of identity. ("Undoing Gender" 256-257)

Reading gender as performance can support a deconstructivist approach to literary studies on a figural level. In "Science fiction and queer theory" (2003), Wendy Pearson highlights Butler's "assertion that all gender is a performance that is both involuntary and always to some extent imperfect" (159). It is imperfect because literary characters, like us, "fail to live up to the discursive ideals of 'male' and 'female'" (ibid.). Therefore, the performativity of gender is highly individual and closely connected to a character's social environment and their positions of interaction or communication, bound to certain local and temporal situations, and dependant on the character constellation. Harry Brod draws attention to the necessary shift of the analytical focus from a societal to an interpersonal level:

> Thus, we move from a theory of gender roles to a theory of gender relations. Gender is not primarily a property of individuals, but a social construction in which social constructs of gender become internalized and engendered in individuals. One gains a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the social construction of gender if one understands individual gender identities as resulting from the internalization of social structures rather than if one attempts to understand gender in society as simply the externalized sum of gendered individuals writ large. (Brod 28)

In that way, he supports Butler's criticism of the presumed 'unified experience' within the (separate) groups of 'men' and 'women'. Butler pointed out time and again that working with the presumption of 'unified experience' furthers hierarchical, subjugating, and exclusionary results. Assuming homogeneity within 'men' and 'women' as two opposing and mutually referential groups also hinders the deconstruction of stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity. Those images, perpetuated through literature, art, and other medial forms, help to establish gender norms and to solidify social hierarchies.

3.2 Representations of Femininity and Masculinity

> It is as though we find it almost impossible to think of gender and sexuality except in terms of a dichotomy. We find it difficult to conceive of masculinity without contrasting it with femininity; but more than this, we assume that these definitions reflect a universal trend in nature, departures from which are instances of abnormality and deviance. In the same way, we dichotomize nature and culture, individual and society. (Brittan 14)

In most parts of the world, the dichotomy of man and woman, constructed and lived in interdependent opposition, dominates every aspect of human interaction. Binaries, as Arthur Brittan mentions above, such as nature and culture, individual and society, body and mind, and the private and the public, serve to catego-

rise our surroundings, to make all sorts of social and cultural phenomena graspable for public and academic discourse. Criminologist James Messerschmidt opened his work *Gender, Heterosexuality and Youth Violence* (2012) with a short summary of the history of gender perception to determine at which point in time the sex binary entered the public discourse and what preceded it. He refers to Thomas Laqueur, American historian and sexologist, whose influential work *Making Sex* (1990) suggests that before the female–male dichotomy,

> a 'one-sex model' dominated scientific and popular thought in which male and female bodies were not conceptualized in terms of difference. From antiquity to the beginning of the seventeenth century, male and female bodies were seen as having the same body parts, even in terms of genitalia, with the vagina regarded as an interior penis, the vulva as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles. (Messerschmidt 22)

This model regards women and men not as biologically different but rather as 'variants' of the same bodily potential – which may seem avant-gardist from the perspective of contemporary transgender and intersex studies. However, according to Laqueur, the "one-sex model" also led to the subjugation of women within the social hierarchy, for having an 'imperfect' or 'lesser' version of the male body. Laqueur's model has been challenged as too reductionist by various historians; instead, they promote approaches which take into account that perceptions of gender are social products shaped by their period of formation, including the social context of the time. However, Messerschmidt and Laqueur argue that by the mid of the 18th century, the Western perception of gender had changed, and the "one-sex model" was replaced by an emphasis on the 'fundamental differences' of male and female bodies and minds:

> [I]t was now understood as 'natural' that women are, for example, passive, submissive, and vulnerable; and men are, for example, active, aggressive, and perilous. And given that anatomy is now destiny, a heterosexual instinct to procreate proceeds from the body and is 'the natural state of the architecture of two incommensurable opposite sexes' […]. (Messerschmidt 23)

This stereotypical perception of 'fundamental differences' between women and men (in a two-sex-model) still mostly prevails. Not only sociologists have concerned themselves with the gender dichotomy; feminist theorists of all disciplines have found evidence for female 'othering' through tying the woman–man dichotomy to other prominent binary constructions, such as man–culture / female–nature. Anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner ("Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?", 1974) broadly defines culture as "human consciousness and its products" (73) and explains that it is, in most societies, perceived as superior to nature due to its ability to "transcend natural conditions and turn them to its purposes" (Ortner 72-73). According to Ortner, this ability marks the distinct difference between culture and nature, which is transferred to the social hierarchy between women and men:

> Returning now to the issue of women, their pan-cultural second-class status could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture. Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, them. (Ortner 73)

Although this comparison clearly exemplifies the transferral of hierarchy from one cultural concept to another, Ortner herself admits that it might lead to an oversimplification of the matter, and therefore backtracks to argue that women are mostly perceived to be "'merely' closer to nature than men" (ibid.). Her arguments for this thesis are predominantly based on features that are discursively perceived as exclusive to the female biology, such as menstruation and pregnancy, in short, the 'creation' of life; while the male, unable of 'natural' creation, strives to transcend nature by the creation of artificial objects or by involving himself in the destruction of life through hunting and warfare (Ortner 74-75)[22]. This rather destructive tendency on the masculine end of the gender binary is also referred to in the analysis of European cultural production of the last centuries, taking up on the dichotomy of woman as natural, life-giving force vs. man as superior, controlling instance:

> Using the feminine form as allegory of nature; European culture could express nature as the mother and bride, whose primary life-giving functions were to comfort, nurture and provide. Yet nature also embodied unruly disorder, uncivilised wilderness, famines and tempests that threatened generations by destroying crops and killing infants. In the equation with nature, earth, body, Woman was constructed as Other to culture, as object of intense curiosity to be explored, dissected, conquered, domesticated and, if necessary, eliminated. (Bronfen 66)

Elisabeth Bronfen is a professor of English literature and a distinguished cultural critic; her monograph *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1994) focusses on the literary and visual presentation of death and its connection to feminine 'otherness' and alterity. Bronfen references the stereotypical representation of the female as the maiden bride, followed by the mother,

22 In this section of her article, Ortner bases her argumentation on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953) (Ortner 74-77); later on, she discusses the social implications of the female biology for women's placement within the household, citing structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (78-80), and then analyses the impacts of female socialisation on the feminine psyche, referring to sociologist and feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow's findings: In the individual expression of experience, statistics indicate a tendency towards the subjective and interpersonal in women's expressions, vs. a tendency towards the objective, the distant, and the individualistic in men's expressions (81-82). Ortner altogether emphasises the impact of socialisation and takes a stand against biological determinism, ultimately unmasking the nature/culture divide as a cultural product itself.

the caregiver providing nurture and comfort. Those representations can be found in European art and literature from the Renaissance onwards, particularly frequently during Romanticism. Escapist painters and poets of the time focussed on the visual aesthetic as a place of refuge for the eyes and the mind, displaying the beauty in the life of the (male) artist, such as nature, wild animals, and women.

What becomes evident here, as in the quote above, is that the man (the author, painter etc.) as creating, regulating, and controlling instance disappears under the pretence of universality. The literary and visual images of men and women we encounter throughout Western history are predominantly images created by men. They are mostly masculine fantasies of how women are and how women ought (not) to be. Again, we encounter the nature–culture divide: If "[w]oman was constructed as Other to culture", as Bronfen (66) claims, then, according to the ever-present binary, culture must be male. This culture then produces images of femininity in connection to nature, which females are taught to accept, strive for, aspire to, or reject within a socially acceptable gender performance. In this process of 'creating woman', the (masculine) gender of the creating force disappears behind the process of creation itself, behind the generic authority it carries. This deceptive process of normalisation is also evident on a linguistic level:

> [I]n the English language and culture, as in many others, the term 'man' is ambiguous. It can be taken to refer either specifically to males or generically to human beings. Our culture then overgeneralizes from 'man' as male to 'man' as generic human being, by which standards males come to be seen as generically human while women are 'other'. As women's studies has demonstrated, in the academy women are 'written out of history,' as male standards, experiences, and perspectives are taken for human standards, experiences, and perspectives. (Brod 20)

Thus, representations of masculinity can be perceived as representative for humanity, the human experience and *life* in general. Coming back to Bronfen's train of argument, representations of the feminine signify the other, subjugated to – while at the same time outside of – culture, connected to the opposite of life: *death*.

Western cultural production of the past centuries has been celebrating the female corpse as an object of otherworldly beauty: "The feminine body appears as a perfect, immaculate aesthetic form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art" (Bronfen 5). Ironically, the decay of the corpse is not a part of this cultural imagination: the feminine body appears, in most imagery, frozen in aesthetic perfection. What remains is a perfect hull, left by the spirit that formerly occupied it, which, in this context, would rather be perceived as intruder than as the inhabitant of the female corpse. Calling upon the dichotomous construction of female and male, the depiction, perception, and the framing of the female corpse indicates its masculine opposite: "the represented feminine body

also stands in for concepts other than death, femininity and body – most notably the masculine artist and the community of the survivors" (Bronfen xi). It is essential to point out that the gender designations are here not referring to any biological reality, they exclusively represent the context of cultural production and imagination; thus, they may serve as tools to analyse gender representations in Western cultural practices, as Bronfen explains:

> By implication the corpse is feminine, the survivor masculine. However, such gender designations occur in the image repertoire of a culture, not in biological reality, and can in fact lead to a contradiction between the two registers. Depending on the values attributed to positions of the feminine (vulnerability, inferiority) and of the masculine (domination, superiority), an anatomically 'male' corpse may be gendered 'feminine' in a given cultural construction. In the same way an anatomically 'female' spectator or narrator may, because she has accepted a fixed position in masculine culture and supports its norms and semantic encodings, embody a 'masculine' spectator or focalisor position. (65)

This distinction is very important for literary analysis: differentiating between culturally generated 'masculine' or 'feminine' positions, norms, or stereotypes on the one hand and the gender of the agents taking these positions, acting within (or outside) these norms, on the other hand, is necessary to be able to analyse the reciprocal impacts on the agents as well as the norms. Bronfen refers to the much-evoked connotation of literature and other cultural productions as mirrors of societies by citing art historian Griselda Pollock:

> Cultural practices are defined as signifying systems, as sites for the production of representations which are not to be equated with beautiful things evoking beautiful feelings. The word representation, Griselda Pollock notes, 'stresses that images and texts are mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their source. Representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence.' (Bronfen 65)

Cultural products such as literature and art cannot be taken as one-to-one translation of the state of the world at their time of origin. As the etymology of the word 'representation' indicates, an image is brought before or exhibited, indicating both a previous selection process fuelled by intention and amplified via coding on the side of the creator and a subjectively hermeneutic process of reception and decoding on the side of the spectators.

Sociologist and masculinities researcher Harry Brod applies this system of decoding cultural signs not to an area of intentional cultural production, such as art or literature, but to the everyday appearance of people in public, analysing the clothes humans 'present' themselves in:

> The physical world around us can also be read as 'text' in this way. Take, for example, the very gendered clothing we wear. While Western women's clothes are designed to call attention to women's bodies, with rounded curves and varied colors and textures revealing the skin and its contours, men's clothing is designed to hide the fact that men

> have bodies. The Western business suit creates a box-like covering, with straight lines, much more monolithic colours and textures, and very little variation in fashion from year to year so as not to call attention to itself, in contrast to the fluctuations in women's fashions and makeup. Thus, we reinforce the construction of women as sex objects and men as disembodied intellects, inscribing onto our bodies the mind-body split that maps onto the male-female divide as part of patriarchal ideology. The necktie worn by men in conjunction with this suit is a highly symbolic article of clothing. First, one ties a noose tightly around one's neck to declare emphatically the separation of mind from body, and then with the material remaining, one points an arrow straight at one's genitals, the only part of men's bodies that is supposed to really matter. (Brod 22-23)

Again, we encounter the duality of contrastive clothing for women and men. The fact that women have bodies is highlighted by tight clothing and bright colours, while men's corporality disappears in a grey monolith, only leaving the head and the hands uncovered. While women's corporality places them in spheres of the natural, men are symbolically split in two parts by the necktie, as Brod points out. Following "the separation of mind from body" and the consequent dislocation of the male mind into the realms of "disembodied intellect" (culture), the remaining body is left with "an arrow [pointed] straight at one's genitals" (s.a.). Why are those the only important corporeal parts of men?

Because, although men's corporality may be hidden through their displacement into the cultural sphere, it is of the utmost relevance regarding sexuality and procreation, a field that is closely tied to the achievement of a masculine gender identity (Messerschmidt 31). Countering what he perceives to be sociological efforts to disregard corporality in the analysis of gender, James Messerschmidt points out that the body, even the male one, is central to the social construction of gender:

> We understand the world from our embodied place in it and our perceptual awareness of situational surrounding space. The body is a sensuous being – it perceives, it touches, and it feels; it is a lived body. And given that consciousness consists of perceptual sensations, it is therefore part of the body and not a separate substance (Crossley 2001). The mind and the body are inseparably linked – a binary divide is a fiction – and live together as one in the social construction of gender and sexuality. In this conceptualisation, then, the body forms the whole of our being and, thus, one's reflexive gendered and sexual 'self' is located in the body, which in turn acts, and is acted upon, within a social environment. Indeed, in contemporary industrialized societies the body is central to the social construction of the self (Giddens 1991). A proficient and able body is necessary for social action and, therefore, embodied discipline is fundamental to the competent social agent […]. (Messerschmidt 41)

The body can neither be disregarded in an analysis of social interaction nor in a summary of gendered cultural imagery. Social hierarchy is established not only through cultural dominance but also, in many cases, through physical domination: the body is there, even if it is covered, and it can be used for psychological or physical intimidation:

> If one empirical observation is unquestionable, it is that the vast majority of those who engage in crime do so with, and through, their bodies. Whenever individuals engage in the harms sociological criminologists label crime, they often use and rely on their bodies to carry out such acts, and this is especially the case for interpersonal violent crimes, such as assault and sexual violence. (Messerschmidt 1)

3.3 Gendered Violence

As psychologist and philosopher Martin Dornberg argues, "violence" can, despite its apparent academic neutrality, not be read independently from gender in academic analysis (Dornberg 11), a circumstance that is mainly a product of the historical legal and social implications of a patriarchal Western culture. Historically, violence is connected to masculine power and hegemony: up until the 20th century, in Western cultures secular and clerical leading positions were almost exclusively occupied by men, propped by the, if needed, violent reinforcement of the patriarchal law. In legislative terms, violence is connected to authority, property, and ownership – a pattern that is still linguistically visible in the polysemy of the German term *Gewalt*:

> Gewalt bezeichnet im Deutschen sowohl den physisch-körperlichen Angriff (*violentia*), die institutionalisierte Amts- und Staatsgewalt (*potestas*), als auch eine Kraft bzw. Macht im Sinne eines Vermögens (*potentia*). In der Gewaltforschung werden diese Begriffe aufeinander bezogen, wobei z.B. Popitz Gewalt als die 'direkteste Form von Macht' definiert, als 'Machtaktion [...], die zur absichtlichen körperlichen Verletzung anderer führt'. (Dornberg 9, emphasis original)

> The German term *Gewalt* denotes physical and corporeal offences (*violentia*) as well as institutionalised legislative power of the state (*potestas*) and power or force in form of assets, wealth, and capability (*potentia*). Those terms are correlated in academic research; Popitz, for instance, defines *Gewalt* as 'the most direct form of power', as 'action of power […] leading to the deliberate physical violation of others'.[23]

The English equivalent, 'violence', mainly denotes forms of physical and psychological *Gewalt* and lacks the direct linguistic implication of structural power and potential the German term carries. However, in distinguishing between physical and psychological forms of violence, Dornberg connects the resulting binary concept to the traditional gender binary, thus reinforcing stereotypical imagery of femininity and masculinity. He distinguishes between *centrifugal violence*, an active, destructive, outward-oriented, 'masculine', or phallic form of violence, and *centripetal violence*[24], a self-harming, passive, destructive, and 'feminine' form of violence (Dornberg 18).

23 Own translation.

24 Original: "zentrifugale/zentripetale Gewalt" (Dornberg 18), own translation.

This perception of gendered violence was and partially still is common among sociologists, psychologists, and the broader public since it can be observed manifold in the social interaction and systematic education of children and adolescents. Different ways of decoding violence, according to the gender of the violent person, can be witnessed in any social environment and relate to the different gender norms propagated by Western societies in the education and socialisation of young men and women.

Sociologist Mechthild Bereswill summarises that statistically violent acts are mostly performed by men, which leads to a greater visibility of violent men in a sociocultural context. This, in turn, leads to a tendency to assume that violent behaviour is more common among men, that it can be ascribed to them as a social group. She also states the importance of violence as a group-based pattern of behaviour among adolescent males in order to functionally produce and defend individual masculinity, a phenomenon that has been analysed and theorised by sociologists like Michael Meuser and James Messerschmidt as well (Bereswill, "Sich auf eine Seite schlagen" 102). In contrast to Dornberg, Bereswill decidedly addresses the lack of conceptual clarity when referring to 'gendered violence':

> Gewalt, das gilt auch für sexualisierte Gewalt, hat kein Geschlecht, es gibt keine männliche oder weibliche sexualisierte Gewalt. Sexualisierte Gewalt und ihre Aneignung, ihre Ausübung und Verarbeitung durch Subjekte ist aber tiefgreifend vergeschlechtlicht. (Bereswill, "Sexualisierte Gewalt und Männlichkeit" 112)
>
> Violence, including sexualised violence, does not possess a gender; there is no masculine or feminine sexualised violence. Sexualised violence and its appropriation, its exertion, and its processing through subjects is, however, deeply gendered.[25]

Although sexualised violence is a very specific form of gendered violence, the distinction made here is recurrent throughout Bereswill's work. On a certain level, it speaks to Bronfen's distinction between what she called the 'biological reality' and gender stereotypes established and cemented through cultural production, in that both approaches are cautious to avoid the creation of a victim = female / perpetrator = male dichotomy, which already seems to be the standard of social imagination due to its regular appearance in literature, art, and media. As Bereswill points out, forms of violence and binary constructions of gender correspond and gain significance because of their reciprocal conjunction throughout academia ("Sexualisierte Gewalt und Männlichkeit" 112).

25 Own translation.

Masculinity and Violence

"Perhaps the most popular image of masculinity in everyday consciousness is that of man the hero, the hunter, the competitor, the conqueror. Certainly, it is the image celebrated in Western literature, art and in the media" (Brittan 77). Traditionally, masculinity is closely tied to 'activity' within the socially accepted gender binary. Activity entails constant progress, development, enlargement, and achievement. To facilitate this growth and success, other agents from both sides of the gender binary have to lose, decrease, be beaten back – be it in the field of economy or finance or in private competitions. Sociologist Michael Meuser refers to Pierre Bourdieu's works on the *domination masculine* in explaining that the 'masculine habitus' is constructed and achieved in exclusively masculine spaces, where men indulge in competitive games. These games are transferred to all traditionally masculine spheres of activity: economy, politics, science, academics, religious institutions, the military, sports clubs, etc. (Meuser 33). Many of these competitive processes of hierarchical negotiation are achieved through socially accepted forms of violence, which results in male socialisation towards violent behaviour:

> When we look specifically at male socialization, rather than at the socialization norms of a genderless 'society', we find a great deal of socialization toward violence, whether through street gangs, the military, media images, sports, or simple tolerance for male violence. [...] Such acceptance and tolerance ends up functioning as encouragement for male violence. (Brod 20-21)

Brod makes clear that violent behaviour in male adolescents is not only accepted in Western societies but even encouraged through the promotion of particularly 'masculine' character traits such as competitiveness, self-assertion, and ambition. Thus, violent behaviour that is learned and socially rewarded can easily border on or result in forms of violence that are legally considered criminal offences:

> Men who are violent are therefore not deviants or nonconformists, but overconformers, men who have taken a particular aspect of male socialization all too seriously. The task in getting them to change their behavior, then, is not to socialize them more thoroughly but, in what may seem a paradoxical result, to help them achieve some distance from their socialization, to de-socialize them. (Brod 21)

Social norms and expectations, particularly materialising in the form of peer pressure, have a severe impact on individual gender performances. Growing up in a set social environment, adolescents are likely striving to perform an accepted social variant of their gender, in this case practicing and internalising the required behaviour associated with the masculine gender role. The social surrounding rates the acting person's masculinity in regard to the individual performance of the predefined gender role:

> Hence, a man becomes a man because he learns the required behaviour associated with the male gender role. He comes to define himself from the perspective of those around him who treat him as male. […] [‘]I know I am a man because my parents, my teachers, my friends, my employers, my wife etc. define and treat me as such. And I know these things because I have been exposed to the determining power of socialization processes which give me this knowledge, and also profoundly influence my behaviour[’]. (Brittan 21)

The prevalence or even the necessity of violence within the frame of socially promoted masculinity is best approached through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, introduced to the broader academic discussion by Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1995). The author introduces, besides the important element of control over oneself and others, the elements of competition or fight as key to masculinity. Men must not only dominate women, but different groups of men assert different ideals of masculinity, with the hegemonic group on top of the hierarchical order exercising the definitory power (Baur and Luedtke, "Konstruktionsbereiche von Männlichkeit" 10). From this position emerges, according to Bereswill, a dual relationality in between masculinity and femininity on the one hand and in between superior and inferior versions of masculinity on the other hand (Bereswill, "Sexualisierte Gewalt und Männlichkeit" 113). The processes which negotiate superiority and inferiority in both relations (between masculinity and femininity as well as within different forms of masculinity) require and enforce violent behaviour, as Connell points out:

> Two patterns of violence follow from this situation. First, many members of the privileged group use violence to sustain their dominance. Intimidation of women ranges across the spectrum from wolf-whistling in the street, to office harassment, to rape and domestic assault, to murder by a woman's patriarchal 'owner', such as a separated husband. […] Second, violence becomes important in gender politics among men. Most episodes of major violence (counting military combat, homicide and armed assault) are transactions among men. Terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions, for example, in heterosexual violence against gay men. Violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles. (Connell 83)

Read as a structural instrument, violence thus creates stability and order within the patriarchal social structure. At the same time, it serves as a tool to establish masculine identity and is normalised within this context – which does not mean that each and every man engages in violence against women or marginalised masculinities, as Connell clarifies: "Most men do not attack or harass women; but those who do are unlikely to think themselves deviant. On the contrary they usually feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (Connell 83). In contrast to that, violent women are perceived as unauthorised deviants from a patriarchal society. Their exertion of violence stands in crude contrast to Western cultural ideals of femininity.

Femininity and Violence

Intersections between violence and femininity are an intricate and often paradoxical subject of study since female criminal offenders have been historically denied by most Western societies. Criminology rendered the female offender invisible for a long time by completely ignoring her, and patriarchal historiography wrote her out of existence (Belknap 2).

In his brief overview of the history of criminology in the United States, James Messerschmidt focusses on the early works of sociologist Edwin Sutherland, whose *Principles of Criminology* (1939) turned into the most important textbook on criminology for the following decades. Like his fellow colleagues in the 1920s and 30s, Sutherland was of the opinion that "Femaleness emerges as anomaly" (Sutherland quoted in Messerschmidt 8), placing girls and women in the realm of biology, whereas the behaviour of boys and men was analysed in the realm of the social, thus evoking "an ontology of difference […] that rendered 'man as social and society as male'" (Messerschmidt 8). This perspective indicates not only how far masculinity had been removed from 'nature' in its dichotomy with society and culture, endowed with the task to control and dominate the natural/biological, but also that the female was of no interest to sociological criminology whatsoever, because it remained in the realms of nature/biology. Obviously, the ignorance by this school of criminologist thought did not stop female offenders from committing crimes, so that sociological criminology had to acknowledge their existence at a later point in time. However, according to Messerschmidt (9), when this happened, the emphasis on the social environment of men and the 'biological sphere' of women was kept as classificatory system:

> Until the early 1970s, sociological criminologists constructed an 'essential sex difference' that equated women with 'the natural body' and men with 'the social mind.' Reflecting the presuppositions already in place in U.S. gender relations, sociological criminologists conceptualized the cause of male crime as outside the body and the cause of female crime as inside the body. Thus, the rise of sociological criminology rested on the culture-nature, mind-body, and social man-biological woman binaries. Consequently, in sociological criminology the female body remained 'Other': biologically enigmatic, afflicted, deceitful, and, therefore, in need of pervasive social control by men. (Messerschmidt 10)

Women who engage in physically violent behaviour deviate from a long-established cultural image of femininity as non-violent; or, at least, forms of violence connected with femininity must be a non-physical derivative from violent acts stereotypically connected to masculinity. Until this day, psychological and verbal forms of violence are mostly decoded as 'feminine' violence (comp. Dornberg 12). These forms of violence are directed at the violation of the psychologi-

cal wellbeing of a person and are thus nearly invisible in a physiological context – which may correspond with the decade-long invisibility of female offenders in crime statistics.

In a corporeal context, "Women's use of violence poses a threat to the gender order that subordinates them – it issues a challenge to the supremacy of masculine power and the social control of women" (Seal 7). The use of physical violence marks perpetrating women as deviants from the social norm; at the same time, it endangers said norm and the social hierarchy behind it. In contrast to male violent offenders, these women fail to follow the culturally imagined norms and thus perform inacceptable variants of femininity which might even lead to social "'monsterization' and 'mythification' as evil, placing them beyond human understanding and making them outlaws" (Seal 8). Violent women transgress gender boundaries and traverse spaces of action that have traditionally been reserved for men within the limiting frame of the gender binary. The only socially acceptable reason for females to employ violence depicts the woman as the initial victim of aggression. This narrative marks a backhaul of the female agent into an initially passive position, which serves as basis to depict her as 'damaged' by the initial victimisation and therefore legitimises her defending herself or exerting revenge: "Where women are represented as more recognisably feminine, for example, when they can be perceived as victims or their actions can be explained through mental illness, they do not cross the boundaries of gender" (ibid.). Drawing on Bronfen, who elaborated on the feminine as an allegory of nature (66) within the nature–culture dichotomy, cultural imagery of the 'female mind' traditionally also carries, besides the caring and nurturing qualities, connotations of rather undesirable traits such as unpredictability, capriciousness, and an assumed tendency towards the emotional. Therefore, violent acts by females are socially interpreted in contrast to the civilised and controlled (masculine) culture and in connection with the wild and unpredictable (feminine) nature. Hence, the combination of violence and femininity can be interpreted as an act of rebellion against patriarchy, a deviance from the social norm, either way challenging the established social hierarchy.

However, cultural production of the last decades found a way to render the depiction of violent females socially acceptable. By eroticising the exertion of violence by females, originally a strategy of crime fiction, Hollywood action cinema produced the trope of the overly sexualised female action hero:

> The sexual appeal of female action heroes draws on the eroticised association between violence and women that is prevalent in popular culture – a connection which works to suggest that despite their tough self-presentation, these women are more sex objects than warriors. (K. James 171)

Not quite as strong as a man but tougher than the traditional helpless damsel in distress, the stereotypical female action hero manages to walk the fine line between social acceptance and deviance. Her eroticised outward appearance turns the tide in her favour and compensates for an open display of physical violence. This cinematic stereotype is also, given a motive of self-defence or revenge, culturally sanctioned to kill.

As implied by the social judgement of violent women, female killers were, for a long time, unthinkable within the limitations of patriarchal gender performances. Sociologist and criminologist Lizzie Seal of the University of Sussex provides a summary of the critical discourse on female murderers of the last decades:

> Women who kill 'test society's established boundaries' (Jones, 1996, p. 13), especially if they appear to have acted purposefully and/or rationally [...]. Crossing the boundaries of gender makes them incomprehensible and dangerous [...] which provokes the need for legal and media discourses to 'contain and limit the threat posed by such women' (Morrissey, 2003, p. 2). Jones (1996) argues that society fears both the female murderer and the feminist as their actions challenge the social order. (Seal 7)

The female murderer can be seen as the violent female deviant in its extreme form, destabilising social order by her blatant disregard of gender norms. As a response, certain medial coping mechanisms evolved, trying to 'de-mask' the female perpetrator by exposing her deed as masquerade:

> [B]ecause killer-women can pose a threat to the male hegemony, they are repeatedly depicted in a way which either undermines their strength and independence or tears down their tough and aggressive image to reveal the 'real' woman underneath. These women thus do little to disrupt the stability of the patriarchal order, […] because the danger posed by their strength and independence is diffused during this process, or sometimes even erased altogether. (K. James 166)

The female perpetrator is rendered invisible for intruding on a stereotypically and historically male domain. Historically, killing has been perceived as the most affirmative evidence of masculinity; the stereotypical connection is rooted in times when killing was a necessary synonym for power, superiority, and virility (Montandon 220). Although having become obsolete in the day-to-day reality of contemporary Western societies, the slaughtering war hero remains an important element of a medially idealised masculine gender stereotype. This provides the male killer with a social status that is distinctly closer to cultural legitimacy than the position of the female killer. As already indicated in the case of the cinematic female action hero, there are a few exceptions to the cultural shunning of violent women. As mentioned before, one circumstance that can turn violent women culturally legible is their previous experience of sexualised violence.

Sexualised violence is presumably the form of violence that is most overtly connected to the binary production of gender and has historically been an instrument of warfare and conquering[26], carrying the potential of 'achieving' masculinity by victimising women and hegemonically inferior men in a sexualised manner. At the same time, having survived forms of sexualised violence is a trait that is repeatedly used in fictions to justify violent transgressions of female characters in acts of revenge.

3.4 Sexualised Violence: Reading Rape

Sexualised violence, rape, and incest permeate Banks' oeuvre. While the frequent graphic depiction of violence and murder appears off-putting to some readers and critics[27], it glues many of his fans to the novels like bystanders of a car crash. The depiction of sexualised violence adds another layer to the captivating and frequently repugnant reading experience because it explicitly foregrounds the gender of the characters.

According to Bereswill, sexualised violence is part of the symbolic order of the genders, tightly interwoven with their cultural construction and connected with binary coding like 'strong–weak', 'active–passive', 'libidinal–abject' ("Sexualisierte Gewalt und Männlichkeit" 114). She states that forms of violence and binary constructions of gender correspond and gain significance through reciprocal correlation (112); however, sexualised violence does not *have* a gender, as there is no such thing as masculine or feminine sexualised violence. Instead, sexualised violence and its appropriation, its exertion and its processing through subjects *is deeply gendered* (112). The attribution of a gender to acts of violence and sexualised violence in particular is common in Western society, and the ascription of masculinity to acts of violence against females is well established in sociological and criminological research: "Male heterosexual violence is customary in patriarchal culture; therefore, it is also customary that women endure

26 The UN still list forms of rape and sexualised violence as war crimes, indicating its repeated occurrence to this day (https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/war-crimes.shtml, Art. 8, 2, b, xxii).

27 About *The Wasp Factory*:

> Among the detractors, Banks' writing was referred to as 'juvenile' (Craig, P. qtd. Banks 1984, ii) and even 'rubbish' or 'a joke' (Gimson qtd. Banks 1984, i). Using these scathing reviews as a marketing tool (especially those that highlighted the violence and the unpleasantness of the reading experience), editions of the novel incorporated these warnings as totems […] to pass by before beginning the novel. (Colebrook, Cox and Haddock, "Introduction" 3)

it. Thus, normative heterosexuality helps maintain male dominance and control over women" (Messerschmidt 15). The relationship between heterosexuality and the subordination of women is also one of the key elements of Judith Butler's theories on gender relations:

> There is thus a difference between sexist and feminist views on the relation between gender and sexuality: the sexist claims that a woman only exhibits her womanness in the act of heterosexual coitus in which her subordination becomes her pleasure [...]; a feminist view argues that gender should be overthrown, eliminated, or rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it is always a sign for subordination of women. The latter accepts the power of the former's orthodox description, accepts that the former's description already operates as powerful ideology, but seeks to oppose it. (*Gender Trouble* xiv)

These theoretical approaches strongly suggest an intricate connectedness of gender, sexuality, and violence. Violence is a necessary tool for establishing and maintaining hierarchies, such as the patriarchy as a form of masculine domination. Based on Bourdieu, Bereswill states that masculine domination is secured through violence and that relations of subordination are expressed in forms of direct as well as symbolic violence; violence is thus inherent in gender relations of traditional and modern societies ("Sich auf eine Seite schlagen" 101). As becomes evident, sexualised violence is to be analysed not primarily within the framework of sexuality but more importantly within that of power and patriarchal societal structures. However, the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, and violence can also be traced back to the individual, micro-sociological level. James Messerschmidt, for instance, emphasises the importance of the body when analysing interpersonal crimes:

> If one empirical observation is unquestionable, it is that the vast majority of those who engage in crime do so with, and through, their bodies. Whenever individuals engage in the harms sociological criminologists label crime, they often use and rely on their bodies to carry out such acts, and this is especially the case for interpersonal violent crimes, such as assault and sexual violence. And regarding specifically the latter, such violence clearly involves embodied *sexual* practices. (Messerschmidt 1, emphasis original)

This raises questions as to how the body is gendered in the act of sexualised violence and how sexualised violence is inscribed onto the bodies of the victim and the perpetrator. Further, interpersonal, physical, 'heterosexualised' violence is an important factor of creating or stabilising hierarchies in homosocial groups, thus marking body and performance as the basis of social negotiations of hierarchy and domination:

> Second, violence becomes important in gender politics among men. Most episodes of major violence (counting military combat, homicide and armed assault) are transactions among men. Terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions, for example, in heterosexual violence against gay men. Violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles. (Connell 83)

In groups of (Western) masculine socialisation, victimisation oftentimes equals feminisation. As such, gender relations within homo- and heterosocial groups are constantly (re)negotiated in terms of group hierarchy. In this context, the biological sex of a person is not as important as the congruency of their sex category and gender performance. Deviances from normative gender performances are frequently punished by exclusion, public shaming, or (sexual) violence; thus, people displaying sexualities that are regarded as 'deviant' and gender performances not adhering to the traditional gender binary are at a great risk to violent attacks.

Physically and psychologically violent or toxic masculinity as a stereotypical norm is further supported through the problematic medial representation of violence and masculinity. In analysing the 'aesthetics of murder' in contemporary Western society, Josephine McDonagh reminds us that representations of rape, sexualised violence, and murder as 'news' in the media, mostly with salacious headlines, help create a culture of sensationalism and detachment:

> In our society, cultural codes that exalt violence and celebrate the murderer as a transcendent being are dominant; such codes also work to eliminate society's responsibility for such violence, so that murderers are regarded as deviants, sex beasts and monsters rather than the inevitable products of our own society. They argue that sex murder is an extreme form of masculinity, existing on a continuum in which 'normal sexuality' (i.e., male heterosexuality) also takes its place. This masculinity is constructed and learned from dominant cultural codes through which we all unconsciously order our own experiences. (McDonagh 223)

Apart from pinpointing the questionable socialisation of males on a 'continuum' of violent (sexual) behaviour, this leads to questions of ethics and morality on the side of the audience or consumers. We find ourselves within the multilayered topic of ethics of representation, forging a bridge to the violent excesses displayed in Banks' novels.

Sexualised violence can take on many different forms and includes psychological as well as physical assaults. In Banks' novels, sexualised violence recurs in the narrative representation of rape or attempted rape. According to Sabine Sielke, rape narratives carry revelatory potential concerning both the cultural context the narrative represents and is placed in and the literary tradition it follows:

> Since texts mean just as much by what they leave unsaid as by what they say, by what is absent as by what is present, those texts that explicitly employ rape in turn raise questions about their silences, their absent centers, about what they chose to obscure (Sielke 3).

With *Reading Rape* (2002), Sabine Sielke laid the groundwork for an in-depth analysis of the textual representation and mediation of sexualised violence in American literature and culture of the 19th and 20th century. Unfortunately, to date there is no study of equal depth and adequacy about the depiction of sexualised violence in British literature; however, due to the shared history of both lit-

erary traditions, as well as the increased cultural globalisation particularly during the 20th century, Sielke's analyses are applicable to Banks' novels. The quote perfectly illustrates her approach to rape narratives: she focusses on textual deconstruction, analysing narrative omissions as well as the semantic depictions of rape and sexual violations in a variety of novels. In her endeavour to identify common strategies in depictions of sexualised violence, Sielke also stresses the importance of intertextuality, especially when analysing modern and postmodern texts, because they

> foreground the historicity of their (rape) rhetoric and thus the constraints as well as the possibilities of the meanings they assign to sexual violence. Echoing and playing upon their literary forerunners, they refigure, re-present, repoliticize, and thus reinterpret previous literary interrogations of rape and sexual violence, and in this way inscribe themselves into a tradition of readings of rape, a tradition they simultaneously remember and interfere with. (Sielke 6)

Postmodern texts display a particularly high degree of intertextuality and self-referentiality as well as critical awareness of current cultural and social tendencies (Hutcheon 5). Sielke reads rape as a 'trope' in many postmodern fictions, pondering "the power dynamics of a particular culture" (2). Consequently, she foregrounds the mediated, interpretative, and normative nature of rape narratives: "as they seem to make sense of socially deviant behaviour, [they] oftentimes limit our understanding of sexual violence while producing norms of sexuality in the process" (3). Depending on the historical contexts which shaped them, rape narratives always stand in a tradition of a certain culture, therefore responding, relating to, subverting, or reproducing cultural symbols and identities – "identities that, figured by way of the sexual, do have a particular resilience. In this way, sexual violence, bodies in pain, and the 'unmaking' of worlds, as Elaine Scarry has it, have participated in the making of a world that tends to care little about violated bodies" (Sielke 2-3). These 'norms' of sexuality, which are inscribed into our societies and invoked by many rape narratives, mostly reflect the traditional gender dichotomy of female victim and male perpetrator. Literary depictions of rape and other forms of sexualised violence are often events that lead to the stabilisation or the reproduction of the patriarchal order, thus enforcing the eponymous masculine domination examined by Bourdieu.

I will start my analysis of Banks' novels with *The Wasp Factory*, where rape is just about the only form of violence that does *not* occur. Frank, the 17-year-old protagonist is engaged in a war against women and nature, striving for dominion over the animal kingdom on a remote Scottish island, compensating his lacking manhood with increasingly violent acts.

4. Gender Bender? *The Wasp Factory*

Banks entered the literary arena with *The Wasp Factory* in 1984, and critics had a hard time overcoming the initial shock caused by the novel's unvarnished depiction of violence as a part of gender identity formation. The overall critical response was mixed, including "reviews ranging from astonishment to repulsion, from praise to derision" (Colebrook, Cox and Haddock, "Introduction" 3).

17-year-old Frank Cauldhame's coming-of-age narrative contains graphic depictions of animal torture alongside ritualistic territorial defence practices, distressing displays of criminalised and uncontainable insanity, and the violent murdering of children to achieve manhood.

> The question of war and violence in Banks's fiction is often explored through the prism of gender identity and sexual transgressions, which constitutes yet another of the author's main preoccupations. Many female characters in the Banksian universe take on characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, which helps the author to foreground the connection between gender and power relationships. (Pisarska 28)

In case of *The Wasp Factory*, this is quite literally true for the main character Frank, who is performing an exaggerated form of a masculine gender identity albeit being born biologically female, which is information that is only disclosed to the protagonist and the reader at the end of the novel. This inversion of gender identities is the result of a social experiment of Frank's father Angus, who started treating Frank, aged three, with male hormones after an alleged dog-attack, which is used to explain the absence of male genitalia. Raised as a castrated male, Frank indulges in compensatory physical violence against all animate matter surrounding him, struggling for the fulfilment of his masculine ideal.

Many of the literary critics concerning themselves with Banks' first published novel have labelled *The Wasp Factory* as 'mainstream' fiction. More recently, critics started to reevaluate this classification in favour of a more diverse approach, particularly towards Banks' first three novels *The Wasp Factory*, *Walking on Glass* (1985), and *The Bridge* (1986), which is supposed to pay tribute to those novels' genre-transgressive tendencies into the realms of science fiction and fantasy:

> Despite, or because of, the artificial classification of his writing into Iain Banks (mainstream) and Iain M. Banks (science fiction), Banks is repeatedly able to transgress the boundaries of science fiction within these classifications. […] Fantasy is [also] a useful term when considering the deliberate ruptures in genre in his mainstream fiction as well. Whilst Banks' movement between these categorizations is obvious, there are perhaps two more nuanced areas in his writing that are masked by these labels. His mainstream fiction plays with fantasy, with alternate realities and impossibilities which are accepted as normal. (Cox 91-92)

This more liberal approach to *The Wasp Factory* brings about some analytical potential, primarily resulting from the narrative situation and the setting, which have already been hinted at by earlier critical examinations of the novel, for example by Thom Nairn (1994) and Berthold Schoene-Harwood (1999). The setting's seclusion and isolation, both geographically and socially, enable Frank to do as he pleases almost beyond any parental or societal limits. Frank, as the first-person narrator of the novel, is by nature unreliable and in total control of the depiction of events. Readers and critics alike have speculated that the murder scenes are only imagined by Frank, or that he even invented the existence of his brother Eric, who only ever interacts with Frank (Cox 92-93).

In "Textual Crossings" (2013), Katharine Cox identifies the "remoteness and isolation of the Cauldhame home" (92), and particularly the "ethereal character of Eric" (93), as "lift[ing] the novel above the narrative technique of the unreliable narrator and caus[ing] it to border on the realm of science fiction" (ibid.). She further understands Frank's wasp factory, a ritualistic device that he uses to predict future events, as a trace element of fantasy (93). While I support the latter finding, the connection between the fantastic and gothic elements in *The Wasp Factory* suggests itself more readily. Many critics, from Victor Sage (1996) to Moira Martingale (2013), have been pointing out the neo-gothic realisations within the novel, first and foremost referring to the *doppelgänger*-motif, which can be invoked in the analysis of Frank and Eric, but also regarding gender, specifically between Francis and Frances (Schoene-Harwood 133). Further, Sage claims that "the novel's Gothic comes from its other major literary forebear, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" (24), whereby "Frank's is the story of Frankenstein's monster written ironically from the monster's deceived point of view" (ibid.). Here, the gothic motif transports the reference to one of the founding texts of science fiction, an intertextual connection which is obviously supported by the protagonist's name. Trying to deal with the unreliable first-person narrator, Andrew M. Butler invokes yet another intertextual reference with undeniable qualities of science fiction:

> If we are to take the novel at anything like face value (which is not the same as assuming Frank is always telling the truth), the Jekyll and Hyde paradigm remains relevant, but with the vital alteration in the plot that the scientist is experimenting on someone else rather than on himself. (A. M. Butler, "Strange Case" 22)

Invoking the Jekyll and Hyde paradigm inevitably introduces literary aspects of identity formation and the self in contrast to the *other*, which is, following Freud's elaborations, another *uncanny* motif directly connected to the literary history of the gothic. In Frank's case, Dr Jekyll is externalised into his father Angus, the (bio-)chemist in control of his child, who is both his biological and his social experiment. In terms of Frank's identity formation, his father fulfils an

important role: he is the primary *other* to Frank's desired identity as super-masculine warrior. Frank's employment of extensive violence in reaching for his masculine ideal also led to problems in terms of literary categorisation, especially among readers and reviewers when the novel first came out:

> The reception of Banks's novel was thus divided between an amusement at the satire of violence and disgust at violence being portrayed comically. Sensibilities at the time were perhaps heightened over the media frenzy about Channel 4's broadcasting policies and, more significantly about so-called video nasties, such as *Driller Killer* and *The Evil Dead*. The Sunday Express review specifically makes the link between the latter phenomenon and the novel: 'a bit better written than most horror hokum but really just the lurid literary equivalent of a video nasty.' (A. M. Butler, "Strange Case" 19)

The Evil Dead, a 1981 horror movie, is categorised as *supernatural* horror, which, genre-wise, often incorporates fantastic elements and features the occurrence of ghosts and demons in a framework of religious topoi (Buffam n.p.). Newspaper receptions likening the movie to *The Wasp Factory* also supports the novel's genre-transgressive potential.

Generally, the connection to video nasties, movies distributed for video home systems displaying excessive scenes of violence and pornography, was easily drawn at that time in the UK and led many literary critics of the time to immediately disqualifying and devaluing *The Wasp Factory*. This critical assessment revokes one of the primary objectives of this project: the examination and evaluation of scenes of violence in their interconnectedness with gender, as gender performances, and in their connection to adolescent identity formation.

4.1 Gender and Identity

Ideas, theories, and norms of gender evolved alongside ideas, theories, and norms of capitalist economies for centuries, up to a point where it can be argued that both categories have played a significant part in "creat[ing] each other"[28] (Hartigan-O'Connor 616) in most Western societies. A capitalist society profits from the division of social spheres into 'masculine' (public) and 'feminine' (pri-

28 As a historian of the early American republic, Hartigan-O'Connor refers specifically to English and American 19th-century capitalism and gender. In her article "Gender's Value in the History of Capitalism" (2016), she aptly summarises that the gendered division of labour was historically relative to regionality, social context, social class, and race as well as subject to repeated change throughout the decades of the 19th century. What remained stable, however, was the exclusion of women from positions of institutional power in England and America, comparable to most Western countries, while "laws, institutions and instruments of capitalism hardened concepts of value and gender into the taken-for-granted forms we know today" (617).

vate), because in that way labour in the 'private' sphere, such as care work, nurture work, and anything connected to household upkeep, can remain unpaid and thus devalued. The resulting appearance of social stability relies on a binary division of the workforce as well as on retail sectors and consumer-oriented marketing. The 'feminine' end of the division is connected to devalued, unpaid labour, which in turn devalues the 'feminine' worker, their labour, and their economic choices in a patriarchal society.

Growing up in a 1980s patriarchal Western social framework, it is important for Frank to solidify his existence within the 'masculine' (public) social sphere. However, in Frank's case, the personal and social development turn out to be problematic on different levels. He grew up in almost perfect social isolation on a fictional Scottish island, with his father as the only relevant external reference. Being home-schooled as a legally non-existing person, his socialisation proceeds under exclusion from the social community and little to no contact to other adolescents. Hence, he lacks what one could describe as a social mirror; information that is potentially influential in terms of the development of gender identity:

> In short, gender identity is the subjective sense that a man or woman has about his or her masculinity or femininity. It can be conceived of as a person's interpretation and acting out of the generally accepted social definitions of what it is to be a man or woman. Hence, a man becomes a man because he learns the required behaviour associated with the male gender role. He comes to define himself from the perspective of those around him who treat him as male. (Brittan 20)

Frank's primary external orientation in terms of gender and identity formation is his father Angus, a particularly unreliable source of information from the beginning of the novel. Hence, Frank's potential development is limited and predetermined right from the start. His struggles to develop a self-concept illustrate the need for social interaction in terms of adolescent identity formation (Degenring, *Identität* 162). In terms of gender identity, Frank's alleged castration proves to be a difficult starting point for leading an ordinary life as a man: "I hate having to sit down in the toilet all the time. With my unfortunate disability I usually have to, as though I was a bloody woman, but I hate it. Sometimes in the Cauldhame Arms I stand up at the urinal, but most of it ends up running down my hands or legs" (WF 17).

As theorised by Goffman (316), the spatial segregation naturalising the 'difference' of men and women is most prominent in case of public toilets: urinals are for men, toilets for women. Raised in the belief of being biologically male, Frank's bodily inabilities, such as his incapacity of urinating in a standing position, threaten his gender identity. These daily difficulties undermine a masculine gender performance and result in compensatory violence and the rejection

of one's own body as well as in a permanent and detrimental instability in terms of identity formation. Frank tries to counteract this and enforce stability by the continual mantra-like repetition of phrases pertaining to (and thereby ensuring) his own existence in the space-time-continuum: "(…) I'm me and I'm here and that's all there is to it" (WF 13). As Degenring points out, this assurance of Frank's own existence is a constituent of his process of identity formation, wherein his autobiographic first-person narrative has an important supporting function (*Identität* 161). However, Frank's constant resort to variants of the phrase cited above carries signs of overcompensation for a lack of stability and certainty: the sheer number of repetitions of the phrase inverts its meaning and invites readers to question Frank's reliability in terms of his concept of self (*Identität* 151). The recurring phrase can thus be read as one of many signs of a lack of orientation, stability, and social boundaries within the coming-of-age narrative, which is, from Frank's side, generally approached with violent compensatory techniques.

4.2 Violence and Adolescent Masculinity

Gender-specific socialisation starts as soon as a child is born. Traditionally, character traits such as ambition, self-assertion, and competitiveness are promoted in boys rather than in girls, beginning at an early age with games and sports that require "rough" or violent behaviour (Connell 37). Frank adopted the habit of playing extensive territorial war games, a behaviour socially accepted in boys, which, as such, is perceived as 'normal' throughout childhood and adolescence:

> Boys grow up in environments which encourage certain kinds of conduct, rather than others. They learn to be 'men'. Aggression, from this point of view, is a response to specific kinds of experience. Men will only behave aggressively if they have learned it is appropriate to do so. The implication is that a society's proper functioning depends upon the inculcation of aggressive patterns of behaviour in young boys. (Brittan 7)

There is a fine line between the kind of violence that is socially encouraged in boys and the kind of violence that is regarded as socially deviant or abnormal. Frank begins crossing this line with his acts of animal abuse. In an act of revenge on the entire rabbit population of a nearby field, he plants pipe bombs inside the rabbit holes, fires them, and then roasts the fleeing rabbits alive with a homemade flame thrower (WF 34-35). This act of vengeance is framed as retribution because a huge rabbit "broke" his beloved catapult, the "Black Destroyer" (WF 33), while Frank strangled the rabbit with it. According to the rules and habits of warfare, Frank aims at wiping out the entire rabbit popula-

tion, not only to compensate for what he sees as a partial defeat (the destruction of his favourite weapon) but also to reclaim victory over his opponents (the rabbits) in order to restore his damaged masculinity. Killing and prevailing are stylised as signs of masculinity, virility, and power. Therefore, the prerogative is to prevail over *others* while demonstrating one's own superiority (Montandon 220). Left 'damaged' after his alleged castration, Frank regains power and masculinity through the defeat of his declared opponents on the island he controls. As a result, Frank's overt exercise of physical violence seems to have a primarily compensatory function.

Compensatory Violence and the Gendered Body

Frank's preoccupation with his 'deficient' body becomes evident in certain passages within the novel. The paragraphs dedicated to the meticulous documentation of his washing and grooming rituals are particularly attention-grabbing since they constitute the only occasions on which Frank cannot avoid facing his genital area: "The shower is the only time in any twenty-four-hour period I take my underpants right off" (WF 44). Instead of neglecting his body as the disturbing factor of his gender identity, Frank maintains it with ritualistic care that borders on obsession:

> I showered carefully, starting at my hair and ending between my toes and under my toenails. […] After my shower, and a brisk rub-down with first a face-cloth and then a towel, I trimmed my nails. Then I brushed my teeth thoroughly with my electric toothbrush. Next the shave. I always use shaving foam and the latest razors (twin-blade swivel-heads are state-of-the-art at the moment), removing the downy brown growth of the previous day and night with dexterity and precision. As with all my ablutions, the shave follows a definite and predetermined pattern; I take the same number of strokes of the same length in the same sequence each morning. As always, I felt a rising tingle of excitement as I contemplated the meticulously shorn surfaces of my face. (WF 44)

Within the grooming ritual, the shaving of the face is depicted in particular detail as the only element that is specific to a man's bathroom ritual; this element demands for special care, attention, and the latest technological equipment. However, the removal of a visual masculine marker, facial hair, as well as the care and attention Frank devotes to his *toilette* stereotypically foreshadow what is revealed later in the narrative, namely Frank being born biologically female. This notion is also mirrored by his cleanliness and orderliness in the bathroom, both of these behaviours being traits stereotypically ascribed to a feminine gender performance:

> I blew and picked my nose clean, washed my hands, cleaned the razor, nail-clipper, shower and basin, rinsed out the flannel and combed my hair. Happily I didn't have any spots, so there was nothing else required but a final handwash and a clean pair of underpants. I placed all my washing materials, towels, razor and so forth exactly where they

> should be, wiped a little steam off the mirror on my bathroom cabinet, and returned to my room. (WF 44)

Frank's remark after the grooming and dressing ritual meanwhile indicates a permanent underlying insecurity and the need for stability concerning his identity: he removes the labels from the clothes "as from everything I wear because I refuse to be a walking advertisement for anybody" (WF 44-45). In this sequence, everything external that could potentially be threatening to Frank's sense of self needs to be annihilated – the clothes, like the body, need to be under Frank's control as thoroughly as possible.

Frank's need to compensate for his body dysmorphia is predominant throughout the narrative. His discontent with his own body is repeatedly addressed within the narrative; the main source of disappointment, apart from the alleged castration, is that Frank's body does not adhere to the stereotypical ideal of a masculine body as propagated by the media:

> I'm too fat. It isn't that bad, and it isn't my fault – but, all the same, I don't look the way I'd like to look. Chubby, that's me. Strong and fit, but still too plump. I want to look dark and menacing; the way I ought to look, the way I should look, the way I might have looked if I hadn't had my little accident. Looking at me, you'd never guess I'd killed three people. It isn't fair. (WF 20)

Here, it becomes clear that Frank commits violent acts to remould his body into his personal masculine ideal. This passage combines a typically adolescent longing for "dark and menacing" (s.a.) looks – many teenagers can probably relate to at a certain stage in their physical development – with the desire for traces left on the body, which mark Frank's violent potential. Whereas many murderers would hope for their deeds to go unnoticed, Frank kills to be perceived as a killer, to leave marks on his body and thus visibly carry evidence for his manhood achieved through murder.

Killing for Manhood

The different motives for killing animals and humans seem to be connected by Frank's conviction that the act of killing is an inevitable component of the masculine ideal he constructs in traditional opposition to femininity:

> It occurred to me then, as it had before, that that is what men are really for. Both sexes can do one thing specially well; women can give birth and men can kill. We – I consider myself an honorary man – are the harder sex. We strike out, push through, thrust and take. The fact that it is only an analogue of all this sexual terminology I am capable of does not discourage me. I can feel it in my bones, in my uncastrated genes. (WF 118)

Here, Frank reproduces biological essentialism: He regards it as the biologically implemented destiny of men to be "the harder sex" (s.a.), to fulfil the gender binary in its extremes and thus complement the life-giving function of the female

body with the taking of lives through the male body. Hereby, he ignores the necessity of a male counterpart to enable biological procreation. This ignorance results in the oversimplification of the gender binary, a system that allows him to compensate for the own alleged inability to procreate:

> Unfit for sex and procreation, his body remains frozen in time and barren. Thus, as a form of revenge, he lays waste to the lands in his power. The character's life is marked by the recurrence of self-instigated hostilities, weapon production, and a daily reconnaissance of his domain, all this aimed at reasserting his hold on the island by causing the death of everything that lives. (Pisarska 72)

Unable to fulfil an idealised role of a sexually fully functional male, Frank asserts his importance, influence, and impact as a masculine being through the total control of the island he inhabits. He is an untouchable monarch, holding ultimate power over life and death on the island:

> For Foucault, death is at once the locus and the instrument of power: that is, an independent power inheres in death itself, but other forms of power rely on death to disclose and enforce themselves. Death – not in the abstract, but people dying and the process by which they die – may signify by turns a monarch's sovereignty, a people's own power, and the primacy of biology over culture. (Goodwin and Bronfen 5)

For Frank, his bringing of death demonstrates his sovereignty, his triumph over all animate matter surrounding him. This includes humans as well; Frank does not shy away from extending his destructive force to the murder of his close relatives. Only six years old, he kills his cousin Blyth, enacting revenge for his brother Eric, whose pet rabbits Blyth had killed with a flamethrower. At the age of eight, he kills his younger brother Paul on grounds of him perceiving Paul as being the reincarnation of the dog who castrated him, and aged nine he kills his cousin Esmerelda, "more or less on a whim", concluding that this is his "score to date. Three. I haven't killed anybody for years, and don't intend to ever again. It was just a stage I was going through" (WF 42). With the last sentence, Frank relativises the murders, presenting them as a necessary part of his struggle to acquire manhood, a stage to overcome within his personal rites of initiation. Here, the killing of animals and humans alike can be read as the result of compensatory violence carried to extremes, to ensure and stabilise the desired gender identity and to symbolically initiate himself into an ideologically twisted fictional version of a masculine community (Degenring, *Identität* 161).

The execution of the three murders carries more than one layer of meaning concerning the foreshadowing of the plot twist, the ultimate revelation of Franks biological femaleness. Recalling Dornberg's binary model, different types of violence are traditionally ascribed to the respective masculine and feminine gender. During his fights against the animal kingdom, Frank mostly displays acts of *centrifugal* violence, which are masculinised according to Dornberg. Observing

the sites and methods of his murders, the displayed violence is generally still outward-oriented, as he is not harming himself but others, but at the same time the manner of him conducting those murders carries a rather stereotypically feminine connotation.

It is a persistent, yet empirically unverifiable popular myth that the female killer's weapon of choice is poison (Soulliere 25); and poison is, ultimately, the weapon Frank chooses to murder his first human victim, Blyth. But what is even more noteworthy concerning all three murders is that Frank, despite preparing all three, is not an active participant in the precise moment in which the victims lose their lives – his methods of killing are characterised through passivity or inactivity.

In Blyth's case, Frank traps a poisonous snake in his leg prosthesis and simply waits for him to strap it back on after his afternoon nap, doing nothing apart from watching his plan unfold: "my brothers and I stood there incredulous as Blyth screamed and jumped and tugged at his leg" (WF 41). The effect of this passivity is, of course, that Frank does not look guilty and manages to stage the whole scene as an accident: "Nobody suspected. […] [N]ot one person even suggested that it might have been anything other than a tragic and slightly macabre accident. Only I knew better" (WF 41).

Frank continues to play the random bystander to macabre accidents in the case of his disposal of Paul, whom he sees as personifying the spirit of the old dog which, according to Angus, attacked and castrated him. Angus shot the dog – who was, in an unquestionably biblical reference, called Saul – mere minutes before Paul was born in the nearby house. Frank feels haunted by Old Saul's spirit in Paul's presence and presents this feeling as motive for the murder: "[n]ot that I bore him any personal ill-will; it was simply that I knew he couldn't stay. I knew I'd never be free of the dog until he was gone" (WF 67). In his eyes, it is a symbolic act of emancipation from an emasculating violent trauma he is told to have suffered and that had a considerable impact on the process of his identity formation. He uses his little brother's unconditional trust in him to talk him into attacking an old aircraft bomb, washed ashore on the island, with a plank of wood. As Folkert Degenring points out, this situation demonstrates the definitory power Frank holds over the island, which allows him to manipulate Paul into unknowingly killing himself (*Identität* 155). Again, Frank exercises his sovereign power over life and death on the island, not only on a physical level but also through psychological manipulation. Thus, his actions encompass the whole established range of gendered violence. The murder of Esmerelda is by far the most aestheticised and symbolic of all three. In this case, Frank is neither motivated by revenge nor by some personal haunting experience but portrays his motives in a statistical context:

> I killed little Esmerelda because I felt I owed it to myself and to the world in general. I had, after all, accounted for two male children and thus done womankind something of a statistical favour. If I really had the courage of my convictions, I reasoned, I ought to redress the balance at least slightly. My cousin was simply the easiest and most obvious target. (WF 87)

Once again, this reasoning elevates Frank to a superior position. He sees himself capable to end Esmerelda's life for statistical reasons just because she falls, geographically, under his reach of power. By trespassing on the island, humans and animals alike fall prey to Frank's territorial reign. To get rid of Esmerelda, Frank stages a meticulously prepared 'accident' with a huge self-made kite, designed to carry the child out above the open sea:

> Then I let the lines go. The winch hit her in the small of the back and she yelped. Then she was dragged off her feet as the lines pulled her and the loops tightened round her wrists […]. I fell to the ground as Esmerelda left it forever. […] [T]hen I saw flowers tumble out of the sky and hit the water ahead of me like some strange rain. I waded out over the shallows until I came to them, and gathered the ones I could, looking up from my harvest as Esmerelda and kite struck out for the North Sea. (WF 92-93)

Conspiring with forces of nature, the wind and the sea, which he normally regards as enemies, Frank creates a disrupted literal enactment of a scene with highly religious content: he makes an angel out of Esmerelda. Recognising this scene as employing overt, yet twisted depictions of religious symbolism allow the reader to reconsider the other two murders under the same conjecture. The snake used to murder Blyth alludes to biblical and mythological appearances of the serpent, the complementary other and eternal rival to mankind, a cold-blooded poisonous threat to human existence (Chevalier et al. 844). In case of Paul's murder, Frank himself represents features of the treacherous snake which corrupts Eve in Paradise; symbolically, he is Christianity's satanic snake "giving birth to vices which brought us death instead of life" (855-856), thus bringing death to the innocent child. He even manages to justify this murder as an act of religious exorcism, out of mercy for Paul's soul and those around him:

> Paul of course, was Saul. That enemy was – must have been – cunning enough to transfer to the boy. That was why my father chose such a name for my new brother. It was just lucky that I spotted it in time and did something about it at such an early age, or God knows what the child might have turned into, with Saul's soul possessing him. (WF 108)

Paul, in the New Testament the spiritually cleansed rebirth of Saul, the sinner, was forgiven his sins and granted a new life, converted to Christianity, and became an apostle. Frank, however, does not know mercy or forgiveness. As the mastermind behind all these killings, exercising ultimate control over their deaths, Frank elevates himself to an almost divine position through the symbolic significance of these murders. In turn, this position helps to stabilise his inner

space through the exercised fantasy of complete control over the outer space (the island and its inhabitants), "its order being based on the male fantasy of domination, which Frank executes through killing and revenge" (Pisarska 46). Here, a twisted masculine ideology and a killing spree presenting spiritual features and enforcing Frank's personal order on the world surrounding him come together in a merger to stabilise Frank's sense of self and control.

Lastly, considering his age at the time of his quest for manhood through murder, it becomes evident that Frank prematurely abandons his own childhood. Within his world, which is mostly categorised in binary oppositions, he becomes the ultimate other to the children he kills. This is not only visible through the apparent life-death-dichotomy but also reflected through the societal response to child murderers:

> Children who kill another child forfeit their membership of the category of childhood and become ripe for being killed in turn as an abjected outsider. The failure of the individual child to match the epithets culturally designated for him or her results in a greater moral response than a violent (especially male) adult would provoke, as a supposed natural feature of adult masculinity is violence. (Downing 175)

In violently distancing himself from childhood and the established image of childlike innocence, the protagonist of *The Wasp Factory* hopes to achieve a decidedly gendered adulthood through yet another clear-cut oppositional transition. It has undoubtedly become clear that dichotomous systems are the groundwork to Frank's worldview and his own sense of selfhood, which serves to justify his preoccupation with extreme gender ideals based on gendered violence.

4.3 The Self and the Other: Construction through Oppositions

Gender studies scholars emphasise the mutual definitory power of femininity and masculinity, and defined gender as a subject to relational references within a traditionally binary system (Schößler 11). Psychological theorems concerning identity, at least since Freud, work with a similar system to explain identity formation, from which the reasoning of gender studies developed: the *self* and the *other* defined in relation and in opposition to each other.

Already at a very early stage in psychological development, infants have a knowledge of self-other equivalence and learn behavioural traits through copying humans in their social surrounding (Hines 169). Within the normal psychological processes during childhood and adolescence, this self-other equivalence is reevaluated and partially inverted within the process of identity formation: within this developmental process, attempts of distancing traits that represent the

self from those which represent the *other* serve to stabilise self-concepts and further individuality and autonomy (Hines 180).

Adopted by 19th-century British literature, the literary version of the psychological *other* tends to occur and reoccur within (gothic) narratives in form of the literary double, or *doppelgänger*-motif, mostly read as an externalised part of the self of a literary character. The externalised part of the *self* then becomes the *other* originating within, which is one of the most frequent recurring themes of gothic and horror literature, critically spiced by Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) featuring the return of repressed aspects or experiences of the self. The literary trope of the double is a popular subject of analysis in case of *The Wasp Factory* and has been examined, among others, in Andrew M. Butler's "Strange Case of Mr Banks: Doubles and *The Wasp Factory*" (1999) and Martyn Colebrook's "'Journeys into Lands of Silence': *The Wasp Factory* and Mental Disorder" (2010). The relationships between the protagonist and other characters who function as primary reference persons are of interest concerning Frank's psychological development, his gender orientation, and his self-concept.

Father and 'Son': Angus and Frank

Angus, Frank's father, not only functions as his primary caregiver but is also the ultimate engineer of Frank's life as a bio-social experiment. In the absence of Frank's biological mother and given her apparent disinterest in her child, Angus is free to conduct hormonal alterations on his biologically female child to convert it into a boy as far as possible without surgical intervention:

> My father dressing Eric up as a girl was just, as it turned out, a rehearsal for me. When Old Saul savaged me, my father saw it as an ideal opportunity for a little experiment, and a way of lessening – perhaps removing entirely – the influence of the female around him as I grew up. So he started dosing me with male hormones, and has been ever since. That's why he's always made the meals, that's why what I've always thought was the stump of a penis is really an enlarged clitoris. Hence the beard, no periods, and all the rest. (WF 181)

Not registering Frank's birth with the authorities, Angus becomes the ultimate definitory authority over his child's biological gender, highlighting the artificial discursive construction of biological sex by social convention: "A man will become a man only when his genitals are defined as having the attributes that belong to men. It is as though he can only testify to his masculinity because others have said this is how he has to be" (Brittan 21).

Being told that he once had male genitalia, now mostly gone due to the alleged attack by Old Saul, Frank's gender identity starts from a position of lack. His primary male sexual organ is absent, which, in a Freudian sense, puts him in a feminine position according to "the prevalent laws of gender differentiation"

(Schoene-Harwood 137). Thus, paradoxically, the girl who was made a boy is again feminised through a lack of biological essentials, which raises the need for violent compensation in a society that promotes gender as a binary system that not only devalues the feminine end of the binary but also excludes anything in between or outside the masculine and feminine poles.

Frank's recognition of his father's experiment as a misogynistic act, which surfaces in the quote above, is shared by Berthold Schoene-Harwood in his essay on devolving gender in *The Wasp Factory*:

> Like all patriarchal discourse, [Angus'] tale of Frank's accidental castration is designed to disable woman, to keep her in check by inculcating in her an awesome respect and envy of the penis. Frank's father assures himself of his own superior able-bodiedness, badly damaged by his wife's rebellious onslaught on his authority, by projecting his fear of impotence and fallibility on his daughter. (Schoene-Harwood 141)

Physically and psychologically influenced by a misogynist father, Frank becomes an "entirely fictitious creation" (s.a.), a boy with a gender ideal manufactured by Angus and the stereotypes propagated by the media, and as a result of this "obsessively overcompensating for a patriarchally inflicted lack of natural manliness by pursuing an extremist ideal of violent masculine perfection" (Schoene-Harwood 133). Ignorant of the father's hormonal and social manipulations of his body until the final two chapters of the narrative, Frank tries to distinguish himself from Angus. In particular, he tries to depict his own masculinity in contrast to his father's body, which is ascribed feminine lineaments: "He has a delicate face, like a woman's" (WF 10). This observation stresses and enhances the necessity of forming Frank's own body in an emphasised masculine fashion, in opposition to Angus' alleged bodily delicacy. This weakness is added to by his stiff leg, a remnant of his second wife Agnes. She had returned to give birth to Paul and then discharged him, leaving on a motorbike and, on her way off, running over Angus: "Angus in *The Wasp Factory* falls prey to the determined and dominant womanhood of his wife Agnes, who leaves him burdened with her new-born illegitimate child and limping for the rest of his life" (Pisarska 29).

Symbolically castrated by his significant other in a twofold way, Angus passes his castration-complex onto his daughter, making her a castrated son (cf. Schoene-Harwood 141). Having learned to treat his father's stories with inherent distrust, the obvious similarity in names of his father and his alleged mother, Agnes, in combination with the discovery of male hormones and tampons in Angus' study, leads Frank to suspect that his father's significant other is in fact a gothic *other*, an alter ego or double behind Angus' masculine façade:

> I thought of that delicate face, those lightly haired arms. I tried to think of one time I had seen my father naked to the waist, but for the life of me I couldn't. The secret. It

> couldn't be. I shook my head, but I couldn't let go of the idea. Angus. Agnes. I only had his word for anything that had happened. (WF 173)

This notion of a potential doubling between Angus and Agnes is shared by Andrew M. Butler, and the forced revelation of Angus' genitalia (WF 174) does not serve to clear up the doubt because the manner of depiction ("greasy-looking") echoes the wax contents of the specimen-jar Angus intended to sell off as the remnants of Frank's severed male genitalia:

> Our brief glimpse of Agnes, his second wife, is of a biker who runs over Angus Cauldhame, permanently damaging his leg. The violence is something which we associate with masculinity [...]. It is entirely possible that Angus's greasy genitals could be made of greasy wax, and, like the tiny set he manufactured to fool his/her daughter, they may be 'More proof; more lies.' (A. M. Butler, "Strange Case" 23-24)

Angus' secretive behaviour towards Frank, his peculiar cosmovision ("My father once had me believing that the earth was a Möbius strip", WF 12), and his lies during homeschooling ("For *years* I believed Pathos was one of the Three Musketeers, Fellatio was a character in *Hamlet*, Vitros a town in China (…)", WF 14, emphasis original) do not serve to provide Frank with a stable worldview, belief system, or trust in his parent while growing up. Angus himself is not a reliable father figure and therefore enhances Frank's need to build a stable surrounding of his own by enforcing his violent reign on the island. Angus is, however, the most important constituent of Frank's social reality and (assumed) gender identity. In terms of gender identity formation, Frank's brother Eric is as important concerning construction through opposition, as will become evident in the following line of argument.

Siblings in Opposition: Eric and Frank

Eric, the older half-brother, is loved dearly and held in high regard throughout Frank's young years on the island, despite only spending the summers at Angus' house. Frank worships him as a brother and, in a way, also as a masculine role model:

> When he was sent off to private schools I pined; when he came back on holidays I enthused; I jumped and bubbled and got excited. Summer after summer we spent on the island. […] We played some stories out: brave soldiers in the dunes and fighting, winning and fighting and fighting and sometimes dying. Those were the only times he deliberately hurt me, when his stories required his own heroic death and I would take it all too seriously as he lay expiring on the grass or the sands, having just blown up the bridge or the dam or the enemy convoy and like as not saved me from death, too; I would hold back tears and punch him lightly as I tried to change the story myself and he refused, slipping away from me and dying; too often dying. (WF 137)

The childlike plays promote the basis of Frank's masculine ideal of the combative hero-soldier, but they also point out Eric's other side, displaying the imagi-

native, sensitive, and attentive features of the teenager. Eric battles with migraines and, with his transition to adulthood, with increasing emotional instability. In Frank's dichotomous world, these traits belong to the feminine gender rather than to the masculine; thus, Eric can no longer serve as a masculine role model during Frank's adolescence but is used as another opposition to Frank's self-concept.

When Eric suffers a mental breakdown after a traumatic experience with a disabled child in a hospital where he worked, Frank takes this as further evidence of Eric's psyche being permeated – and thus weakened – by femininity (Schoene-Harwood 138). Frank's view of Eric is both founded on, and an effect of, their father having "dressed Eric in girl's clothes and let him run wild" (WF 66). On grounds of this knowledge, Frank assumes that Eric was 'contaminated' with femininity at a very early age, which led to his downfall after the traumatic incident at the hospital:

> Whatever it was that disintegrated in Eric then, it was a weakness, a fundamental flaw that a real man should not have had. […] There must be a few strong women, women with more man in their character than most, and I suspect that Eric was the victim of a self with just a little too much of the woman in it. (WF 148)

After his mental breakdown, Eric comes home to the island and increasingly displays violent and irrational behaviour against children and teenagers of the nearby town, then starting to abduct pet dogs and setting them on fire (WF 143). Even though these cases of animal abuse are clearly mirrored by Frank's own violent excesses against animals (such as attacking rabbits with pipe bombs and a flame thrower), in Frank's perception they are evidence of Eric's insanity induced by femininity. For Frank, both concepts are closely related:

> Women, I know from watching hundreds – maybe thousands – of films and television programmes, cannot withstand really major things happening to them; they get raped, or their loved one dies, and they go to pieces, go crazy and commit suicide, or just pine away until they die. Of course, I realise that not all of them will react that way, but obviously it's the rule, and the ones who don't obey it are in the minority. (WF 148)

The societal evaluation of Eric finds in favour of Frank's version of events; although both boys "commit acts of atrocity, and both appear to be less than sane" (A. M. Butler, "Strange Case" 21), Frank's crimes are not sanctioned throughout the novel, whereas the authorities are constantly chasing Eric, the escaped lunatic:

> Frank is able to think of his own madness as sanity because, unlike Eric's, it appears to have patriarchal sanction. Although it results in the deaths of two cousins and his younger brother, Frank's ultraviolent behaviour ultimately poses no threat to the societal order but [...] seems to remain – almost – within the socially acceptable boundaries of what boys naturally tend to get up to. Despite the fact that Frank undoubtedly goes too far, his actions are never deviant or subversive but follow the normative guidelines of masculine propriety. (Schoene-Harwood 136)

The only clear difference between the boys' violent killing sprees is that Frank is not violating anybody's property; therefore, he does not transgress in a society based on capitalist ownership. While Eric sets fire to people's pets, Frank sets fire to field rabbits that belong to nobody; while Eric molests schoolchildren who then go and tell their parents, Frank kills relatives, leaving no witnesses, and stages it like accidents. Read like that, the differing societal treatment of the brothers' analogous violence can be interpreted as a sarcastic commentary on modern Western society's capitalist perception of crime, guilt, and insanity: first of all, there is no crime if the destroyed object is nobody's property or concern; second, violence is always gendered: encouraged in the quest for masculinity, condemned in connection to (in this case purely psychologically ascribed) femininity; and lastly, transgression of gendered norms and capitalist property laws indicates insanity.

The contrasting of the siblings Eric and Frank further leads to a patriarchally forced masculinisation of both parties, featuring "both a girl obsessively preoccupied with asserting what she believes to be her congenital masculinity (Frank) and a boy whose feminine disposition is crushed by the impact of inexorable patriarchal pressure (Eric)" (Schoene-Harwood 134-135). Thus, it seems that after all that happened with Agnes, in the world of Angus, Eric, and Frank, the feminine has no chance of survival; it equals death and has to be fought against or dispersed of violently and vehemently with 'masculine vigour'. And so, even Eric's "ultraviolence is motivated by an overwhelming sense of his own inadequacy, failure and incompetence as a 'real' man" (Schoene-Harwood 139). Presenting the feminine as the ultimate enemy leads to an examination of Frank in relation to his archenemies, "Women and the Sea" (WF 43).

Contrasting through Enemies: Frank against Women and Nature

> My greatest enemies are Women and the Sea. These things I hate. Women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them, and the Sea because it has always frustrated me, destroying what I have built, washing away what I have left, wiping clean the marks I have made. And I'm not all that sure the Wind is blameless, either. (WF 43)

Frank's negative perception of femininity is mainly based on the stereotypical depiction of women in the media, where he perceives them as passive and weak, reacting to things "happening to them" (WF 148) instead of acting on their own behalf and of their own accord; thus, he concludes that women have no goals of their own but are instead suffering their fates as passive bystanders. At the same time, paradoxically, the feminine poses a threat to the masculine, which does not only become evident in the fate of Eric, who, in Frank's perception, suffers his societal and mental downfall due to being 'permeated' by femininity, but which

also becomes symbolically visible in the destructive forces of nature. Besides women, the sea is Frank's greatest enemy. This reproduces a traditional literary topos, which consists in connecting the sea with femininity, danger, and unpredictability (Degenring, *Identität* 165). Nevertheless, wind and sea are accomplices to his third murder – he is thus able to manipulate his archenemies towards his own ends.

Frank's notion of femininity contains contradictory attributes within the context of the gender binary: on the one hand femininity denotes inferiority and triviality in contrast to masculinity, on the other hand it is connected to unpredictability and hence a potential threat to stability and masculine hegemony. Externalising the latter into forces of nature allows Frank to stabilise his environment and therefore his masculine identity. Through this division, he can maintain his personal idea of masculine superiority and feminine insignificance in a social framework, whereas the struggle against the untameable sea positions him within the ancient battle of mankind against nature, a traditional and honorary masculine occupation whose inherent hopelessness cannot directly threaten his masculine identity as an individual.

Frank's negative image of women also partly stems from the few things he assumes to know about his mother, not from personal recollection but from his father's depiction of events:

> I can't remember my mother, because if I did I'd hate her. As it is, I hate her name, the idea of her. It was she who let the Stoves take Eric away to Belfast, away from the island, away from what he knew. […] [S]he didn't like children and Eric in particular; she thought he was bad for her karma in some way. Probably the same dislike of children led her to desert me immediately after my birth, and also caused her only to return on that one, fateful occasion when she was at least partly responsible for my little accident. All in all, I think I have good reason to hate her. I lay there in the Bomb Circle where I killed her other son, and I hoped that she was dead, too. (WF 66)

Ironically, this story puts Frank himself in a passive and feminised position of only being capable to react to the consequences of his mother's decision to abandon him. Again, Frank is feminised in a position in which his intention is to display strength and masculinity through violent revenge; instead, he is exposed as a deserted child whose rage is based on his own feelings of loss, insecurity, and insignificance.

Critics claimed that Frank's original biological femaleness is resurfacing within the nature–femininity allegory, his battle against the sea and the obsession with the own body foreshadowing the novel's plot twist:

> In this context, the sea's repeated attacks on Frank's domain can be interpreted in terms of his own repressed femininity, whose latent presence has continually challenged the painstakingly constructed but artificial image of Frank as a man. It is because of his resurfacing womanhood that Frank's build is more rounded than other men's […]. (Pisarska 74)

Folkert Degenring reasons that in the end, when Frank's biological femaleness is revealed, his misogyny is justified for the first time: with the realisation that he is, biologically, a woman, Frank's carefully manufactured gender identity is destroyed (Degenring, *Identität* 165). Ironically, this happens in the moment of its necessary abandonment due to psychologic self-preservation: Frank, once a genuine misogynist, must now reinvent *themselves* and their perception of gender.

4.4 Unveilings: Constructions and Performances

In the moment of unveiling Angus' secret and Frank's biological sex, all hell breaks loose on the island in a truly Macbethian fashion:

> Something screamed outside, in the night beyond the window. […] Then came a light, orange and wavering, where no light should be, out there, over the dunes, and more screams, bleatings and baas and screams; everywhere screams. […] In seconds the hillside was covered with burning sheep, their wool in flames, bleating wildly and running down the hill, lighting up the sandy grass and weeds and leaving them burning in their fiery wake. (WF 174-175)

This symbolic and aesthetic intensity is comparable to Shakespeare's 'Scottish play' and its perverse messengers of evil after the rightful king's murder: horses eating each other, an owl killing a falcon, and darkness overshadowing the day (*Macbeth* 2.4 ll 1-19) – the latter here directly inverted into "a light […] where no light should be" (WF 174). Regarding the unveiling of Frank's biological sex, the burning sheep, accompanied by the long-awaited homecoming of Eric, therefore mark the beginning restoration of the 'natural order'.

In contrast, Carole Jones depicts the scene as "the image of a world turned upside down and the terrible consequences [of] Frank's gender dysphoria, his 'unnatural' crossing of the gender divide", and "the horrors unleashed in his terrible acts" (Jones 111). This interpretation regards Frank as being symbolically haunted, not only by his ultra-violent acts against animals and humans but also for his involuntary gender transgression, and goes hand in hand with Katharine Cox's interpretation of the plot twist: "Frank demonstrates this power through extreme acts of violence which punish transgressors. Ironically it is Frank who is revealed as the principal transgressor having been socialized as a boy (albeit a castrated one) who is then revealed to be female at the end of the narrative" (Cox 93).

Frank's revelation as "the principal transgressor" is read as punishment by many critics, as retribution for the display of an "ambiguous portrait of contemptible masculinist ideology" (Martín Alegre 201). Now, as a woman, Frank is a second-class subject to patriarchal values, and Sara Martín Alegre sees the

ultimate punishment in Frank's destiny being determined by the biologically male members of the family: "like Frances's, women's identity is in the hands of unstable men like Angus and Eric with the power to alter it" (Martín Alegre 201).

This evaluation of the plot twist is regressive, for it falls back into the previously criticised extremist gender dichotomy Frank held up. Reading the revelation of Frank's biological sex as the punishment for violent behaviour submits the analysis to a patriarchal ideology that treats women as second-class citizens.

Further, the interpretative approach outlined above ignores the importance that is assigned to gender performance at this point of unveiling. Frank's violence is no longer maintainable as effect or inborn attribute of his male biology; it therefore lacks any form of social legitimacy. At the same time, supported by Eric's character conception, the whole notion of violence being inherent in the masculine gender is deconstructed and the overall acting out of masculinity within this novel is unmasked as pure performativity:

> In *The Wasp Factory*, patriarchal masculinity, traditionally the bedrock of all communal and individual identification, undergoes an elaborate process of ironic unwrapping. Banks employs gender parody to reveal the imitative artifice of normative standards that compel individuals to fashion themselves in compliance with an imperative ideal that does not originate in biological nature, it is in itself a derivative of social conditioning. (Schoene-Harwood 132)

In Frank's character conception it becomes evident what it takes to *build* a man in Western societies, albeit admittedly in an exaggerated form that borders on gender parody. The need to compensate for apparent physical deficiencies through enhanced stereotypical behaviour is particularly emphasised by Frank: "I believe that I decided if I could never become a man, I – the unmanned – would out-man those around me, and so I became the killer, a small image of the ruthless soldier-hero almost all I've ever seen or read seems to pay strict homage to" (WF 183). Finally, not only is the traditional social position of females as the second sex questioned, but masculinity itself is deconstructed, facilitating the top-down unmasking of the gender hierarchy as a social construct. What remains is Frank's ambiguous new social position as a female, which seems, surprisingly enough, to be accepted by the novel's protagonist as a way out of the infinite cycle of violence:

> In the final image of Frank cradling his brother's head, Duncan Petrie sees Frank embracing the feminine. [...] The image is certainly a recovery of a feminine, even maternal, force that has been suppressed in the world of the text, and the novel undoubtedly reinforces the need to move beyond the barbarian and the assertion of a violent code of misogynistic masculinity. (Falcus 133)

This acceptance of the new gender identity as a social sphere that allows for a non-violent lifestyle appears to be a throwback to the traditional gender binary, which at the same time lets Frank's 'masculine' violent actions appear even

more perverted, as a product of an 'unnatural' gender transgression. However, this assumption is debilitated through Frank's assertion of self, of an own identity despite the loss of gender identity:

> I want to laugh or cry or both, as I sit here, thinking about my one life, my three deaths. Four deaths now, in a way, now that my father's truth has murdered what I was. But I am still me; I am still the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to my name. (WF 182)

This declaration problematises the impact of gender stereotypes on identity once more, since it makes clear that, stripped of gender as a relativising factor, what remains is a human being having to bear the effects of their acts of misanthropic violence. At the same time, it raises the question whether the social perception of 'gendered violence' can be maintained after the literary deconstruction of gender.

The interplay of gender, violence, and identity is also at the centre of Banks' first Culture novel. Protagonist Bora Horza Gobuchul is a member of the rare and ancient Changer species, able to shape-shift into any human form. As a species, Changers were engineered to be biological weapons and are therefore personified threats of violence.

5. Gender Stereotypes? *Consider Phlebas*

In *Consider Phlebas*, the Culture, a socio-anarchic interstellar association of humanoids and machines living in a harmonious symbiosis, is not introduced from within the society but from an outside perspective. Protagonist Bora Horza Gobuchul works against the Culture, in a war between the former and the Idirans, a highly developed non-humanoid species with prevalent religious convictions and fascist tendencies. As this setup already indicates, both physical and psychological violence are important aspects of gender performances in *Consider Phlebas*. Warfare is recognised as a "predominantly male occupation" (Kimmel and Kegan Gardener vii). As such, it is a defining aspect of ideals and stereotypes of masculinity in Western literature and culture. Indeed, as a mercenary in service of a morally and ethically highly questionable society, Horza is frequently depicted as an efficient and ruthless "man on a mission", thereby adhering to a traditional gender norm in science fiction. This, furthermore, becomes apparent in his interactions with other characters; particularly his romantic relationships serve to present him as the masculine space cowboy of traditional science fiction, which undermines the subversive potential Horza personifies as a Changer in terms of gender norms and stereotypes. However, Horza's stereotypical gender performance as a mercenary for an ultra-patriarchal civilisation is starkly contrasted by the transgressive potential the Culture offers: changing one's biological sex is not only possible but even encouraged.

The reproduction of gendered stereotypes within this opening novel of Banks' Culture series will be the first object of my analysis, which will then be contrasted with elements of subversion as well as attempts of deconstruction and transgression.

5.1 Sex and Gender and the Culture

> Stan-Preonsa Fal Shilde 'Ngeestra dam Crose [...] changed sex several times, bore two children, joined Contact after the war, went primitive without permission on a stage two uncontacted with a tribe of wild horse-women, [...] had another child, then accepted an invitation to join Contact's Special Circumstances section and spent nearly a hundred years (as a male) as emissary to the then recently contacted Million-Star Anarchy of Soveleh. (CP 466)

With the Culture's human members, it is a matter of *bon ton* to change one's sex at least once during a lifetime, as well as giving birth at least once. For John Garrison, this signifies a "fluidity of identity in the Culture, […] where citizens often change gender several times during their lifetime" (Garrison 59). How-

ever, in the Culture, the choice most predominantly made is of being either biologically male or female – it is therefore the biological sex that is interchangeable; that Garrison equates it with gender is already a hint of a conservative reading à la sex-equals-gender, whereas this study operates on an understanding of gender as a cultural and social concept, which can result in an expression that is not necessarily congruent with the individual's biological sex.

In the Culture, readers rarely encounter a human comfortably and permanently settled in a space between or outside the male–female binary. In fact, the sex and gender binary is not only reconstructed in the Culture series, without the overt need to do so[29], it is also reinforced through the reproduction of Western gender stereotypes, portraying, for example, (young) women as frail, female operatives as restraint and diplomatically forbearing, and men as violent, active, and impatient.

In the Culture novels, biological sex is no longer a determination but a choice. Thus, new questions arise for the analysis of biological sex in relation to gender and gender performance – are the performances linked to the characters' biological sex in a stereotypical way? In how far does (voluntarily chosen) biological sex express a characters' gender identity and influence their fate? Is there a display of 'dissonances' in comparison to the traditional sex–gender binary? How is the space in between depicted, particularly during transition times in between the male and the female biology? Is the gendering of violence critically addressed or subverted?

As mentioned above, the diegetic world depicted in *Consider Phlebas* allows for biological alteration of any kind in humans and displays 'alien' variations of biological sex. This creates a new field of interest between the poles of biological sex and gender performance in literary analysis. As explained in chapter 3.1, Judith Butler understands gender as involuntary and imperfect performance. This performance is highly individual and influenced by a character's social environment as well as their position within a social hierarchy. It is also dependent on the character constellation: keeping in mind Brod's assertion that "[g]ender is not primarily a property of individuals, but a social construction in which social constructs of gender become internalized and engendered in indi-

29 Bearing in mind that science fiction can serve as an infinite cognitive and moral test area for any cultural or social paradigm, upholding a stereotypical sex and gender binary seems regressive. The potential of portraying and thus exploring spaces between or outside the sex and gender binary is seldomly realised in the Culture series. *Excession* marks the only time that an androgynous-presenting character is explored in the Culture universe. Since that character is an avatar of a Culture mind, thus technically a non-human artificial intelligence, it is not entirely comparable to a human (cf. chapter 6).

viduals" (28), it stands to reason that gender performances are practiced and solidified in interpersonal interactions.

The analysis of gender performances will therefore go hand in hand with an examination of the relationships and interactions between the characters. Literary gender studies emphasise the mutual definitory power of femininity and masculinity, thus analysing gender as subject of relational references within a traditionally binary system (Schößler 11). It can thus be assumed that this system also serves as reference to define the space outside the binary model of femininity and masculinity ex negativo, rendering that space culturally "unintelligible" (J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* 17). The "heterosexual matrix" (J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* 7) serves to naturalise a stereotypical continuity of sex, gender, and desire with procreation at the heart of it. Homosexuality, trans-identity, androgyny, and many other phenomena that do not conform to cis-heteronormativity potentially disrupt this matrix and are therefore culturally invisible. The character constellation of most Culture novels follows the mutually referential gender binary supported through the heterosexual matrix, featuring characters constructed alongside binary gender stereotypes engaging in heterosexual romance plots.

In this way, Bora Horza Gobuchul, protagonist of *Consider Phlebas*, a Changer, and an agent on behalf of the Idirans, and Perosteck Balveda, a Special Circumstances[30] agent employed by the Culture, are opponents and display stereotypical gender performances which are emphasised in relation to each other.

The novel predominantly features a third-person figural narrative situation with Horza being the dominant focal point, while the characters he interacts with are mostly described through his point of view. Horza is introduced to the narrative as an employee of the Idirans, a deeply religious and violent non-human species at war with the Culture. They provide him with his 'mission': to find and capture a stranded Culture mind. His determination to fulfil his mission is the undercurrent of the novel and drives the plot throughout Horza's involuntary employment by Kraiklyn aboard the *Clear Air Turbulance*. During the attempted fulfilment of his mission as well as during his relationships with his romantic interests, Kierachell and Yalson, and with his adversary, the Culture agent Perosteck Balveda, the protagonist displays a 'space cowboy' gender performance that is stereotypical to SF.

30 Special Circumstances is the Culture equivalent of an intelligence service, itself a part of the Contact section of the Culture, which deals with non-Culture civilisations.

5.2 The Changer's Unchanging Gender Performance

In the beginning of the novel, Horza is tasked with retrieving a stranded Mind, a highly intelligent supercomputer and important societal, political, and military part of the Culture. The Mind is stranded on Schar's World, a forbidden planet behind the Quiet Barrier, controlled by the Dra'Azon, a species sublimed[31] long ago. When asked by the Culture agent Balveda why he is fighting this war alongside the Idirans, Horza's main motif proves to be biological essentialism:

> I don't care how self-righteous the Culture feels, or how many people the Idirans kill. They're on the side of life – boring, old-fashioned, biological life; smelly, fallible and short-sighted, God knows, but *real* life. You're ruled by your machines. You're an evolutionary dead end. (CP 29)

In his perception, the inclusion and importance of artificial intelligence[32] in the societal structure of the Culture marks the civilisation as "opposed to biological life" (Vint 91). In addition to his resentments based on a biologically essentialist notion of what 'real life' is, he feels superior to the human Culture citizens: "The fools in the Culture couldn't see that one day the Minds would start thinking how wasteful and inefficient the humans in the Culture themselves were" (CP 35). Despite claiming to fight in defence of biological life, he does not hesitate to kill any biological life form he perceives to be a hindrance of his mission.

Horza's determination to fulfil his mission on behalf of the Idirans is the force that drives the novel's plot. In this respect, it resembles a traditional western novel: Horza, the cowboy at the centre of the plot, is fearless, ruthless, and goal-oriented, unhesitatingly using violence, even against members of his own crew who he fears are about to jeopardise his mission:

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31 When a civilisation chooses to sublime in Banks' Culture series, its individuals choose to leave their bodies, homes, and possessions behind to enter a collective consciousness beyond: "Sublimation meant your whole civilisation waved farewell to the matter-based universe pretty much altogether, opting for a sort of honorary godhood" (M 174).

32 "The Culture, there could be no doubt, relied profoundly on its machines for both its strategy and tactics in the war it was now engaged in. Indeed, a case could be made for holding that the Culture was its machines, that they represented it at a far more fundamental level than did any single human or group of humans within the society. The Minds that the Culture's factory craft, safe Orbitals and larger GSVs were now producing were some of the most sophisticated collections of matter in the galaxy. They were so intelligent that no human was capable of understanding just how smart they were (and the machines themselves were incapable of describing it to such a limited form of life). […] the Culture had placed its bets – long before the Idiran war had been envisaged – on the machine rather than the human brain. This was because the Culture saw itself as being a self-consciously rational society; and machines, even sentient ones, were more capable of achieving this desired state as well as more efficient at using it once they had. That was good enough for the Culture." (CP 86-87)

> Horza clouted Wubslin across the head with his arm, sending the man falling to the floor, stunned. He grabbed the controls back from the relaxing fingers of the engineer, but it was too late to turn away. [...] Horza shrugged and checked the laser again. He was becoming, he realised, almost blasé about the whole thing. *What the hell?* He thought. (248)

Horza fits into Rocío Carrasco Carrasco's classification of the "conquering man", a term developed within her study of constructions of masculinity in science fiction cinema (Carrasco Carrasco 228-229). She also draws connections to western heroes; Horza fits these descriptions in so far as he is depicted as a lone space cowboy on a mission who shoots before he asks any questions. In contrast to a western hero, he does not display any form of doubt or remorse, which would be an essential quality indicating good-heartedness or a moral compass. Not only does Horza kill without any hesitation in situations where he must defend his own life, but he also plans and executes murder in cold blood. To gain control over the *Clear Air Turbulance* and its crew, he decides to kill and impersonate its captain, Kraiklyn. The crew aboard the old ship finds Horza floating helplessly in space after having been abandoned by his Idiran employers mid-battle (CP 33). They haul him on board, him still physically impersonating an old man (for a previous job in service of the Idirans). Assuming him dead, Kraiklyn has an eye on his technologically well-equipped space suit. Horza, trapped in an aged body and desperately pleading for a chance to stay aboard the ship, finds himself in a position of inferiority and complete dependence on the captain:

> 'Let me join. All I'm asking for's a chance. If I louse up first time, dump me then.'
> 'Why not dump you now and save the hassle?' The captain laughed, spreading his arms wide. Some of the others laughed too.
> 'A *chance*,' Horza repeated. 'Shit, it isn't much to ask.'
> 'I'm sorry.' The Man shook his head. 'We're overcrowded already.'
> The silver-haired youth was looking up at Horza, his face twisted with pain and hate. The people in the group were smirking at Horza or talking quietly to each other and nodding at him, grinning. He was suddenly aware that he looked like just a skinny old man in the nude. (CP 44)

Kraiklyn is in a dominant patriarchal position in this situation, which is added to by him being referred to as "the Man" – he personifies masculine authority and superiority, which is further emphasised by the capital "M" that alludes to (predominantly masculine) figures of absolute power of order, such as 'the President' and 'the King' – or 'God' –, which in its sheer exaggeration also serves to emphasise the parodist qualities of Kraiklyn's stereotypically masculine gender performance. In contrast, Horza is socially emasculated by his frail, unsuited nudity and Kraiklyn's corresponding demeanour: he has the power to decide whether Horza lives or dies but decides to play games, ridiculing Horza's ap-

pearance, demanding that "somebody get this old guy some shorts; he's putting me off my food" (ibid.). Emasculated by this situation's power dynamic, Horza reacts with a verbal attack to regain agency and respect in this space of masculine hierarchy: "'Fuck it!' he spat, glaring right at the Man. 'Give me five days and I'll take you on anytime'" (ibid.). In proper Wild West fashion, Horza challenges Kraiklyn to a duel, but the captain of the *Clear Air Turbulence* is only willing to risk "the most expendable member of the crew" (45) – who is subsequently killed by Horza in single combat (50).

In this situation, Horza must prove his manhood and his worth by taking a substantial risk, which is seen by critics as an essential process within adolescents' struggle towards masculinity in particular:

> Masculinity, as a notion, is in transition, if not inherently unstable, it is not a simple fact but has to be acquired through struggles, painful initiations, rites of passage, or long and often humiliating apprenticeships. The risks that have to be taken during this time are inestimably high, and the higher these risks are, the greater is the manhood they confer. [..] Being a man has thus become – and has always been – a serious matter that has to be taught and learned. But this, of course, always implies the risk of failure, of not being man enough [...]. (Horlacher 5)

Horza repeatedly shows stereotypical performances of masculinity through the exercise of patriarchal power and violence; both are inextricably tied to his character. He has the potential of transforming himself into an exact replica of any human being, when given the appropriate amount of time, and therefore holds power over the life of anyone he meets. His strength and his biologically implemented weapons make him dangerous to anybody around him, as Folkert Degenring points out: the Changers were made as living weapons ages ago, not only physically superior to most of their opponents but also posing a profound psychological danger, thus making Horza a personified threat of violence (Degenring, "*Women, Aliens and Monsters*" 107).

Unbeknownst to Kraiklyn, Horza has planned to impersonate the captain almost from the beginning of his stay aboard the *CAT* (CP 65). When he finally gets the chance to implement his plan, the real Kraiklyn must die for the double to take his place. Physically fully transformed into the captain's outward appearance, Horza attacks Kraiklyn from behind. Fearing that 'the Man' will not realise *who* is about to end his life, Horza feels the need to make sure Kraiklyn knows the identity of his killer:

> 'I'm Horza! Horza!' he screamed, but couldn't even hear anything himself.
> He shook his head, and with a grimace of frustration on the face that was not really his own and which was the last thing the real Kraiklyn ever saw, he gripped the head of the man lying on the concrete and twisted it sharply, breaking the neck, just as he had broken Zallin's. (219)

Horza embodies the importance of violence for the preservation of patriarchal hierarchies. Nevertheless, physical and psychological violence are not the sole characteristics of Horza's stereotypically masculine gender performance. It is additionally supported by the way his romantic relationship with the Changer woman Kierachell is presented by him in retrospect.

Kierachell

Several years before Horza comes aboard the *Clear Air Turbulance*, he and Kierachell were stationed on Schar's World together with four other Changers with the assignment to safeguard and maintain the otherwise unoccupied planet. They were in a romantic relationship until Horza was offered a different post. He left Schar's World, consequently ending their relationship:

> When he left, he knew it had hurt her much more than it had hurt him. He had been glad of the companionship and he liked her, but he hadn't felt anything like what humans were supposed to feel when they talked of love, and by the time he left he was starting, just starting, to grow bored. (CP 103)

The relationship between Kierachell and Horza presents itself in a female–male dichotomy, perfectly adherent to stereotypes reproduced within many works of conventional science fiction of the 20th century. In those works, the female character (if existent) is symbolically tied to nature, emotion, and the unconscious, whereas the male is tied to reason, rationality, consciousness, and intent (Sanders 42). During Horza's time on the *Clear Air Turbulence*, while entertaining a sexual relationship with his crew mate Yalson, he dreams about being reunited with Kierachell and thinks about settling down and leading a tranquil life with her. She is closely connected to his return to Schar's World and the fulfilment of his mission and, within his personal quest, seems to function as a reward to be gained after the successful completion of his job. In "The icons of science fiction" (2003), Gwyneth Jones makes clear that the 'woman as reward'-trope is a prominent genre marker for traditional science fiction: "Hero-tales generally involve the hero being rewarded, after his trials, by gaining access – in some sense – to the desirable female. The male reader, at least, expected a taste of that reward from the original pulps, and was rarely disappointed" (Jones 172).

Kierachell is tied to nature in Horza's memories: together, they climbed the mountains of the snow-covered planet Schar's World. When standing in the snow to watch a romantic sundown, Horza is intrigued by her "lustrous, heavy hair" and her "skin white as snow" (CP 299) – not only does this choice of words directly allude to Snow White as an ideal of feminine beauty, but the innocence of the fairy-tale princess is also turned into a sexualised fantasy by the word 'lustrous'. Shortly after, Kierachell's connection to nature is emphasised by Horza's violation of it:

> He put out one hand and scooped the insect into his palm, before she could stop him. 'Oh, *Horza*...' she said, her breath catching on a tiny hook of despair.
> He looked, uncomprehending, at her stricken expression, while the snow-creature died from the warmth of his hand. (301)

Previously, Kierachell had been "taking his hand and bringing it to her mouth, kissing, it, stroking it as though it was a small, defenceless animal" (300) – a moment later, a small, defenceless snow insect dies by and in his hand. Here, the allegorical depiction of Kierachell as 'mother nature', caressing and mothering her partner, is conveying Horza into the realm of animals. This notion stands in contrast to the above quote, where, on the one hand, Kierachell's connection to the nature of Schar's World is strongly emphasised again, whereas Horza proves completely ignorant about nature. On the other hand, Kierachell's stereotypically feminine depiction is accentuated through her inability to act in this situation, i.e., to stop Horza from picking up the snow insect and thus prevent its death. This aspect is also added to by Horza's notion of her being slim and fragile (ibid.), both being aspects of frailty, an attribute that is stereotypically projected onto femininity. The connection between femininity and nature has a long tradition in science fiction literature: "In much of the genre, women and nature bear the same features: both are mysterious, irrational, instinctive; both are fertile and mindless; both inspire wonder and dread in the hero; both are objects of male conquest" (Sanders 42).

Finally, Kierachell falls victim to yet another feminine cliché: the perfection of feminine beauty in death. This picture is admired and aspired to by numerous authors and artists of the last centuries, all of them trying to capture the moment "where beauty is defined in its contrast to destruction. On the one hand, the soul has departed from the woman's body, but her beauty has not yet begun to disappear, as it will in the natural process of decomposition" (Bronfen 5).

When Horza finds Kierachell's body upon his return to the Changer basis on Schar's World, he thinks that she "must have been asleep" during the Idiran attack, because her eyes are closed and her face is "peaceful" (CP 305). The image is one of beauty, and even though Kierachell had been lying in the station tunnel for eight days, there are no signs of decay: "[t]here was frost on her eyelashes. [...] Her skin was hard. Her hair was still soft, and he let it run through his fingers" (ibid.). The harsh nature of Schar's World and its arctic temperatures have preserved the woman's beauty for Horza and the reader to appreciate:

> [The] image of a feminine corpse presents a concept of beauty which places the work of death into the service of the aesthetic process, for this form of beauty is contingent on the translation of an animate body into a deanimated one. [This kind of] beauty fascinates not only because it is unnatural, but also because it is precarious. (Bronfen 5)

When the Dra'Azon later close the planet to restore its natural order, Kierachell is buried under several kilometres of ice, returned to nature, and inseparably

connected with the planet for eternity, literally reuniting nature and femininity. The woman thus has no agency of her own; within the narrative, she only exists in Horza's recollections and serves to characterise him as romantic, yet also as unloving and easily bored. His subsequent relationship with Yalson is comparable to his relationship with Kierachell in respect to his gender performance and the stereotypical power dynamic.

Yalson

At first sight, Yalson does not adhere to traditional gender stereotypes. She exhibits a strong, sportive, assertive, and thus rather masculine gender performance, and her furred outward appearance is, in Horza's eyes, lacking femininity: "She had a small, hard-looking face. Her skin was dark, and she had spiky fair hair. Her whole body looked slim and hard; she walked, Horza thought, like a man. As she got closer Horza saw she was lightly furred on her face, legs and arms" (CP 45). Yalson is active, physically strong, and exercised, yet she takes on feminised characteristics by acting openly and friendly towards Horza, betting on him in his fight to gain access on board, and introducing him to the crew of the *Clear Air Turbulence* afterwards. When she shows him around the ship, the Changer uses this tour to evaluate the percentage of females within the crew, "disappointed to find that there were only four women aboard" (56). After having ruled out a withdrawn couple and a religious fanatic, he concludes that "Yalson seemed to be the only normal female on board" (ibid.) – however, deterred by her physical appearance, he finds it "difficult to think of her as a woman at all" (ibid.). While this is an open display of toxic hegemonic masculinity on Horza's part, Yalson's depiction eludes his heteronormative categorisation, therefore initially bearing the potential to be situated in the space between or even outside the stereotypical gender binary.

In this first part of the narrative, her character subtly addresses one of the intentions of feminist science fiction: Separated from a stereotypically feminine frame of action in both outward appearance and behaviour, Yalson is initially depicted as a character who does not invoke a definite gender affiliation, like the protagonist of Emma Bull's *Bone Dance*, Sparrow, to which science fiction critic Veronica Hollinger refers in the following excerpt:

> Marked by postmodern ideas of the subject as multiple and contradictory, Sparrow is both female and male, her/his 'identity' is dependent more upon the preconceptions of observers – including, of course, readers of the novel – than upon any actual physical make-up. (Hollinger 131)

This notion is disrupted in the moment Yalson starts a sexual relationship with Horza. As he sees it, their relationship contains "friendship and coupling" (CP 103), and although this confirms Horza's ease in his (sexual) treatment of women,

which supports his apparent masculine machismo, their "coupling" breaks with Horza's former prejudgement of Yalson's masculine gender performance and outward appearance.

However, this relationship changes again towards the end of the narrative, when Yalson reveals that she is pregnant with Horza's child. In this situation, as in numerous others, the otherwise tough, aggressive, foul-mouthed Yalson is feminised in relation to Horza. Further, she gives Horza power to exercise over the life of the unborn child; he is to decide if it grows, if it is aborted, or if it is kept in stasis to potentially continue the pregnancy at a later point in time (363). Through this patriarchal plot twist, Horza is empowered in his hegemonic masculinity by Yalson's subordination. In the following, Horza 'feminises' Yalson by repeatedly belittling her in a mocking way: When Yalson offers to share her AG[33] with him, he jokingly refuses on the grounds that she has to carry more weight now due to her pregnancy (374). Later, he refuses to take Yalson with him down to the tunnels to retrieve the Mind, referring to her "delicate situation" (418). During the quest of retrieving the Culture Mind from the tunnel system on Schar's World, Yalson's violent death serves as a foreshadowing of Horza's fate: like Yalson and their unborn child, Horza will die on Schar's World. Yalson is struck by Idiran fire, "*bursting* through like lightning all over the woman's body, *throwing* her into the air, *blowing* her arms out, *kicking* her legs from under her, *jerking her like a doll caught in the fist of an angry child*" (426, emphasis added). After that, her body is fully destroyed by being caught between two colliding trains and forcefully "buried […] with the access ramps in the wall, *hammering* into the black rock by the side of the tunnel" (428, emphasis added). This violent overkill scenario uses a striking number of verbs which carry violent and traditionally masculinised connotations, implying that the force that killed her is hypermasculine, while at the same time violently infantilising and feminising her, comparing her to a "doll caught in the fist of an angry child" (s.a.). Foreshadowing Horza's ultimate demise[34], she is not only killed but annihilated beyond resurgence, leaving Balveda as the only female character surviving the tunnels of Schar's World.

33 An AG is an anti-gravity gadget which allows the wearer to fly rather than having to walk or climb.

34 On his deathbed, the Changer seems to be unable to remember who he is and asks for his own name (CP 441); after his death, Balveda describes him as having lost all identifying features: "The face of the man on the stretcher was white as the snow, and as blank. The features were there: eyes, nose, brows, mouth; but they seemed somehow unlinked and disconnected, giving a look of anonymity to a face of lacking all character, animation and depth […]." (CP 446)

Perosteck Balveda

As a member of the *Culture*, Contact agent Perosteck Balveda's outward appearance is depicted, again from Horza's point of view, in accordance with Western beauty standards: she is thin, "strikingly handsome", with short black hair (CP 11). Her motions are elegant, and she is empathetic and well-mannered. During her first appearance in the narrative, she solicits for Horza's life, after him being captured and sentenced to death for killing and impersonating a minister of the planet Sorpen. In the middle of the Culture-Idiran war, Perosteck Balveda demands mercy for the enemy. "In Banks's Culture, drones, Minds, humans, and other species do not behave according to laws enforced by an external regulatory system. Rather, social norms are generated and reverberate through the indisputable logic of shared 'good manners'" (Garrison 63).

In contrast to Horza, with his biologically implemented weapons, Balveda relies on external helpers; she travels with a knife missile[35] and several memoryforms[36] for her physical defense. Nevertheless, she spends most of the plot as a captive, first on an Idiran ship (cf. CP 25-31), then on the *Clear Air Turbulence* under Horza's command, and ultimately on Schar's World (cf. CP 238-418).

Readers never experience Balveda actively using physical violence, except at the end of the narrative, when she shoots the Idiran Xoxarle. The Idiran is about to kill Horza (CP 438), and Balveda kills him with a gun out of a memoryform which was formerly her back tooth; a weapon which, as Folkert Degenring points out, had been available to her since she came aboard the *CAT* (Degenring "*Women, Aliens and Monsters*" 109). The only other time she apparently choses to make use of physical violence occurred aboard the Idiran ship where she was held captive. This situation is not shown directly but summed up in retrospective by Balveda, omitting any detail while downplaying her actions:

> 'I killed the guard and then sat and waited, Horza. The GCU managed to take the cruiser intact. Eventually some nice soldier drones came and rescued me.' She shrugged.
> 'Unarmed, you killed an Idiran in full battle armour and toting a laser?' Horza said sceptically. Balveda shrugged again.
> 'Horza, I didn't say it was easy.' (CP 264)

Balveda's understatement stands in stark contrast to the detailed depiction of Horza's kills. At the same time, she still manages to uphold the 'damsel in distress' trope, waiting to be rescued by "some nice soldier drones" (s.a.) instead of taking further action herself.

35 A knife missile is an AI, an intelligent weapon at the disposal of Special Circumstances agents.

36 A memoryform is a miniature device that can adopt the shape of physical objects, like a dental crown able to transform into a pistol.

Both incidents of physical violence exerted by a woman, which potentially endanger patriarchal hierarchies and social norms, gain social legitimacy through Balveda's motives: By shooting the Idiran warrior, she tries to save Horza's life; and killing the guard on the Idiran ship was an act of self-preservation since the guard would otherwise have killed her.

However, in the rare cases in which Balveda intends to use physical violence without her own life or other lives being immediately at stake, the type of violence she pursues is self-harming. To assassinate Horza, she joins the crew of the *CAT* physically altered and disguised, bringing aboard a bomb intended to destroy the *CAT* wholly, including herself. Generally, Balveda's actions can mostly be defined as self-endangering as well as passive and reactive, a fact that connects the forms of violence employed by her to a stereotypically feminine gender performance (Dornberg 31). Additionally, Balveda seems to be a rather pleasant captive, which is troubling to Horza only on a psychological level:

> Balveda was pleasant and seemed unworried; but he looked at her sometimes and thought he saw, briefly, a glimpse of inner tension, even despair. It relieved him in one way, but in another it gave him that same bad, cruel feeling he experienced when he thought about exactly why the Culture agent was still alive. (CP 285)

Horza thinks about his motives for not killing her several times and adduces different reasons: His fear of losing the loyalty of his crew, a fear of losing Yalson's regard (CP 284), or even, with artificial-seeming hints at nostalgia, for moral reasons (cf. CP 254). Therefore, Balveda's rather stereotypical passivity interferes with Horza's mostly stereotypical performance of strength and ruthlessness, whereas the balance of power between them remains seemingly unchanged: He has her stunned when he discovers her true identity, holds her captive, has her tied up at night, and exercises physical violence over her. Thus, drawing on Dornberg's binary model, both characters constitute gender through the usage vs. the experiencing of violence and reinstate gender stereotypes through the attribution of cognitive and behavioural clichés in the enactment of their relationship (Dornberg 12).

Only in the final thirty pages of the novel does it become clear that power relations illustrated throughout the greater part of the novel have not been entirely what they seemed: Balveda carried a hidden gun, which she kept concealed during most of the battle in the tunnel system of Schar's World – until finally using it to save the Changer, her enemy, the man who had held her captive for weeks. Even this last and unforeseen performance of physical violence bears traces of altruism and compassion, therefore supporting the Culture agent's feminine gender performance.

5.3 'Feminine' Culture vs. 'Masculine' Idirans?

Critics like Simon Guerrier (1999), Gavin Miller (2007), and Folkert Degenring (2010) agree on a rather 'feminine' depiction of the Culture as a society[37], in contrast to a violently 'masculine' depiction of its opponent societies. This notion is reinforced throughout *Consider Phlebas*, where the representatives of the Culture appear as seemingly strong and independent female characters: Perosteck Balveda and Fal 'Ngeestra.

Fal is a very intelligent young woman, and important for the progression of the war, but she is introduced to the narrative with an emphasis on her frailty. She has broken her leg while climbing in the mountains and is now vigilantly cared for by the drone Jase (CP 86), who seldomly leaves her side and treats her in a motherly as well as patronising way: "It saw her shifting her weight on her backside and a tiny grimace appear fleetingly on her face. Jase decided she was getting uncomfortable on the hard stone bench, and ordered one of the lodge drones to bring some cushions" (90).

Fal's important and unusual position as a "Culture Referer" (87), one of the very few human consultants of the Culture's Contact section, makes her valuable to the society; therefore, "nothing she sa[ys] or d[oes goes] unrecorded, nothing she experience[s goes] unnoticed" (ibid.). Hence, her independence exists only on the surface; constant surveillance and caring for by the Culture distinctly influence her character development as well as her depiction. The Culture's behaviour towards Fal as its 'Referer' serves as the basis to the interpretation of the Culture as "feminine [and] caring" (Guerrier 33), which is shared by some critics, while at the same time being taken as evidence for the Culture's tendency towards "benevolent imperialism" (Vint 80) by more critical voices.

But also non-biological members of the Culture are depicted with attributes stereotypically ascribed to femininity; the drone Unaha-Closp, for example, displays constant moodiness and is often offended because it feels that it is being underestimated and its work is not appreciated:

> The man was a speciesist! *Me, just a machine*, thought Unaha-Closp, *how dare he*! […] Only Unaha-Closp knew what it felt, only it knew why it had risked injury to protect the humans. […] Maybe it shouldn't have bothered; maybe it should just have let the Idirans shoot them. (CP 392)

Unaha-Closp's assessment of Horza's 'speciecism' is an allegory of patriarchal sexism. Despite having intelligence and intellectual capacity similar to the aver-

37 Sara Martín Alegre criticises Guerrier's analysis of the Culture's opponents as "masculine communities" (Guerrier 33), claiming that he is "confusing, as is habitual, patriarchy and masculinity" ("The Culture against Patriarchy" 87). I address Martín Alegre's interpretation of the Culture as anti-patriarchal rather than 'feminine' in detail in chapter 8.

age human and posessing considerably more inbuilt equipment and technological advantages, it is stated in *Consider Phlebas* that drones must work for 80 years in Culture to pay off their "Incurred Generation Debt" (260) before they are free to do what they like as equal citizens of the Culture. Thus, on a textual level Unaha-Closp's outburst works alongside demands of recognition and legal equality of the second-wave feminist movement; on a performative level, it contains allusions to feminised expressions of emotionality, exasperation, and desperation. *In Bodies of Tomorrow* (2006), Sherryl Vint ascertains the parallels between what was (and continues to be) historically considered women's work and the social and care work conducted by AI members of the Culture:

> [A]ll socially necessary work is accomplished either by citizens, including Minds, who enjoy such work and choose to do it, or else by non-sentient robots […]. The parameters by which sentience is defined are not discussed in the novels, but it is worth recalling that similar boundaries have been used to construct women or non-whites as less than male European subjects when their economic exploitation was 'required.' (Vint 83-84)

One could argue that this work being conducted by machines, robots, drones, and minds makes it visible as systemically and socially necessary work with an emphasis on de-stigmatising it; but within the Culture, it is still unpaid and therefore potentially undervalued work conducted primarily by machines working off a "Generation Debt" (CP 260) that echoes the economic exploitation Vint describes, therefore rather transferring stereotypically feminised traits onto non-biological members of the Culture instead of deconstructing the connections between femininity and subservience.

The ascription of feminised qualities to non-biological citizens of the Culture is quite frequent in *Consider Phlebas*: The novel opens with the depiction of a sentient factory vessel which hastily builds a ship amid a battle against the Idirans raging on around it. This ship, thrown together from leftovers and spare parts, is supposed to carry a Culture Mind to safety; the same Mind which later hides within the tunnel system of Schar's World. The factory vessel explicitly expresses motherly feelings for the warship it created shortly before being destroyed itself:

> The ship didn't even have a name. [...] The dockyard threw the ship together as best it could from its depleted stock of components [...]. If it could get the Mind to safety, the factory vessel thought it would have done well. Nevertheless, there was another reason – the real reason – the dockyard *mother* didn't give its warship *child* a name; it thought there was something else it lacked: hope. (CP 3, emphasis added)

Not only the human and non-biological Culture individuals in the novel are tendentiously depicted as feminine, but the whole Culture is also frequently perceived as a 'soft', peace-loving, and thus 'feminine' society, particularly by Horza, who thinks of himself as hard and warlike in contrast:

> He wondered how the Culture people faced the war; they were supposed to be able to decide to die, too, though it was said to be more complicated than simple poison. But how did they resist it, those soft, peace-pampered souls? He imagined them in combat, auto-euthanizing almost the instant the first shots landed, the first wounds started to appear. The thought made him smile. (CP 162)

In addition, the Culture is feminised in relation to its opponents in war, the Idirans. In a reproduction of the gender binary, the Culture is characterised as predominantly caring for and supporting its citizens, defending itself rather than attacking the Idirans; these, in contrast, are depicted as aggressive, warlike, expansionist, and generally performing exaggerated versions of masculinity, as Degenring elaborates. He interprets the sheer size of the aliens as carrying a significant potential for power and violence, and their casual posture points towards the comfortable and 'natural' employment of violent means, whereas their heads, which are much bigger than a human's, imply a superior intellect (Degenring, "*Women, Aliens and Monsters*" 109).

The intersex reproductive system of the Idirans is described by Fal ʾNgeestra; her description of their reproduction and life circle is strongly biased towards a stereotypical binary image of masculinity and femininity, despite describing a non-human species:

> They were dual hermaphrodites, each half of the couple impregnating the other, and each usually bearing twins. After one or occasionally two pregnancies – and weanings – they changed from their fertile breeder stage to become warriors. Opinion was divided on whether they *increased in intelligence or just underwent a personality alteration*. Certainly they became *more cunning* but *less open-minded*, *more logical* but *less imaginative*, *more ruthless*, *less compassionate*. They grew by another metre; their weight almost doubled; their keratinous covering became thicker and harder; their muscles increased in bulk and density; and their internal organs altered to accommodate these power-increasing changes. At the same time, their bodies absorbed their reproductive organs, and they became sexless. (CP 275, emphasis added)

The distinction between the "fertile breeder stage" and that of the "warriors" already carries stereotypical gender connotations and is presented as a dichotomous construct which stands figuratively for the female–male binary. Further, "breeder" carries a negative connotation as derogative expression, negating the nurturing, caring, and emotional bond of motherhood. Additionally, the "breeder stage" is connected to lower intelligence, besides being associated with the stereotypically feminised attributes of compassion, imagination, and open-mindedness, in turn denying logic, ruthlessness, and cunning by attributing those character traits to the warrior stage in a mutually exclusive dualistic frame. After emphasising size and hardness of the warrior body and enumerating all "power-increasing changes", the description of the Idiran warrior concludes with registering their sexlessness. Otherwise constructed completely alongside Western stereotypes of masculinity, Idiran warriors lack the ability to father offspring – sexual-

ity is limited to procreation, both being conspicuously absent from the ultimate incarnation of 'adult' Idirans.

Within the narrative, however, Idirans only appear as warriors and are blatantly masculinised in this role. In a conversation with Horza, who works *for* them, several Idirans emphasise their superiority in terms of intelligence and corporality, therefore in turn 'feminising' Horza by addressing his intellectual and bodily inferiority. This 'femininisation' of Horza is a procedure that is in complete accordance with the practices of hegemonial masculinity as described by Connell. In combat, the Idirans prove to be deceptive and hard to kill, as is demonstrated by Quayanorl's determination to finish his mission, notwithstanding his loss of several limbs and an eye as well as the suffering of paralysing pain (cf. CP 384). His enthusiastic and unfaltering dedication to the cause, even though his own life is lost, positions him closely to a masculine ideal: he hopes that his fellow comrades will remember him as a true war hero.

Generally, the Idirans live within a rigidly hierarchical society, are highly militarised, and their religious belief gives them the necessary conviction to fight for a 'higher cause'. Their religiousness is unusual for a well-advanced alien society, as Farah Mendlesohn points out (266), and serves as motive to antagonise the atheist Culture. According to Degenring, throughout the Culture series the Culture's enemies tend to be constructed alongside masculine stereotypes (Degenring, "*Women, Aliens and Monsters*" 112) – which again, through the principle of construction by means of opposition, enhances the perception of the Culture as a 'feminine' society. This perception of the Culture as 'feminine' is reductionist and questionable, but the recurrence of the notion among Culture critics is perhaps best explained by Banks' own assessment of the Culture in various interviews, particularly those conducted with Jude Roberts in 2010:

> I've always thought of the Culture as being more feminine than male, at least as far as we as a species would react to it if we were ever exposed to it. […] [W]omen are, compared to men, generally more caring, less aggressive, and more open to using discussion as a way of resolving disputes. ("A Few Questions")

Banks conflates sex and gender and expresses essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity. To put his favourable but essentialist attitude towards femininity in perspective, Joseph Norman argues that Banks revolutionised the stereotypical and regressive gender representations of the space opera genre by including well-rounded female characters with independent agency:

> Banks envisioned his personal utopia as a place in which all structures of inequality, especially patriarchy, were non-existent, and he worked to ensure that the representation of women characters, in particular, was appropriate and positive, given the near absence of such in early classics of the form. […] [T]he Culture works to subvert the militaristic, masculine aggression of the traditional space-opera world system through its adherence to feminine traits of empathy and compassion. (Norman, *The Culture of "The Culture"* 141)

Whereas the suggested absence of patriarchal structures in the Culture will be discussed in chapter 8, it is safe to say that revolutionising the genre by including female characters does not pre-empt the rise of gender stereotypes, particularly if femininity and masculinity are portrayed as dual opposites to favour the former over the latter. This is also visible in the interplay of the two main characters representing the opposing war parties: Balveda's and Horza's character performances are often analysed on basis of the different societies they are part of or work for, which is a legitimate approach regarding the importance of the social environment for gender performance. However, as demonstrated previously, both figures increasingly exhibit stereotypical gender performances, either in relation to each other or in relation to other characters of the opposite gender. This implies that their binary gender identities are rooted in their character conceptions and emphasised through the presented character constellations, since gender is perceived as subject of relational references within a traditionally binary system (Schößler 11).

5.4 *Consider Phlebas* – a Reproduction of Gender Stereotypes?

The extensive comparative analysis of characters, societies, and motifs leaves this chapter with the question whether *Consider Phlebas*' stereotypical implementations operate alongside space opera's traditional gender binary or whether its ascribed postmodernism emerges in the disruption of traditional gender performances.

As already pointed out, in the case of *Consider Phlebas* biological sex is an insufficient category of analysis for comprehensive examination, due to its scientific adjustability. In those cases, Helen Merrick, specialist on Women's Studies and cyberculture, argues that the assumed sex-and-gender correlation is nonexistent: "In these scenarios [i.e., sex changes complete with full reproductive capabilities], the socially mediated relation between sex and gender is dissolved into multiplicity and meaninglessness, as 'sex' becomes a referent, rather than a determinant of sexuality" (Merrick 249).

It stands to reason that the characters' traditional gender performances are simply effects of their identity conception: as for all the novel reveals about the Changer species, Horza could as well bodily impersonate any human female, whereas his behaviour leaves little room for a gender performance that could be described as feminine, or androgynous, or non-binary – Horza's traditional masculinity is one of the few stabilisers of his identity, which is however continually destabilised by his shape-shifting.

Nevertheless, the narrative does not content itself with the unquestioned depiction of traditional gender performances. Throughout the novel, attention is drawn towards the relevance of gender with short remarks which mostly go unnoticed and seemingly unweighted. When Horza is captured by the 'Eaters', he seems to find confidence in the ability to classify his jailer's gender: "*At least*, Horza thought, *now I know it's a male*. *For whatever that's worth*" (CP 151, italics original). Similarly, the discovery that the famous reporter 'Sarble the Eye', whom Horza had previously assumed to be male (CP 187), is, in fact, a woman, disturbs – for some reason not disclosed to the reader – Horza's concentration: "She was Sarble the Eye. [...] He smiled, then shook his head as though to dislodge the small, useless revelation from the centre of his attention" (CP 212). Finally, when Horza refers to the Dra'Azon guarding Schar's World as "Mr Adequate", Balveda reacts by pointing out that he just masculinised the alien civilisation (CP 295) – her remark passes entirely unnoticed and has no further influence on the course of the story.

These very short intermissions do not further the plot in any way – they can, however, be used to highlight the importance of clear and unambiguous gender categorisation for Horza, demonstrating that he automatically assumes that positions of power must be filled by male figures. By proxy, for the reader, these short scenes may serve as thought-provoking impulses to reflect on their own implicit gender biases.

In contrast to Horza, neither Yalson nor Balveda present an entirely stereotypical gender performance, particularly due to several layers of power relations presented during the narrative. However, the fate of the protagonist can be read as the most prominent narrative commentary regarding gender stereotypes: Horza, the warrior, is bound to fail from the beginning; his fate resembles the eponymous *Phlebas*[38], destined to drown and be washed away by the sea, as Simone Caroti explains in his analysis of the Culture series (Caroti 46-47). Caroti points out the irony of Horza's destiny already being anticipated, unbeknownst to him, by Culture intelligence, in this case personified by Fal 'Ngeestra:

38 IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (Eliot 42)

> Worst of all from Horza's point of view, he doesn't know any of this. Neither he nor his Idiran employers have realized that the Culture, which had hitherto been on the losing side, now stands a statistically overwhelming chance of winning – so much so, […] that the Minds in the War Council have already established a likely timeline.
> So, even before Horza gets to take control of the *Clear Air Turbulence* and bring the Free Company along to Schar's World, his Grail Quest is already void. We're not looking at the turning point of the war, nor are we witnessing the birth or rebirth of an individual consciousness with the power – and the implied manifest destiny that comes with it – to radically influence events. (Caroti 51)

As a member of an ancient declining species, genetically engineered to be a human weapon, the Changer ultimately proves his unchanging gender performance to be as obsolete as his whole mission within the greater context of the narrative. Lastly, the 'feminine' Culture triumphs over the masculine stereotype, and Bora Horza Gobuchul does not simply die – his existence is wiped out entirely:

> The face of the man on the stretcher was white as the snow, and as blank. The features were there: eyes, nose, brows, mouth; but they seemed somehow unlinked and disconnected, giving a look of anonymity to a face lacking all character, animation and depth. It was as though all the people, all the characterisations, all the parts the man had played in his life had leaked out of him in his coma and taken their own little share of his real self with them, leaving him empty, wiped clean. (CP 446)

In the moment of his death, Horza is deprived of his identity and his offspring is annihilated together with Yalson, the mother to be, in the tunnel systems of Schar's World (CP 427), bereaving him of the opportunity to act out yet another idealised masculine role, that of the father. Kierachell is dead, and the rest of the Changers are destined to follow shortly (CP 467). The only remaining memory of Horza is carried by the rescued Mind, which takes on his name. Therefore, his story is in the hands of the Culture – to be retold, altered, or withheld as they please.

Hence, Horza fails to achieve a legacy of his own authority; his heritage and his offspring are wiped out. These factors serve as curtailments of his masculinity. Like Frank in *The Wasp Factory*, he is unable to create or leave behind anything that outlasts him. In the moment of his death, Horza's body is drained of any traces of his self and –in the fashion of the sea, Frank's mortal enemy in *The Wasp Factory* – the Culture and the Dra'Azon collaborate in "washing away what [Horza had] left, wiping clean the marks [he had] made" (WF 43). The Changer's annihilation can thus be read as a plot element serving to criticise stereotypical representations of masculinity, in a novel that nevertheless perpetuates heteronormative romance plots and upholds the traditional gender binary despite the alternatives that the SF setting would allow for.

6. Stereotypes Meet Subversive Potential: *Excession*

In *Excession* (1996), the fifth novel of the Culture series, many characters are constructed alongside gender stereotypes, even though sex changes (which result in a same-sex relationship) and androgynous gender representation are at the centre of one of the narrative strands. Despite this paradoxical setup, the novel remains curiously understudied in terms of gender depiction[39].

As in several other of Banks' Culture novels, the reader encounters a rather strange and unlikeable male protagonist who is positioned not only at the geographical but also on the moral fringes of the Culture. Byr Genar-Hofoen's official role is that of a Culture ambassador to the Affront, another of Banks' ultra-patriarchal and violently misogynist non-human species, on whose home planet he is stationed. While the Culture condemns the Affront's societal structure and tries to keep them and their expansionist and xenophobe ambitions under control, Genar-Hofoen sympathises with the dominant males of the species and wishes to experience "life as an Affronter", as he had "come to admire them for their vivacity and enthusiasm; he had never really subscribed to the standard Culture belief that any form of suffering was intrinsically bad, he accepted that a degree of exploitation was inevitable in a developing culture" (E 170).

The Affront themselves are described, mostly through Genar-Hofoen, as aggressive, militaristic, and patriarchal; their social system is based on classism combined with the violent subjugation of their females and juvenile geldings, which is a clear indicator for an established patriarchal hegemony (Bereswill, "Sich auf eine Seite schlagen" 101) with a strong focus on asserting masculinity through violence (Connell 83). The Culture, understanding itself as an egalitarian pacifist society, perceives them as misogynistic affront to the space-faring community with a massive superiority complex (E 167-168). Exploiting the Affront's inherent narcissism, a group of Culture minds tricks them into starting a war with the Culture. At the same time, an unknown object, exceeding the technological and physical knowledge and ability of the Culture ('excession'), appears in a remote sector of the galaxy and causes a race between the civilisations to examine, claim, or capture it. Amidst this turmoil, an eccentric Mind half tricks, half abducts Genar-Hofoen to convince him to reconcile with a past lover.[40]

39 Apart from being briefly mentioned in Hubble et al.'s volume *The Science Fiction of Iain M. Banks* and contrasted with *Inversions* by Simone Caroti, *Excession* has been analysed by Farah Mendlesohn concerning "Banks' use of language to mirror and intensify the structure of the plot" (565). None of these analyses address matters of gender and violence.

40 For a more extensive and very comprehensive summary of the novel's plot, with an analytical focus on the communication between Culture minds and the effect of the 'ex-

Opposite Genar-Hofoen and the Affront, whose representatives are portrayed in such a stereotypically masculine way that it borders on satire on more than one occasion, stand the female characters of the novel, creating a traditional binary. The two female protagonists of *Excession*, Dajeil Gelian and Ulver Seich, former and current love interest of Genar-Hofoen respectively, are displayed in a widely differing but nevertheless stereotypical manner. Ulver is a young, intelligent, and promising woman from an influential family who aspires to work for Special Circumstances. She is popular but also vain and conceited (E 103-106, 176, 195) as well as sexually very active (102) – her romantic involvement with Genar-Hofoen, however, only starts after "she'd convinced herself that he wasn't taking her for granted, that he liked her" (359). Not only does she embody the feminised stereotype of the temptress – particularly as she is used by the conspiring group of minds to entrap Genar-Hofoen by impersonating his past lover Dajeil –, but she is also depicted as an outer-space version of the 90s it-girl, which becomes particularly evident when she quarrels with the drone Churt Lyne over wanting to take her complete wardrobe, a couple of pets, and friends on her quest:

> 'Churt; real space here! My diary is a public document, hadn't you noticed? There are at least three channels devoted to me – all run by rather desperate young men, admittedly, but nevertheless. I can't change my eye colour without anybody on the Rock who follows fashion knowing about it within the hour. I can't just disappear! Are you *mad*?'
> 'And I don't think the animals can come either,' Churt Lyne said smoothly, ignoring her question. 'The protira certainly can't. There isn't room on the ship.'
> 'Isn't *room*?' she roared. 'What size *is* this thing? Are you sure it's *safe*?'
> (E 178, emphasis original)

In contrast to Ulver, Dajeil has been employed by the Culture's Contact section for many years, she is experienced and steady in her career. When Genar-Hofoen first meets her, he is a young man, determined to have sex with as many women as possible aboard every ship he enters, an attitude which, apparently, many women find attractive. Dajeil refuses him on grounds of his promiscuity, which obviously makes her more attractive to him: "He had been the rake, she the unavailable older woman" (323). Genar-Hofoen makes it his project to change her mind. They eventually become close friends, and when she is offered a remote post to study the ʾKtik, an evolving ocean-based species, for several years, he does everything in his power to accompany her. Their ensuing romantic relationship, and its violent ending, will be the starting point of my analysis of gender identity and performance in *Excession*. After an in-depth analysis of

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cession' on the Culture as civilisation, see the chapter "The View from Above, the View from Below. *Excession* and *Inversions*" in Simone Caroti's monography *The Culture Series of Ian M. Banks. A Critical Introduction* (2015).

binary gender performances in spite (or because) of the ability to change biological sex at will, which is inherent in all the novel's protagonists, this chapter will close with a discussion of androgyny and the 'space in between' the gender binary, focussing on the androgynous avatar Amorphia.

6.1 Gender: a Magnifying Glass for Difference

The 'difference' between the genders is made visible by their construction as opposites to each other. As summarised in the chapter "Gender Matters", West and Zimmerman's concept of doing gender emphasises that the "differences" between men and women "are not natural, essential, or biological" but socially produced and reinforced and thus instrumentalised to "reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 13).

Excession is part of Banks' Culture series and therefore reviewed and analysed within the science-fiction genre conventions – and thus within a genre that is particularly suited to subvert or expand traditional gender categories by means of futuristic technologies or the exploration of alien life forms. As each Culture-human's biological sex is alterable at will at any time, the 'coherence' of sex and gender[41] is particularly worth investigating, for it is here that gender stereotypes are most likely to be reproduced. As previously mentioned, among Culture citizens it is considered a matter of *bon ton* to change one's sex at least once in a lifetime as well as to father and carry a child respectively. However, in *Excession* it is explained that after fulfilling societal expectations and 'having a taste' of the life of the other sex most Culture humans tend to return to the biological sex they were born with: "Generally people eventually changed back to their congenital sex, but not always, and some people cycled back and forth between male and female all their lives, while some settled for an androgynous in-between state, finding there a comfortable equanimity" (E 321). It is noteworthy that none of the protagonists to be encountered in the Culture series belongs to one of the latter two groups.

In the following, I will first focus on the apparent consolidation of the sex and gender binary that the first part of the quote suggests, considering Judith Butler's perception of gender as "the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic and performative that gender assumes" (J. Butler, *Undoing Gender* 42). Then, I will analyse the in-between states of

41 This refers to the normative assumption that biological femaleness coheres with a feminine gender identity and performance, as is assumed that biological maleness coheres with a masculine gender identity and performance.

'comfortable androgynous equanimity' that the second part of the above quote addresses, framed and aided by sociological and cultural approaches to the concept of androgyny.

Stereotypical Representations of Femininity and Sexuality

As mentioned before, Ulver and Dajeil as the female protagonists of the novel differ widely in terms of gender performance, though both are depicted according to (different) stereotypes of femininity.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader encounters Dajeil as the only conscious passenger on the eccentric Culture ship *Sleeper Service*. The ship built a reconstruction within its hulls, of the tower by the sea on the faraway planet Dajeil lived on with Byr Genar-Hofoen to study the ʾKtik. Just like when he left her 40 years ago, she is still carrying their child, consciously halting her pregnancy one week before she is due to give birth. The ship agreed to take her on as passenger, despite usually transporting humans in storage[42]. For her, the *Sleeper Service* built a replica of the world she lived in with Genar-Hofoen, in the hope of thus helping her to recover from the separation and eventually carry her child to term. However, Dajeil does neither of these things. She stubbornly refuses to process the pain inflicted on her and move on. Her friend Aist describes her as "really independent" in the years before she met Byr Genar-Hofoen and they became a couple; according to her, Dajeil "never wanted to be a mother, never wanted to settle down with one person, not for a long time, anyway" (E 337). Aist describes how "both changed each other so much" (337) right before she engages in a sexual act with Byr, which is recorded by a drone on a standard monitoring route. Dajeil discovers the recording the next day and confronts Genar-Hofoen about the infidelity.

Interestingly, at that point in time Genar-Hofoen is biologically female, referred to exclusively as Byr, which is their[43] first name. The reason for this is that Byr and Dajeil planned on "Mutualling" (E 321), a practice within the Culture by couples who "chose to emphasise their co-dependence […] by synchronising their sex-changes and at different points playing both parts in the sexual act", each in turn impregnating the other, so it is "possible to synchronise the growth of the two foetuses and the birth of the babies" (322). This practice leads

42 'Storing' is a common practice among Culture citizens, who have a general life expectancy of 300 to 400 years, enabling them to witness events further in the future. Their bodies and/or their minds are conserved in a stasis, mostly aboard Culture ships, to be revived at a later point in time.

43 During Byr's time as biological female, the pronouns 'she/her' and 'he/him' are used inconsistently in the primary source and will thus be replaced by 'they/them' in this analysis.

to two different people giving birth to one biological twin each, and is used as a symbol of commitment to each other to mark a relationship as one of the "partnerships which were intended to last" (322) in a society where monogamy has become rather unusual.

Originally having planned to give birth to their babies at the same time, Byr and Dajeil gave up on that idea after realising that two new-born babies could be too difficult to care for by just the two of them, living alone on a remote planet. When their friends Kran, Aist, and Tulvyi come to visit, they explain that Byr halted the development of their foetus for the moment and that they are planning to wait with the second baby until the first one, at that point almost carried to term by Dajeil, "is grown up enough to help […] look after it" (337).

The exclusive usage of 'Byr' for the female and the prevalent usage of 'Genar-Hofoen' for the male time span linguistically suggest different personas. However, set off by Aist's visit to the tower and their subsequent affair, it turns out that Byr has, all along, been a masquerade for Genar-Hofoen. When confronted by Dajeil about having sex with Aist, Byr responds with a stereotypical, almost satiric performance of toxic masculinity:

> Dajeil turned to look at Byr, her face streaked with the tears. Byr felt a sudden welling of anger. On the screen, she watched the two people embracing, caressing on the tower's moonlit roof, and heard the soft gasps and whisperings.
> 'Yes,' Byr said, smiling ironically as she pulled off the wet suit. 'Old Aist, eh? Quite a lass. You shouldn't cry, you know. Upsets the body's fluid balance for baby.' (E 344)

Instead of apologising or comforting her, Byr stultifies Dajeil by ridiculing her emotional distress while 'mansplaining'[44] her baby's needs to her. Byr then tries to downplay having sex with Aist by using their own female body as an excuse, asking Dajeil if it "count[s] as screwing, technically, when neither of you has a penis? […] Shit; so I stuck my fingers in your pal's cunt; so fucking what?" (E 345). Numerous stereotypical perceptions are invoked here: First and most obvious, Byr assumes that sex between two females is not 'real sex' for lack of penetration by a penis. Second, Byr categorises Dajeil's emotional distress as an 'overreaction', telling her that she is "being ridiculous" (345) because she is upset. Third, Byr ties Dajeil's reaction to her being pregnant (while technically also carrying a foetus at this point in time), at the same time reminding her that this is not an excuse for her emotional breakdown:

> 'Oh, Dajeil, come on; this isn't anything that matters. We never swore to be faithful, did we? It was just a friendly… it was *politeness*, for fuck's sake. I didn't even think it was worth mentioning… Come on, I know this is a tough time for you and there's all these hormones and shit in your body, but this is crazy; you're reacting … crazily…' (345, emphasis original)

44 The term 'mansplaining' is used to accentuate Byr's stereotypically masculinised behaviour, explaining things he does not have more or superior knowledge of than Dajeil.

On the textual level, the portrayal of this situation between Byr and Dajeil creates tension between Byr's sex and their gender performance. From a contemporary feminist perspective, Byr behaves like the ultimate masculine macho, stuck in a female body. Other text passages support the hypothesis that neither Dajeil nor Aist perceive Byr as a female person[45]. Apparently, neither does Byr, for they constantly perform masculinity in interaction with Dajeil, Aist, and their friends. As Messerschmidt points out,

> [w]ithin social interaction, then, we encourage and expect others to attribute to us a particular sex category. And we facilitate the ongoing task of accountability through demonstrating that we are male or female by means of concocted practices that may be interpreted accordingly. The specific meanings of sex, gender, and sexuality are defined in social interaction and therefore through personal practice. [...] Thus, it is the particular gender and sexual relations in specific settings that give behavior its sexed, gendered, and sexual meanings. (Messerschmidt 31)

It becomes clear that in the same way the female body is not their 'true' body, 'Byr' is not Genar-Hofoen's true identity. Enabled through the aptitude of Culture citizens to change their biological sex at will, the clear distinction between roles as "situated identities – assumed and relinquished as the situation demands" and "master identities, such as sex category, that cut across situations" (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 6) is void in Byr Genar-Hofoen's case because their *female body* serves as a *role* they play in order to fulfil Dajeil's wish of 'Mutualling'. When Dajeil confronts Byr about having had sex with Aist, a grotesque portrayal of masculine machismo is necessary for Genar-Hofoen to break free from the 'role' that is their female body in order to become their essential 'true self' again. On this journey back to masculinity, the only thing standing in Byr's way is the foetus inside them. Dutifully, Dajeil frees them of that burden by cutting it out of the body while Byr is asleep. Hereby, she does not only free them from this last piece of 'femininity' they were still carrying around, she also succumbs to the feminised stereotype of the murderous madwoman taking revenge on the *man* who wronged her:

> Byr awoke that night to find Dajeil standing over *her* with a diving knife held tightly in both hands, her eyes wide and full and staring, her face still puffy with tears. There was blood on the knife. […] What? What had been done? What? Roaring in ears. Looking up, to find all the sheets red. *Her* blood. Belly; sliced. Open. Glistening masses of green, purple, yellow. Redness still pumping. Shock. Massive blood loss. What would Dajeil

45 Dajeil: "'We haven't decided on the other name yet. Anyway,' she went on, 'doing it this way will give me time to recover and get the two of us used to coping with a baby, before Byr has *his*… well, hers,' she said laughing, and put her arm round her partner's shoulder" (E 320, emphasis added).

Aist: "She looked at Byr, studying *his* face again. 'It's not fair, Byr,' she said. 'You look good no matter what you are'" (E 338, emphasis added).

> do now? Byr sank back. So this was how it ended. […] Neatness to it, still. Women; penetration. *He* had lived for it. Now *he* died of it. (E 347-348, emphasis added)

At this point, Dajeil becomes active for the first time. Her violent attack is outward-oriented, "phallic", and therefore coded as masculine (Dornberg 18). At this moment, she breaks her traditional gender role in physically attacking Byr – only to then direct her aggression back inwards and spend the next 40 years in complete stagnation. Therefore, the threat Dajeil poses for male hegemony is eliminated right after the attack, while she is, before and after, depicted "in a way which either undermines [her] strength and independence or tears down [her] tough and aggressive image to reveal the 'real' woman underneath" (K. James 166). It is also noteworthy that this is the only serious physical attack Byr Genar-Hofoen suffers throughout the narrative, and it happens to a female body, which is traditionally the site of patriarchal power struggles (Brittan 3).

However, in the quote above it is evident that there is no cohesive usage of the female pronoun for Byr. Masculinity shines through the character at every opportunity. Moreover, the last sentence of the above quote has a satiric quality to it: Apart from the symbolic connection of stabbing and penetration, it indicates that Byr interprets the attack as some sort of cosmic joke, wondering if they might have provoked it through their obsession with penetrating women (comp. E 216, 304, 323). Byr's performance of stereotypical masculinity throughout their period of biological femaleness also affects the potentially homosexual love scene with Aist, which is subverted by heteronormative desire: Byr confirms that Aist would have "found [herself] in the firing line" (338) of Genar-Hofoen's sexual addiction when they first met if she had "stuck around longer" (ibid.). Aist herself makes clear that she desires Byr *despite* the female body: "'It's not fair, Byr, […] You look good no matter what you are.'" (ibid.) Thus, the affair, the betrayal, and the violent physical assault not only undermine the subversive potential of the character constellation Dajeil–Byr–Aist but also openly and firmly reestablish gender norms and stereotypes. This chapter in the life of Genar-Hofoen is closed by restoring 'the natural order', from a gender-essentialist perspective: "Genar-Hofoen became male again. One day, going through some old clothes, he found the little figurine of Dajeil the old 'Ktik had carved. He sent it back to Dajeil. He didn't know if she received it or not. Still on the *Unacceptable Behaviour*, he fathered a child by Aist" (355).

Unacceptable Behaviour

Genar-Hofoen's life choices are commented on critically by other characters in the narrative. His uncle Tish confirms that he has always been an odd child (63) and finds his sympathies for the Affront "slightly strange" (64), and even more so his desire to be one of them (ibid.).

Ships with telling names are common in the Culture novels, and so, quite fittingly, it is the *Unacceptable Behaviour* that brings Aist to the isolated post where Byr Genar-Hofoen and Dajeil are stationed; later, the same ship takes Byr and Aist away, leaving Dajeil after the affair and the violent abortion. The ship's name is one of the more obvious ways, one could argue, that the text comments on Genar-Hofoen's behaviour. Read as situational irony, Genar-Hofoen's behaviour is, although morally questionable, 'acceptable' because he gets away with it unsanctioned[46].

While Genar-Hofoen's eccentric behaviour is repeatedly commented by other characters or reflected in their bewildered reactions, he seems to enjoy the attention. In fact, he seems to relish in "annoying everybody" (39). This comment primarily refers to annoying the Culture in his function as their ambassador among the Affront. Much like the Affront, he is likely to look down on most people around him, e.g., the physically altered sex workers he hires on Tier[47], and the people advocating for sublimation in the Night City[48], all while carrying a ridiculously expensive alcoholic drink around ("you didn't really drink it for the internal effect, you drank it to show you could afford to" 256), parading around in a suit and cloak made of his own skin ("This was where he felt most himself" 257).

Taken together, the depiction of Genar-Hofoen borders on gender parody. His adolescent obsession with sex, his unwillingness to grow up (E 324), and the unquestioned joy he expresses indulging in his many privileges as citizen of a post-scarcity society, as employee of the prestigious Contact section, and particularly as a male-born person speak to a rather untroubled and shallow character. For him, Dajeil is the one woman he cannot – and therefore must – have. She is the prize of a competition against himself; he must prove that he can be what she wants him to be: her ideal partner, material for a serious relationship: "He would make this work, he would perform this task and be blameless in the self-sacrifice of his own interests to Dajeil's" (E 336), all the while wondering if "he'd made a terrible mistake" (ibid.). After failing that self-imposed task, he returns to competitions he is more comfortable with, "serious games that [...] offer possible fields of action for the *libido dominandi*" (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 26) in exclusively male circles of strictly patriarchal societies (Meuser

46 The only 'loss' is that of the child he did not want to carry anyway; apart from that, he recovers completely from Dajeil's assault (E 354).

47 "[…] you had to wonder at the mentality of people who actually chose to alter their appearances and behaviour every few days just to suit the tastes – usually though not always sexual – of others" (E 217).

48 "You believe everybody should just sort of disappear up their own arses, don't you?" (E 260)

33) like the Affront. Genar-Hofoen believes that the only way to understand and learn about other beings, alien or human, is through penetration, literal and figural (comp. E 324). Thus, he sleeps with nearly every woman available on any ship he is on, accidentally also having sex with a ship avatar and afterwards being furious about the 'deception' (330), before moving with Dajeil to their isolated post to study the 'Ktik, 'penetrating' them with his interest to gain scientific insight. After spending many years at that post, when he is stationed with the Affront, his desire to penetrate physically comes to a sudden halt for lack of an Affronter body (which is then his most urgent wish) and is only resumed on his mission to steal the dormant mind-state of captain Zreyn Tramow on behalf of Special Circumstances[49] (comp. E 69-73). Consequently, on his first stop en route he hires a group of seven sex workers ("erotroupe") to please him, six of them female, two of them impersonating Zreyn Tramow (comp. E 216-218). A day later, after a failed attempt to kidnap Genar-Hofoen, he is trapped in a module together with Ulver Seich and the drone Churt Lyne for several days. What makes the situation unbearable for him, however, is not the potential threat to his life but the fact that 'the girl' he is trapped with does not seem to like him: "the girl he could easily fall in love with, and in the right circumstances certainly admire and be impressed by and, yes, perfectly possibly like, even be friends with … but right now he didn't like her any more than she liked him, and she really didn't like him a lot" (304-305). He is convinced that this is not his fault, that the circumstances failed him. His judgement seems to be proven correct, for when they are taken off the module and aboard the ship *Grey Area* together, after "[d]inner, talk, drink, shared smoke-bowl, agreeing fuzzy heads might be cleared by a dip in the *Grey Area*'s pool, splashing, fooling around…" (359) they have sex (ibid.).

The *Grey Area* and Genar-Hofoen are comparable in their obsession with penetration. This ship, too, has a telling name, operating in a moral grey area by "perfecting its techniques of teasing dreams and memories out of a variety of animal species" (71), i.e., reading or inserting itself into thoughts and dreams of humans. The sexual connotation of these penetrative acts is reflected in the nickname the other minds apply to it: "Meatfucker" (53). Inside its hulls, it displays collections of instruments and souvenirs which are remnants of war and institutionalised cruelty "like a museum to torture, death and genocide" (339). Like Genar-Hofoen, it exists on the fringes of the Culture, rather absorbed by its own agenda, called upon reluctantly by other minds and generally perceived as

49 Or so he thinks; it later turns out that his mission was a pretence to lure him aboard the *Sleeper Service* – the ship itself, in the tradition of telling names, turns out to be a sleeper agent for Special Circumstances (E 389).

an "oddball" (71). During Genar-Hofoen's first night aboard, it manipulates his dreams so that he relives an episode from the perspective of captain Zreyn Tramow, where she reflects on her childhood and upbringing and expresses her longing for a man to come to her rescue and take her away (349-352). Genar-Hofoen reacts dismissively when he wakes up: "All he'd wanted was a sex-simulation, not an in-depth inquisition of a bleakly ambitious woman's arid soul" (352).

His only moment of reflecting on his own behaviour and gender performance occurs when he is stabbed by Dajeil, assuming his impending death: "I am who I ever was. What I called masculinity, what I celebrated in it was just an excuse for me-ness, wasn't it?" (348). Here, he separates his behaviour from his gender, identifying the latter as his personal "excuse" for the former. Like Frank at the end of *The Wasp Factory*[50], Genar-Hofoen tries to detach gender from identity. The attempt ignores the impact of gendered socialisation on identity development and claims the space in between the genders as the locus of 'true identity', 'untarnished' by gender.

6.2 The Space in Between

Amorphia is the *Sleeper Service*'s avatar, used to communicate with the ship's human and animal guests. Its androgyny is accentuated numerous times and seems to lead to irritation among the humans it interacts with. Most of Amorphia's interactions are with Dajeil since she is the ship's only conscious long-term guest. The *Sleeper Service* seems devoted to care for and protect Dajeil, rebuilding her tower by the sea inside its hulls, asking her about the baby on every visit and generally waiting for her to come to terms with the separation from Genar-Hofoen and have her child (E 7, 392-393). The *Sleeper Service* feels guilty for having played a part in allowing Genar-Hofoen to accompany Dajeil to the remote post to study the 'Ktik all those years ago, which led to the betrayal and the violent breakup as well as the apparently infinitely suspended pregnancy: "'I was wrong twice and each time I harmed Dajeil. […] this is – my last chance to get it right'" (393). Unlike many other ship avatars, and unlike the avatars the *Sleeper Service* previously had, Amorphia is not conceived as an independent entity:

50 When Frank realises that he is in fact biologically female and has been raised believing that he was a castrated male, he exclaims: "But I *am* still me; I *am* still the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to *my* name." (TWF 182)

> The avatar Amorphia was deliberately formed to look not simply neither male nor female but as perfectly, artificially poised between maleness and femaleness as it was possible to be and the ship had never made any pretence that its representative was other than completely its creature, with only the most cursory intellectual existence of its own. (6)

In the tradition of telling names, Amorphia is derived from amorphous, which describes something that is shape- or formless, something without definite character or nature. Ironically, the *Sleeper Service* has created Amorphia with definite form and shape, apparently with the intent to eliminate gender as an expression of identity. This intent leaves the avatar looking "cadaverously sexless" (6), long-limbed and tall (7), with a thin and pale face (388) and "steady grey eyes" (250), while clothed in black throughout the novel. The choice of words alludes to death and decay, to a body that is not only sex- but lifeless and is therefore positioned in stark contrast to Genar-Hofoen and Ulver, who are constantly engaging in sexual acts, as well as in opposition to Dajeil, who carries new life inside of her. Compared to the other characters, its outward appearance is noted or commented on every time it interacts with someone. Dajeil in particular reacts with a mixture of distress and curiosity towards it, using its regular visits in her tower to try and break down Amorphia's reserve:

> It had become one of the small, private games she played with the cadaverously sexless creature; she gave it a glass, cup or goblet full to the brim of the appropriate drink – indeed sometimes full beyond the brim, with only surface tension holding the liquid in the container – and then watched Amorphia lift it to *her* mouth and sip it, each and every time, without either spilling a single drop or appearing to devote any special attention to the act; a feat no human she had ever encountered could have performed. (6, emphasis added)

While at the same time emphasising the difference between humans and the avatar through its physical skill and perfect abilities in handling the drink, this quote explicitly genders Amorphia using the female pronoun – for the first and only time in the novel. For the rest of the narrative, Amorphia is referred to either by name or by the gender-neutral-seeming pronoun 'it', which nevertheless carries overtones of derogative dehumanisation[51] or infantilisation.

51 As a ship avatar, Amorphia is de facto non-human; however, the reader regularly encounters avatars physically appearing as human men or women, being referred to by masculine and feminine pronouns, which impacts the way they are perceived. In *Surface Detail*, for instance, Demeisen's male pronouns go along with an authoritative masculine gender performance while the avatar of the ship *Sense Amid Madness, Whit Amidst Folly*, on which Lededje's mind-state is first intercepted and reinstated into a new body, takes on the appearance of a benevolent older woman, Sensia, whose female pronouns support her function as a nurturing, reassuring, (rebirthing) feminine figure. Thus, the dominant usage of the pronoun 'it', only replaced once throughout the narrative (by 'her'), places Amorphia in a liminal space between a (gendered) feminine sphere, a (genderless) infantile sphere, and an (equally genderless) non-human sphere. Whereas the former two potentially denote inferiority to the masculine sphere, the latter

In terms of gender performance, the avatar sometimes displays behaviour that the average reader would perhaps decode as feminine. When talking to Dajeil about her potentially having to leave the ship, Amorphia appears confused, ashamed, and incoherent, hesitant to disclose the reasons as well as angry and exasperated to have to deliver this difficult message (E 183). When, at the end of its deliberations, the avatar looks startled, Dajeil compares the look on its face to that of a "tiny baby" in "utter, blinking surprise" (184).

The first time this infantilisation is revoked is when Genar-Hofoen talks to Amorphia at the end of the narrative, after having been imprisoned by the *Sleeper Service* for 24 hours, trying to force him to talk to Dajeil. Nevertheless, he notes again that its face displays "something near to innocence" (388), hereby alluding to the symbolic connection of childhood and innocence. Both instances indicate that Amorphia does not possess full knowledge of the ship's plans and intentions; it does not have the power to decide any character's fate or even whether or not to deliver a message. In terms of power structures in a patriarchal system (which the Culture claims not to be), Amorphia is feminised and infantilised. When first introduced through Dajeil as the focal point of a third-person figural narrator, the avatar is described as follows:

> Amorphia was a gaunt, pale, androgynous creature, almost skeletally thin and a full head taller than Dajeil, who was herself both slender and tall. For the last dozen or so years, the avatar had taken to dressing all in black, and it was in black leggings, black tunic and a short black jerkin that it appeared now, its cropped blonde hair covered by a similarly dark skull cap. (5)

Apart from the unspecified jerkin and the black cap, Amorphia's leggings and tunic (as feminine clothing) seem to counteract its height, which is traditionally considered a male attribute. At the end of the narrative, the feminisation of the avatar is supported once again by it wearing a "simple black pant-skirt" (449), which of course, being a combination of pants and a skirt, could refer to its status in between the sexes; as a garment, however, a pant-skirt is traditionally women's wear. At this point it is necessary to state that fashion is one of the most important instruments in producing gender (Lehnert 119), which is also evident in the case of Genar-Hofoen parading around Tier with suit, cloak, and cane. Androgyny is thus not limited to a person's physique but encompasses gender performance as well, consequently emphasising the connection between West and Zimmerman's understanding of *sex category* and *gender*[52], situating androgyny at the heart of and in interdependency with both categories.

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stands for intelligence, ability, and agency that exceeds human faculties by far and consequently poses a potential threat, or at least an unease in its human counterparts.

52 "Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. The criteria for classification can be

The concept of androgyny has been rediscovered and revived for cultural and literary analysis in the 1970s and 80s of the last century, most notably by Carolyn Heilbrun's *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973):

> The ideal toward which I believe we should move is best described by the term 'androgyny.' This ancient Greek word – from *andro* (male) and *gyn* (female) – defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate. (Heilbrun x, emphasis original)

Heilbrun's approach to androgyny suggests the liberation of the individual through the abolition of social norms and stereotypes relating to gender. Whereas the idea itself is commendable, social norms and stereotypes stem from the traditional construction of sex and gender as binaries that are deeply rooted in history, culture, and politics. According to Bock and Alfermann, numerous social sciences and literary studies have shown that the androgynous figure serves mostly as a fragile mask to conceal the traditional gender binary (Bock and Alfermann 11). The attraction of androgynous literary and medial figures, however, appears unbroken, and as Gertrud Lehnert points out, here, androgyny lies in the eye of the beholder: it is a phenomenon of reception and appears seductive for some, repulsive for others, but always elicits strong affective responses (Lehnert 119). This is certainly true for Amorphia in interaction with other characters of the novel, given that Dajeil and Genar-Hofoen regularly refer to its 'sexlessness' and its 'cadaverous' physique as something bizarre, if not repulsive. However, the narrative also includes information about Amorphia that appears to justify the avatar's intentional androgynous conception as an act that demonstrates dependency and subjection to the ship (E 6). Here, gender is understood as an expression of identity, and since Amorphia is not an independent entity, it is not allowed a particular gender identity.

In stark contrast to that of the human protagonists of the novel, Amorphia's behaviour is also not predictable according to its chosen gender (since it has none). Ulver's, Dajeil's, and particularly Genar-Hofoen's adherence to gender

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genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, and they do not necessarily agree with one another. Placement in a *sex category* is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking. *Gender*, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category." (West and Zimmerman, "Chapter One" 4-5)

stereotypes completely inverts Bettina Hannover's theory that androgyny brings an end to biological essentialism:

> Wenn die Geschlechtsrollenidentität einer Person völlig unabhängig von ihrem biologischen Geschlecht ausgeprägt sein kann, wie dies bei Androgynen der Fall ist, so bedeutet dies auch, daß Menschen nicht durch ihr biologisches Geschlecht determiniert sind, sondern vielmehr selbst beeinflussen können, inwiefern sie sich in ihrer Psyche und in ihrem Verhalten von ihrer Geschlechtszugehörigkeit lenken lassen. (Hannover 132)
>
> If the gender identity of a person can be completely independent from their biological sex, as it is with androgynous people, this also means that humans are not determined by their biological sex. Instead, they themselves can affect in how far they let their gender category steer their psyche and behaviour.[53]

Genar-Hofoen chooses his biological sex and the 'corresponding' gender identity within the binary according to his psyche and behaviour, whereas Amorphia does not, as a half-enslaved ship avatar, possess any *gender* identity. Amorphia's gender is ascribed, supported by the gendered interpretation of its clothing and mannerisms, by the other characters, since all are part of a binary gender system without words for the space in between and with a constant need to conceive the world according to well-established categories. In this situation, what may be the potential androgyny carries for literary analysis? According to Julika Funk, androgyny can be a useful concept to reflect on the construction of gender and gender difference. Inspired by Butler's theories on the construction and deconstruction of gender and heteronormativity, she understands the androgyne as the undefined, impalpable third, disturbing the gender binary and making the instability as well as the cementation of gender as dichotomous concept visible (Funk 50). Whereas Amorphia's outer appearance has an irritating effect on Dajeil and Genar-Hofoen and thus highlights their reliance on gender as a dichotomous concept – despite the near-infinite creative leeway the Culture provides for human and non-human self-presentations – it does not appear as the impalpable third with a lasting subversive impact.

6.3 Gendered Characters, Gendered Societies

With the Culture and the Affront in opposition, representing completely different social, political, and moral values, later on engaging in a brief war, the 'background scenery' upon which the action unfolds is comparable to the setting of *Consider Phlebas*. Like the Idirans, the Affront are a masculine-presenting, warlike, and highly patriarchal society who are expanding throughout the universe. In contrast, the Culture acts diplomatically and friendly but also deceives

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and manipulates – a group of Minds within Special Circumstances, for instance, tricks the Affront into attacking so that the Culture can remain in the 'righteous' position of not having started the war. As explained before, scholars such as Gavin Miller (2007) and Folkert Degenring (2010) have connected the Culture with a "feminine" (Miller 207) ethic both in its responses to external threats and in its nurturing position towards its citizens. Therefore, the gender binary is not only present on the character level, but also ascribed to the societal level. In large-scale conflicts, the 'feminine' Culture tends to prevail. Thus, destiny or fate are interesting aspects to consider when analysing gender performances within the Culture series: In the long run, the 'feminine' position seems to dominate, to 'win', or at least to be more long-lived. In the case of *Excession*, it can be established that the Culture defeats the Affront with the intent to regulate their behaviour more thoroughly in the future, the *Sleeper Service* gets its way in (partially forcefully) persuading Genar-Hofoen to talk to Dajeil, and consequently Dajeil decides to carry her child to term and to raise it aboard the ship (E 448-451). Ulver returns to her home, Phage Rock (447-448), enjoying the company of her pets and her friends, and Genar-Hofoen is granted his wish of an Affronter body and allowed to live with the Affront (E 445). At first sight, this seems like a positive outcome for him. On a larger scale, however, it becomes clear that he is now a player on a confined playground, under the watchful eyes of the Culture – a society which tends to put mischievous individuals under constant observation.

Amorphia's depiction may primarily serve to unsettle the novel's characters and the readers. It is intended to be *different* from the human characters and, designed as a fluid and ambiguous figure, it may serve to represent the human portrayal of an infinitely intelligent and hardly assessable Culture Mind. Within the character constellation, it can be used to highlight stereotypical gender performances of the human characters. Other than that, the androgynous character's use to the deconstruction of gendered portrayals is limited. Despite all the possibilities of biological self-alteration that are inbred in Culture citizens, and even though many among them change sex at least once a lifetime, and even despite the borderline-satirical portrayal of gender stereotypes, the dichotomy remains very much intact in this Culture novel.

7. Making Victims, Making Perpetrators

Interpersonal violence is a common occurrence in Banks' novels, as is the gendered coding and decoding of violence and victimisation. In the analysis of three of Banks' novels so far I have shown that physical violence is often closely connected with gaining or maintaining a masculine gender performance, whereas it is mostly regarded as 'unnatural' in regard to gender performance when used by female characters; or, as masculinised violence, it is used to catapult female characters to the same level male characters occupy in patriarchal societies. Masculinised physical violence against male characters is thus used as an 'equaliser' in a gender-hierarchical social context.

Sexualised violence, however, is oftentimes used to reestablish or maintain the patriarchal order. Perpetrators use sexualised violence forcibly as an instrument of patriarchal power; the degradation and humiliation of the victim is in this context a 'desired' factor leading to the empowerment of the perpetrator. Rape is oftentimes regarded as the severest form of sexualised violence.

Following Urania Milevski's reasoning in *Stimmen und Räume der Gewalt* (2016), despite the ostensible semantic similarity of both terms, 'sexualised violence' denotes the usage of sexual means to exercise power, whereas 'sexual violence' is a relic of the traditional explanation of sexualised violence as a means for sexual satisfaction or reproduction (16). The problematic nature of the latter terminology is evident, it will therefore be disregarded in this analysis. Milevski differentiates between rape, sexual violence, and sexualised violence in her work. She defines rape as the forcible penetration of an inferior subject by a superior subject with the use of physical and/or psychological violence and sexualised violence as the exercise of power by sexual means, oriented towards the goal of subduing the inferior subject or a third party, with the intention of harming said party (ibid.). Unlike Milevski, I will group non-consentual violent acts with intent of sexual satisfaction or reproduction under the terms sexualised violence or rape wherever appropriate.

Milevski points out that scholarly studies about rape still take a gendered power imbalance as a starting point, connecting the power of violation with male genitals and the potential to be violated with the female sexual organ. Further, apart from an assumed gender hierarchy, she explains that every reader potentially keeps a mental script about the process, the reasons, and the contexts of rape which is connected to these stereotypical assumptions about gender (44). These assumptions about epistemic violence serve to support and stabilise patriarchal power discourses and impede social transformation (45). Mental imagery and stereotypes like these are closely connected to what Gerd Bohner calls 'rape

myths': convictions about rape that serve to deny, downplay, and justify sexualised violence exerted by men against women (Bohner 43). Rape myths question the legitimacy of rape accusations and severely limit victims' agencies. Alongside Veronika Schuchter's analysis in *Textherrschaft. Zur Konstruktion von Opfer-, Heldinnen- und Täterinnenbildern in Literatur und Film* (2013), Milevski summarises the spaces of agency literary rape victims are limited to:

> Das überlebende Opfer kann zur Täterin werden und sich […] gegen den Selbstmord und für die Rache an ihrem Peiniger entscheiden. Trotzdem verbleibe die Täterin in den tradierten geschlechtsspezifischen Mustern, so Schuchter. Reagierend auf ihre Versehrung, konstruiere sie sich selbst einmal mehr in Abhängigkeit von der Definition männlicher Täterschaft. Nur wer Opfer war, kann also zur Täterin werden, wie uns bereits Prokne und Philomela lehren. (Milevski 62)
>
> The surviving victim can become a perpetrator and decide against suicide and for taking revenge on her tormentor. Nevertheless, according to Schuchter this (female) perpetrator would remain within traditional gender-specific patterns. As a reaction to her injury, she would construct herself in dependence of the definition of masculine perpetration. Only victimised women can become perpetrators, as the tale of Prokne and Philomela teaches us.[54]

Whereas the stereotypical role of the female rape victim is addressed in detail by sociological and literary criticism, theory on male rape victims is sparse. According to Connell, male-on-male sexualised violence "can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles" (Connell 83) – here again, sexualised violence is a tool for claiming power in homosocial hegemonic structures. The subjugation of the male victim of sexualised violence is a central aspect, whilst a potential sexual satisfaction of the perpetrator is secondary.

When analysing sexualised violence and the narrative depictions of rape in Banks' novels in the following, I will first conduct an in-depth analysis of the traditional binary combination of female victim vs. male aggressor. Afterwards, I will examine text passages across Banks' oeuvre where female characters are depicted as particularly sexually active and assertive, hereby analysing the potential of an inversion of the gendered stereotype. This analysis will be followed by a detailed exploration of the combination of sexualised violence and incest in order to establish the dynamics of inner-familial sexualised assaults. Next, I am going to introduce the literary trope of victim-turned-avenger in a thorough analysis of rape-revenge motifs in Banks' novels. Lastly, I will be examining 'the last taboo' addressed above: sexualised assault and rape of male literary characters. Throughout my analyses, I will employ methods of reader-response criticism. In this context, it is important to focus on how rape and sexual assault are represented on a textual level, which then serves as a basis to analyse the

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implied reader. Alongside the theories and methods employed by Sabine Sielke, the analysis of narrative omissions as well as a focus on the semantic depiction of rape and other forms of sexual assault will be foregrounded. Thus, one will be able to assess whether a scene of sexualised violence is presented in a way that appears to satisfy scopophilic and pornographic desires, whether it produces or overrides resistance within the reader, which viewpoint is represented (perpetrator – victim – bystander), and if it caters to the 'male gaze'. These factors are also of importance when conducting analyses from a narratological perspective, as Mieke Bal points out:

> The narratological perspective of the term 'rape' requires that we appoint a narrator. The subject of the action, the rapist, needs to be mentioned. Then, there is the subject into whose body the action is done, in whom it brings about change. […] then, this is the meaningful question: who is the focalizor? Is it the rapist, who would be likely to refer to his action differently, or the raped one, the victim who experiences the action? Or is it the narrator, and if so, does this agent identify with either one of these two positions? (Bal 159)

From there, the readers' position is dependent on the narrative tools used: Are we as readers called out on our internalised stereotypes and sensationalist desires? Does the text invite us to identify with one of the characters involved in scenes of sexualised violence? These questions will serve as guidelines in shedding light on the depiction of rape and sexualised violence in the following cross-sectional analysis of Banks' works.

7.1 Violated Women – Sexual Transgression as Means of Masculine Domination

In a patriarchal society, violated women are the necessary outcome of a gender dichotomy based on the custom that women are supposed to 'endure' violence by men (Messerschmidt 15). However, Banks created literary worlds that seem to be far more advanced than ours, not only on a technological but also on a societal level. The Culture propagates itself as an egalitarian society, despising injustice of any sorts. From the civilisations it chooses to 'meddle' with, or even go to war against, the majority is ultra-hierarchical and violently sexist. This is used as justification for observation or downright political manipulation in order to subtly stir them into directions of more peaceful societal development. If those attempts fail, the Culture does not shy away from manipulating those civilisations into bringing about or accelerating their own downfall. In these cases, evidence of systemic sexualised violence present or tolerated in those societies is often used to justify more drastic forms of interference.

The Empire of Azad

Azadians are a good example of Culture antagonists whose societal structure is based on sexist oppression and exploitation. In *The Player of Games* (1988), the second Culture novel, they are described as having developed an unusual three-sex-model: male, female, and 'apex', the intermediate sex, which is "equipped with a kind of reversible vagina, and ovaries. The vagina turns inside-out to implant the fertilised egg in the third sex, [female,] which has a womb" (TPoG 74).

The apex is the dominant sex in the Empire of Azad, in the novel referred to by masculine pronouns[55], therefore adhering to stereotypes of patriarchal hierarchies as is suggested by the name: The Latin 'apex' denotes the highest or top part of something – in this case, the top of the social hierarchy. While males are the 'second sex' on the social ladder and employed as servants and in the military, females are the 'third sex', regarded as possessions of their apice masters (PoG 204) and presented throughout the novel only as dependants: daughters, wives, courtesans, or generally as entertainment for Azadian apices, and males, including the human protagonists. In addition to the blatant sexism, the society is highly xenophobic (nobody wants to touch the 'alien' protagonist, his physique is appalling to them), racist (with a eugenics programme in place to dispose of newborns with dark skin), and intensely violent (with physical violence and torture serving as common means of entertainment for the military and political elites). On the basis of the characteristics of the Empire as outlined above, the Culture decides to intervene. Similar to other Culture novels, they send one of their own outsiders, game champion Jernau Morat Gurgeh, a male human who, in spite of Culture customs, has never changed his sex. He is supposed to play the game of Azad, which is a complicated strategy game where the

55 The narrator of the novel, the drone Flere-Imsaho, directly addresses the issue of gendered pronouns in the beginning of chapter 2:

> Marain, the Culture's quintessentially wonderful language (so the Culture will tell you), has, as any schoolkid knows, one personal pronoun to cover females, males, in-betweens, neuters, children, drones, Minds, other sentient machines, and every life-form capable of scraping together anything remotely resembling a nervous system and the rudiments of language […]. But what of you, O unlucky, possibly brutish, probably ephemeral and undoubtedly disadvantaged citizen of some uncultured society, especially those unfairly (and the Azadians would say under-)endowed with only the mean number of genders?! […] Rest at ease; I have chosen to use the natural and obvious pronouns for female and male, and to represent the intermediates – or apices – with whatever pronominal term best indicates their place in their society, relative to the existing sexual power-balance of yours. In other words, the precise translation depends on whether your own civilisation (for let us err on the side of terminological generosity) is male or female dominated. (PoG 99-100)

outcome decides over one's social rank in the Empire, up until the position of the Emperor. While Gurgeh becomes engrossed with the game and starts to sympathise with some of the Azadian apices, the drone Flere-Imsaho, which is accompanying him, does its best to prevent him from straying too far from the Culture's ideals, showing him all of the Empires social and ethical shortcomings during a secret visit to the capital city's slum quarters (203-207). After returning, the drone shows Gurgeh three different TV-broadcast channels with increasing levels of security clearance mandatory to watch them, which display progressively more and more horrifying forms of sexual domination, degradation, torture, and murder:

> The final scene the man watched featured a psychotic male criminal previously injected with massive doses of sex hormones and hallucinogens, a knife, and a woman described as an enemy of the state, who was pregnant, and just before term. […] 'That one is live, Jernau Gurgeh. It is taking place now. It is still happening, deep in some cellar under a prison or a police barracks [sic].'
> Gurgeh looked up at the blank screen, eyes still wide and staring, but dry. He gazed, rocked backwards and forwards, and breathed deeply. There was sweat on his brow, and he shivered. (209)

Obviously, this marks the turning point of Gurgeh's sympathies. The scene itself is presented through a layered gaze: Gurgeh, representing the male gaze, is watching the screen, which is a male gaze in its own right through the directed filming of the violation of the pregnant female; the drone Flere-Imsaho is watching Gurgeh, waiting for him to cry, close his eyes, or turn away, "but nothing of the sort happened. The screen held his gaze […]" (209). The reader is observing both the drone and the man, evoking an effect addressed in the beginning of this chapter: the potential human inability to turn away from graphic scenes of violence, the fascination of the forbidden and immoral. The timespan of Gurgeh's transfixation by the events on the screen appears to be too long; the drone shows him scenes of increasing violence, waiting for him to react, to show signs of humanity, and the reader is waiting alongside. When Gurgeh finally has enough, closing his eyes and cupping his ears with his hands, the drone turns the screen off: "The man rocked backwards on his heels, as though there had indeed been some attraction, some artificial gravity from the screen, and now that it had ceased, he almost over-balanced in reaction" (ibid.). The message to the reader is clear: Gurgeh has spent too much time fraternising with the locals, engrossed in the game he came to play. In order to test his loyalties and moral compass, the Culture, represented through Flere-Imsaho, subjects him to the programme on the three secret channels. This is a stress-test for Gurgeh and the reader alike, where character flaws become visible (Gurgeh's and, by proxy, the reader's) and personal ethics and morale are 'set straight'. The addictive potential of graphic violence for audiences and bystanders is thus critically addressed.

Gurgeh reacts with anger. Now he fully concentrates on the game, dedicated to reach the finals. He becomes the subversive weapon the Culture wants him to be, finally beating the Emperor in the game of Azad. Gurgeh does so by playing the game not only as a representative of the Culture, actively acting like the Culture on the board, while the Emperor ruthlessly builds a mini-version of his empire. The Culture's more open-minded and diplomatic policy, relying on "a net, a grid of forces and relationships, without any obvious hierarchy or entrenched leadership, and initially quite profoundly peaceful" (269) proves superior to the Azadian method of violent oppression.

Acting as the Culture's avenger, activated by viewing the amassed violent transgressions of the Azadians, Gurgeh's behaviour succumbs to the fulfilling of masculine stereotypes. Previously an oddball from a Culture point of view[56], he now turns into the hero of the story, the masculine avenger of systemic oppression and violation of Azadian females, exercising revenge by beating the Emperor in his own game, thereby accelerating the Empire's downfall. In the eyes of the Culture, he is reformed[57]; having recognised and beaten the evils of societal toxic masculinity, Gurgeh returns home into the arms of the woman who formerly refused him. In his five years of absence, she changed her sex and is in

56 Gurgeh is a male who has never changed sex or entertained a homosexual relationship; he is slightly obsessed with a Culture female who keeps refusing him because of his "primitiveness", because she feels he would want to "possess" her (24). Possession, in this context, carries undertones of patriarchy and capitalism, two societal concepts that the Culture considers overcome, as well as of *Gewalt* as *potestas*, the forcible power one can execute over one's legal possession. Through this characterisation, "Yay identifies in Gurgeh further 'residual' views from an archaic patriarchal order, which sees women as an inferior sex, and therefore as the 'property' of men. These patriarchal views are, in turn, directly reflected in the Empire of Azad, to which Gurgeh is sent on his SC mission" (Norman, *The Culture of "The Culture"* 158).

57 Joseph Norman shares the notion of Gurgeh's reformation during his time in Azad, describing the protagonist as "initially unreconstructed Handy Man" catering to the expectations readers of traditional space opera might have. In the conclusion of the narrative, according to Norman, Gurgeh is deconstructed and rebuild "as an ideological subversion of the Handy Man: a more emotional, empathetic, and open-minded individual who is more likely to thrive in the Culture" (*The Culture of "The Culture"* 159). While Gurgeh's newly found access to his emotional side might be sufficient to consider the stereotypically masculine space opera trope of the Handy Man subverted, his development is nevertheless rewarded by another patriarchal SF trope: access to the desired woman back home. As Lisa Tuttle explains in her SF anthology entry "Women in SF": "When women do appear, they are usually defined by their relationship to the male characters, as objects to be desired or feared, rescued or destroyed; often, especially in recent, more sexually explicit times, women characters exist only to validate the male protagonist as acceptably masculine" (n.p.). In this case, the acceptable masculinity Gurgeh must display to win his female prize is a form of emotionally progressive masculinity endorsed by the Culture.

the process of changing it back when he comes home. She also finds that "he looked a lot more cuddleable than when he'd gone away" (306), proposing that they should have sex. The narrative deems it necessary to clarify to the reader how exactly that takes place since she is still transitioning towards her female body: "She used her mouth […]" (ibd.). This detail destroys any subversive potential this scene might have carried as a non-binary sex scene. It could have been argued that having sex with a person in a state of androgynous in-betweenness takes away from Gurgeh's stereotypically masculine gender performance. But for one, his partner is consistently referred to with a female pronoun in the present, only using the masculine pronoun when referring to her past as a man. Secondly, heteronormativity is reestablished by the above-cited detail, her using her mouth does not refer to kissing but to her providing a cavity for him to penetrate, whereas he caresses "the odd, almost comic unbuddings of her now concaving genitals" (307). While her still androgynous non-binary body is devalued through its description as "odd" and "almost comic", it is still able to provide heteronormative intercourse.

In the night, sleepless, Gurgeh watches the sky and cries for the first time in his life. Evolving from the stereotypical 'primitive' (s.a.) macho with a fragile ego into the equally stereotypical masculine avenger, heroically taking revenge on a system on behalf of violated females and children (Reifenberger 19) with skills only he possesses (as the best game-player in the Culture), he is rewarded with the partner he wanted and the discovery of his 'feminine', or rather not-so-stereotypically-masculine, side which finds expression in him gaining access to his emotions, respectively his ability to cry. The subversive potential of the last scenes, particularly in relation to heteronormativity and the gender binary, remains unrealised.

Elethiomel / Cheradenine Zakalwe

Use of Weapons (1990) is the third Culture novel; here, the narrative provides two intersecting timelines, one going into the future, the other one into the past. It follows the fates of two men and two women who grew up together on a remote planet outside the Culture. What makes the narrative particularly challenging is the self-deception (and consequent deception of the reader) the main protagonist engages in. For the entire narrative, Elethiomel takes on the identity of his former friend and foster brother Cheradenine Zakalwe. Growing up together in wealth and comfort, increasing sibling rivalry leads them to eventually fight on different sides of a war. The thread of their story is like an undercurrent throughout the whole novel, breaking to the surface from time to time when the memories return to haunt Elethiomel. The protagonists of those memories are mostly

Cheradenine's sisters Darckense and Livueta, who get caught in the growing rivalry between the brothers, which includes the strife for dominance over the sisters. When Cheradenine returns from his training in a military academy, he finds Darckense and Elethiomel in the family's summer house, having sex:

> Elethiomel sat, trousers round his ankles, hands on Darckense's naked hips under her bunched-up dress, and looked calmly at him. […] 'Hi there, old chap,' he said to the young man […]. Cheradenine looked into Elethiomel's eyes for a moment, then turned away, […] walking out, closing the door behind him.
> Behind him he heard Darckense crying, and Elethiomel laughing. (UoW 201)

Years later, when a war is already raging across their homeland, Major Cheradenine Zakalwe returns to the summer house to have it blown up by a tank gun (202), thus acting out his anger in the space where his former friend and foster brother Elethiomel first 'took possession' of his sister. Yet still later, Elethiomel has been holding Darckense hostage for years. Both men are now heading their respective armies, fighting over their city, their country, and the sisters, subjecting hundreds of thousands of people to their war[58]. The conflict culminates in the deliverance of a chair to Cheradenine's headquarters which is made of Darckense's bones with a cushion made from her tanned skin (379). After that, Cheradenine takes a gun to his own head.[59] From this moment on, Elethiomel is known as the 'Chairmaker'. Apparently traumatised by his own actions, he takes on Cheradenine Zakalwe's identity to work for the Culture as an outside agent; "used by the Culture in various interventions aimed either to support or undermine more-or-less identical male oligarchies or individuals struggling for power in patriarchal orders of varying degrees of instability. His involvement usually leads to the onset of chaos" (Hubble 65).

There is a certain irony in the fact that Elethiomel, now referred to as Zakalwe, not only possesses the eponymous talent to use anything (or anyone) as a weapon but is also used as the Culture's weapon in interventions with numerous failed or failing patriarchal orders: "While Zakalwe's background story reveals, in characteristically Banksian gothic excess, the level of violence inherent to the male psyche within a patriarchal order, his repeated attempts to atone boil down to trying to eradicate the monstrousness in others that he recognizes from

58 Whether this is indeed their personal war, or whether they got caught up in a war going on at the time, fighting on different sides and using their high positions and resources to target one another, is not clarified in the text.

59 Cheradenine Zakalwe's death by suicide questions the identity of the narrative focal point. As a third-person figural narration, the focal point of the narration alternates between Special Circumstances head operative Diziet Sma and Zakalwe. With the revelation that the 'Zakalwe' of the novel is indeed Elethiomel, it remains unclear who narrates the passages of the backstory that focus on the war between Cheradenine and Elethiomel, which are presented from the former's point of view.

knowledge of his own self" (Hubble 66). Elements of sexualised violence are not as explicit in *Use of Weapons*. The relationship between Elethiomel and Darckense is mediated through Cheradenine's point of view, which is tainted by jealousy and hatred, as Cheradenine himself admits (UoW 376-379). However, his perception of the sex scene between Elethiomel and Darckense (quoted above) carries overtones of sexualised violence: Cheradenine rushes inside the summer house when he hears "a scream from inside. Darckense" (200). When he leaves again, he can hear his sister cry (201). Thus, a moment of pleasure is potentially inverted by guilt, shame, and rivalry, and the sex scene is degraded to fit into the narrative of the foster brothers' rivalry: It symbolises Elethiomel's initial claim of Darckense. From then onwards, their relationship is hidden from the reader's view until Darckense is delivered to Cheradenine as a chair – only minutes after Livueta claimed that she trusts Elethiomel not to kill her sister (377). Again, the description of the cushion carries sexual overtones: "They had tanned her skin and made a little cushion out of it; a tiny plain button in her navel, and at one corner, just the hint, the start of some dark but slightly red-tinged hair" (379). Here, the navel as erogenous zone and the 'hint' of pubic hair are particularly prominent in the description; in the display of the chair itself, the once fractured and surgically rejoined pelvis is the centre of attention. Thus, even turned into a chair, Darckense's bones and skin are sexualised; as her body has been made into a piece of furniture, Elethiomel literally objectified her. He used sex to turn Darckense into a weapon in the fight against his foster brother, he took her hostage to draw out the war and keep Cheradenine's attacks at bay from fear of his sister being killed, and then he killed her and rearranged her bones, turning her pelvis into a seat, thus making her receptive in a literal sense. In terms of sexualised violence, this perverse display of possession and dominance happens on a bodily level: Elethiomel demonstrates that, while his body is active and acting, Darckense's body, the female body, is *being acted on*, she is an object, made into a piece of furniture, a tool in his warfare; and she is now eternally passive, silent, and without power.

> The social world constructs the body as sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division. This embodied social programme of perception is applied to all the things of the world and firstly to the *body* itself, in its biological reality. It is this programme which constructs the difference between the biological sexes in conformity with the principles of a mythic vision of the world rooted in the arbitrary relationship of domination of men over women, itself inscribed, with the division of labour, in the reality of the social order. The *biological* difference between the *sexes*, i.e. between the male and female bodies, and, in particular, the *anatomical* difference between the sex organs, can thus appear as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the *genders* […]. (Bourdieu 11, emphasis original)

Through the deconstruction of Darckense's body, gendered anatomy comes into focus. The chair factured from her bones "was very small; it looked so delicate that an adult might have broken it. It was small and white […]" (UoW 379) – and indeed, an 'adult' broke Darckense and rearranged her bones into something innocently "white", childishly "small", and femininely "delicate". Not only is her body the site of "sexually defined reality", as Bourdieu has it (11), but it is also the site of "domination of men over women" (11), and it is further quite explicitly the site of a fight of masculine hegemony, a fight about the question which man is going to dominate the other.

The Affront

In *Excession* (1996), the Affront, the antagonist of the Culture, is another prime example of a civilisation based on systemic sexualised violence. When Genar-Hofoen, Culture ambassador to the Affront, describes the uniform of his primary diplomatic contact, Colonel Fivetide of the Affront, the descriptive focus lays on "a group of discreetly black portrait disks" which "indicated the females of other clans that Fivetide could honourably claim to have successfully impregnated; the discs edged with precious metals bore witness to those who had put up a struggle" (E 30). Those disks are the only ones on Fivetide's uniform whose symbolism is explained and elaborated on, the rest of his sashes and medals are descriptively summed up as indicating "Fivetide's clan, rank, and regiment" (30).

First, the existence and the bestowing of medals, or in this case "portrait disks" (30), for the successful impregnation of females is obvious evidence of societal sexism and male domination. Second, the increased elaboration and preciousness of the 'disks' awarded for impregnating females who "put up a struggle" (30), thus effectively rewarding the rape of females of other clans, is undeniable evidence for systemic sexualised violence. The choice of words is also evidently euphemistic: 'putting up a struggle' downplays scenarios of rape and violence; at the same time, it enforces the stereotype of female inferiority, bodily as well as psychologically. A female Affronter, at the threat of being raped, does not put up a 'fight'; for the dominant male it is merely "a struggle" (30). The choice of words in these descriptions mirrors the Affront's point of view, repeated without any criticism or distance by Genar-Hofoen, who serves as the focal point of the narration at this time. The way he describes the Affront civilisation and his sympathies for them serves to produce antipathy or outright dislike on the reader's end, not only towards the Affront but in particular towards Genar-Hofoen, who, as citizen of the highly evolved, egalitarian, post-scarcity Culture is not expected to remain indifferent to such blatant displays of sexism.

The Culture's own perception of the Affront carries a connotation different from Genar-Hofoen's; they describe the Affront's self-perceived 'right' to travel through the galaxy, hunting or killing every being they encounter as the "self-evidently perfectly natural, demonstrably just and indeed arguably even sacred Affronter prerogative to go wherever they wanted and do whatever they damn well pleased, preferably while having a bit of fun with the locals at the same time" (E 167). Following the assessments from Northrop Frye to Ruben Quintero, this description is satirical. The detection and definition of satire is closely connected to assumptions of 'basic' moral norms, "standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (Frye quoted in Davis and Nance 9). Measured against the implied readers' presumed moral standard, the "Affronter prerogative to […] do whatever they damn well pleased" is obviously not "perfectly natural", neither is it "demonstrably just" (E 167), but rather a caricature of childishly egocentric and violent behaviour, and it creates a distance between the Culture (and the readers) on one side and the Affront on the other side, a distance which may carry the feeling of moral superiority on the readers' and the Culture's side. As Quintero explains,

> [s]atire cannot function without a standard against which readers can compare its subject. We praise with delight what we admire, enjoy, or profit from, and we censure with indignation the despicable or what causes ill because we have an acquired sense of what the world should or might be. (Quintero quoted in Davis and Nace 9-10)

Satire is sometimes mean, often witty, it tends to critcise injustices – but it is also funny. The ironic distance satire creates between the object, the question or issue at hand (in this case the childish hubris of the Affront), and the addressee, Culture-sympathetic reader who shares the Culture's values, lightens the mood. Irony as a figure of speech partially relieves the reader of the gravity of the situation they are faced with and thus offers a coping mechanism which makes it possible to speak about the unspeakable.

> In the twentieth century, in some critics' views, irony has even come to stand for all that is complex and thus positive about art itself. With postmodernism we have witnessed a further expansion, one that is perhaps really a reverting to a more simple sense of irony as a semantic balancing act, as a fence-sitting, bet-hedging middle ground where evasion and complicity sit – not totally comfortably – with commitment and critique. (Hutcheon 119)

Banks' playfully ironic Culture-novels are squarely placed in the postmodern space-opera subgenre of science fiction. Hutcheon's postmodernist imagery of irony "as a semantic balancing act" (s.a.) and as an uncomfortable middle ground is a fitting description of *Excession*'s reading experience: the reader is uncomfortably caught between the Culture's ironic criticism of the Affronter society, Culture-ambassador Genar-Hofoen's complicity in the ruling class' social

atrocities, with a trinkle in his eye, and the evasive potential provided by the ironic depiction of these behaviours.

The Affront justify their systemically sexist and violent behaviour as part of their "sacred […] prerogative" (E 167), while the Culture perceives the Affront's excursions into genetic engineering and modifications of their prey "as a kind of self-perpetuating, never-ending holocaust of pain and fear" (168). The Affront artificially heightened the levels of fear and terror their prey species experience when being hunted, claiming that this would enhance the taste of the meats as well as the sporting experience (169). Yet, they chose to genetically alter members of their own species as well:

> Affronter society rested on a huge base of ruthlessly exploited juvenile geldings and a sub-class of oppressed females who unless born to the highest families – and not always even then – could count themselves lucky if they were only raped by the males from their own tribe. It was generally regarded as significant – within the Culture if nowhere else – that one of the few aspects of their own genetic inheritance with which the Affront had deemed it desirable to meddle had been in the matter of making the act of sex a somewhat less pleasurable and considerably more painful act for their females than their basic genetic legacy required; the better, it was claimed, to further the considered good of the species rather than the impetuously selfish pleasure of the individual. (168)

How exactly this genetic alteration of Affront females "further[s] […] the good of the species" is not explained. However, it seems that only female pleasure is a threat to the Affront, for the sexual pleasure of the Affront males is neither tampered with nor explicitly commented on; moreover, among the high-ranking males of the species, it seems to be common to have a harem of several wives and courtesans (E 73-74). At large, Affront society adheres to an ideal of 'manliness' as 'duty', as described by Bourdieu:

> *Manliness*, understood as sexual or social reproductive capacity, but also as the capacity to fight and to exercise violence (especially in acts of revenge), is first and foremost a *duty*. Unlike women, whose essentially negative honour can only be defended or lost, since her virtue is successively virginity and fidelity, a 'real' man is someone who feels the need to rise to the challenge of the opportunities available to him to increase his honour by pursuing glory and distinction in the public sphere. Exaltation of masculine values has its dark negative side in the fears and anxiety aroused by femininity. (*Masculine Domination* 51, emphasis original)

Whereas for the Affront males violence is an essential component of entertainment (E 37-39), competitions and warfare are necessary to achieve honour and scars and lost limbs are proof of skill and sportsmanship (28-29), Affront females' only purpose is reproduction and serving as status symbols for high-ranking males. In *Excession*, in contrast to the oppressed class of juvenile geldings, they do not have a voice and are irrelevant to the plot – apart from the fact that their systemic oppression and rape is communicated as reason for the Culture's interference, because

> the Culture's attempts to persuade the Affront that there were other ways to control fertility and familial inheritance besides those which relied on the virtual imprisonment, genetic mutilation and organised violation of their females […] all met with equally derisive if brusquely good-humoured dismissals. (169-170)

In the end, however, after the brief war between Culture and Affront, which the latter loses, no information is given on any changes of the Affront society. On the contrary, Colonel Fivetide and "Onceman Genar-Hofoen", who by then is equipped with an Affronter body as payment for his services to Special Circumstances, enjoy a game of "bat ball", a squash-like sport with a live animal used as ball (445). So, while oppressed females are likely to be used as token by the Culture to justify antagonising other space-faring civilisations, they are irrelevant and silent in the aftermath of a Culture war. Thus, systemic sexualised violence and cultures of male domination may be challenged but, at least in this case, neither dismantled nor overthrown.

Slavery, Rape, and Virtual Hells

Surface Detail, published in 2010 as the penultimate Culture novel and therefore one of Banks' later works, seems to be set out to cover every gruesome detail of systemic sexism and torture imaginable. In the beginning of the novel, Lededje Y'breq is hunted by three men, one of which is her legal owner; she and her mother have been 'signed over' to the ownership of Joiler Veppers as a result from her father's crippling debt and loss of honour. As legal property of another person, she is an "Indented Intagliate" (SD 74), born with bioengineered tattoo-like markings covering her whole body down to the cellular level. Veppers himself is the richest and most powerful man in the Sichultian Enablement, whose ultra-capitalistic society takes debt, honour, and ownership very seriously. Lededje is part of Veppers' property, designed in vitro to amaze and impress with her beauty, "contractually and honour-bound to produce [one or two children]" (73) which would themselves be Intagliates in Veppers' possession. She tries to escape numerous times and is always recaptured as is the case in the beginning of the novel. In an attempt to defend herself, she bites Veppers' nose off, which results in him stabbing her to death (15). Similar to the narrative structure of most Culture novels, this is not the end of her story. Her mind-state[60] is saved by a Culture ship, and she wakes up in a new body aboard a Culture vessel. This is the starting point of her quest for vengeance; she aims to kill Veppers in retaliation for him enslaving, raping, and killing her.

60 For a comprehensive overview over mind-states, digital souls, heavens, and hells in the Culture novels, consult Joseph Norman's essay "Digital Souls and Virtual Afterlives in the Culture Series", in Colebrook and Cox (eds.), *The Transgressive Iain Banks. Essays on a Writer Beyond Borders*.

Hers is just one of a multitude of narrative strands, which are all, mostly through detours instead of directly, connected with the "War in Heaven" (169). There is a virtual "confliction" (ibid.) going on between numerous advanced and space-faring civilisations, centring on the existence of virtual hells. Many high-ranking individuals of different societies, like the Pavuleans (a quadruped race living in herds), insist on the necessity of "the threat of punishment in the afterlife to keep [them] from behaving like mere beasts in this existence" (SD 258)[61]. A small group of Pavulean academics has made it their mission to prove the existence of the virtual Pavulean hell, which is denied by government officials. Prin and Chay, two of these academics, a couple, volunteer to have their consciousnesses illegally uploaded into the virtual hell. Their mission is to collect evidence in order to be able to testify towards the hell's existence in front of a grand jury. Whereas Prin manages to escape the virtual hell deeply traumatised, his partner in love and crime, Chay, loses all hope in hell and refuses to believe that there is an outside world, a 'real' to return to. She is left behind and subjected to physical and psychological torture for two lifetimes. In Chay's narrative, Banks created pain and suffering which is

> [easily transcending] the corporeal limits of the Real world. In other scenes, body parts are removed from their owners to constitute elements of the landscape, without freeing their owners from pain: fingernails decorate the roofs of buildings like tiles; bones form the structure of a mill wheel; and stretched skin lines the walls of the mill.
>
> Banks' hells are rendered in all their gory details, recalling the famous visions of his literary and artistic predecessors, such as the vivid and imaginative realms of Dante or Milton, and the visceral and sadistic paintings of Bosch. (Norman, "Digital Souls" 161-162)

In the virtual hells, Chay encounters the aesthetics of sadism, fascinated by the perverted artistic detail that must have gone in planning and creating them: "just the geography, then the logistics, then the hatefully sadistic inventiveness of it all was enough to captivate the inquiring mind" (SD 579). Apart from – or maybe within – these sadistic aesthetics, Pavulean hell is a deeply sexist place. Rape is a popular form of torture there, and even though Chay indirectly suggests that the demons that carry out this specific form of torture are not picky about their victims' gender (280), the reader only witnesses females (including Chay) being raped. Back in the real world, a high-ranking Pavulean politician,

61 Others find the practice of uploading mind-states into virtual hells repulsive and fight for their complete abolishment in the known universe. Pro- and anti-hell sides agree to fight out their conflict in a virtual environment where the losing side will have to accept the verdict once and for all. The virtual war has been going on for 30 years at the time of the events in *Surface Detail*, and the anti-hell side is about to be defeated. They decide to cheat and to attack the physical substrates that house the virtual hells, and so the fight spills over to the real.

Representative Errun, tries to keep Prin from testifying about his experiences in hell in front of a grand jury. In his attempt to intimidate Prin, he threatens Chay, specifically pressing the fact that females are treated even worse in hell: "You've seen what they do to people, to females in particular. […] I'll make sure they tell her it's all your fault when they're fucking her to death every night, a hundred a time… […] Your moral fucking high ground won't be high enough to escape her screams every night for the rest of your life" (444-447). Apart from confirming hell as another, albeit virtual, patriarchal and deeply sexist place derived from male fantasy, Errun emphasises Prin's responsibility for Chay's fate – because he is male and her partner. Prin himself struggles with the guilt of having left Chay behind because he had thought she would be unable to testify in the 'real'. If she had been better, he tells himself,

> he could have done the decent, chivalrous, masculine thing and saved the girl, got her to safety and taken whatever extra punishment the mephitic bureaucracy of Hell decreed. But he could only have done that if he'd thought that she would get back to the Real as anything other than a broken, weeping wreck. (437)

These passages address the absurdity of patriarchal systems and masculine domination while at the same time reproducing it. Hell is depicted as a sadistic male fantasy which first breaks Chay and then integrates her into the system as a demonic "angel" (397) who is allowed to release one soul per day if she takes on a bit of their pain. Chay suffers more than Prin does, for longer than he does, precisely because she is female. Her fate in hell is decided by the grotesquely and satirically masculine demon king and dependent on the decisions of Prin, while her mind-state is held hostage by the pro-hell forces in the Pavulean government, represented by Rep. Errun, an old Pavulean male. When Errun shows Prin Chay's lifetimes of suffering, and her refusal to let it change her, he feels "proud of her, even though he knew such vicarious pride was mere sentimentality, arguably just a typically male attempt to appropriate some of her achievement for himself. But still." (442). Here, again, problematic masculine behaviour is directly addressed – *but still*, it is reproduced.

Similarly, Lededje Y'breq, who has spent most of her life as Veppers' trophy possession and sex slave, finds herself back at Sichult, opposite Veppers, apparently betrayed, manhandled, and belittled by Demeisen, the avatar of the ship *Falling Outside The Normal Moral Constraints*, which brought her there when no other Culture ship would:

> The Sichultian woman finds the Culture as fascinating as it is frustrating – fascinating because it is a far better place than the Sichultian Enablement, which is virtually run by Veppers, and frustrating because the very ethics that make the Culture what it is get in the way of her revenge. This is why she and the FOTNMC get along well: each sees in the other a topsy-turvy mirror version of themselves – Lededje because the ship is the kind of warrior she wishes she were, and the ship because Lededje is, like it, the off-

> spring of a social system that first created her the way she is and then treated her like something of a pariah, at once admired and rejected. (Caroti 201)

They got along rather well on the journey to Sichult, despite the avatar describing itself as "a borderline eccentric and *very* slightly psychotic Abominator-class picket ship" (409, emphasis original). Without prior warning, Demeisen teleports Lededje into a room with Veppers upon their arrival at her home system. When she uses the chance to attack Veppers, her killer, Demeisen stuns her and constrains her to a seat. She is subsequently insulted by Veppers and belittled by Demeisen throughout the enfolding conversation between them and a Culture ambassador to Sichult, who are seemingly coming to a peaceful agreement. After Veppers, his bodyguard, and the ship avatar leave, Lededje breaks down in the ambassador's office, defeated (592). The Culture ambassador explains that keeping Veppers alive and coming to an agreement with him was necessary for the Culture to be able to destroy the substrates hosting the majority of hells in the universe. The substrates were owned and operated by Veppers and located on his estate. After the substrate is successfully destroyed, the Culture ambassador finally lets Lededje follow and hunt down Veppers.

Lededje's last scenes in the novel, however, are once again full of patriarchal power structures and stereotypical gender performances: In the final confrontation with Veppers, Lededje ultimately proves unable to execute her revenge – it becomes apparent that she cannot handle a gun, and she eventually loses it, nearly being shot with her own weapon. She is saved by Demeisen, who, as it turns out, had planned to assist her all along and kills Veppers for her, "[q]uickly", upon her request, which makes Lededje, in Demeisen's words, a "[g]ood kid, really" (616). An equation of women and children was already inherent in the analysis of *Use of Weapons*, in the treatment of Darckense. In the case of Lededje, this equation becomes more prevalent since it is made by Demeisen and her alike. Throughout her narrative, Lededje struggles with her habit of using what Bourdieu calls "soft violence" (*Masculine Domination* 32), which does not challenge the existing power structure she finds herself in but confirms dominant stereotypes of femininity, like submissiveness, manipulability, and weakness in physical combat. When she wakes up aboard the Culture vessel after being killed by Veppers, she is unsure of what will become of her now, who owns her now. Getting ready to enquire about these questions, "[s]he immediately found herself preparing to use what she thought of her little voice: the meek, low, soft, *childlike* tone she used when she was trying to make her own vulnerability and powerlessness known" (SD 90, emphasis added). Aboard the FOTNMC, she thinks about starting an affair with Demeisen, the ship's avatar, to tie the ship closer to her and secure its help in her revenge, realising that "[i]t was all calculation rather than emotion; she'd be whoring herself. But then Vep-

pers had long ago removed the choices she might have had regarding who she fucked" (294). In both cases, it takes her active effort to refrain from resorting to those stereotypical images of femininity in a patriarchal society; however, in the end, she succumbs to a feminine stereotype in demonstrating her inability to act out her revenge and her dependency on someone else doing it for her.

In *Surface Detail*, despite being critically addressed through the narrative strands of Lededje and Veppers, patriarchal structures and stereotypical gender performances are reproduced, even during the quest to destroy the virtual hells, which, by their sheer existence, prove that the societies entertaining them are systemically sexist, patriarchal, and deeply unethical. Bourdieu describes the dualisms which built the basis for masculine domination and feminine subordination as ingrained, ever-present, and thus hard to overcome:

> These dualisms, deeply rooted in things (structures) and in bodies, do not spring from a simple effect of verbal naming and cannot be abolished by an act of performative magic, since the genders, far from being simple 'roles' that can be played at will […], are inscribed in bodies and in a universe from which they derive their strength. (*Masculine Domination* 103)

Apparently, they are still very much present and reproducible in the Culture universe. Following up on the behavioural patterns Lededje Y'breq struggles with, the next chapter seeks to gradually invert the present analysis by examining in how far Banks' female figures (try to) use sex to dominate or manipulate male characters.

7.2 Inversions – 'Domination Feminine'

This chapter focusses on the analysis of female characters whose sexual activities are featured prominently (e.g. Madame d'Ortolan and Mrs Mulverill in *Transition*), who are depicted as particularly dominant women (e.g. the lieutenant in *A Stong of Stone*), or who combine both traits in a manner that suggests that said female characters may use sex as a means of political or personal domination or manipulation (e.g. Diziet Sma in *Use of Weapons* and *The State of the Art*). I will examine whether an inversion of Bourdieu's concept of masculine domination through the conception of powerful and sexually dominant female characters can be traced in Banks' oeuvre.

Transition – Madame d'Ortolan vs. Mrs Mulverhill

Banks' novel *Transition* (2009) makes use of the so-called 'many-worlds interpretation', a theory from the field of quantum mechanics stating that any possible outcome of an event is realised in a different world or a parallel universe.

Thus, Schrödinger's cat is indeed dead and alive at the same time, but in two different worlds, or universes. In the novel, travel between the different universes is possible for a limited group of 'transitionaries', who are born with the 'talent' to travel between dimensions and are educated at the "University of Practical Talents", which provides them with a strongly limited and controlled substance, "septus" (101), which is needed to make a transition. Septus is developed and distributed by a mysterious operation controlling all inter-world travels, the Concern. The name is an allegory to the Culture, and indeed, they share a similar self-assigned prerogative: the Concern's official intention is to influence history in the different universes to improve their timelines, thus avoiding catastrophes and mass extinction.

Transition is, however, explicitly *not* a Culture novel. In fact, the autocratic head of the Concern, Madame d'Ortolan, secretly harbours the intention to cut all known and accessible worlds off from possible detection of or contact through alien civilisations – the concrete reason of this scheming never really becomes clear. It might be an attempt to conclusively bring her inherent racism to a head – a trait she admits to, but only if the race at question is humanity (T 454). However, she displays a blatant disrespect, or even hatred towards people of different skin colours, religions, or social classes – a fact excused by her biblical age. In one of the few academic takes on the novel, Ursa Vogrinc Javoršek summarises that

> *Transition* is in fact a novel about what happened to Europe – or, more generally, the Earth – in the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, and what those twenty years did to society. The most blatant consequence is arguably the War on Terror which encroached upon human and civil rights and marked the beginning of the end of personal privacy and freedom. […] [I]n *Transition*, Banks [introduces] a very contemporary *otherness* based on religion, race and gender. (Vogrinc Javoršek 104-105, emphasis original)

This contemporary *otherness* is predominantly realised in a universe parallel to the one the reader knows; in Madame d'Ortolan's home universe, which is the seat of the University of Practical Talents, Islam and Judaism are the dominant religions. Christianity is the frightening and inherently destabilising *other*, "[a] religion made for terrorism" (T 39). Apart from this twist, the other *others* are familiar conservative stereotypes and preconceptions: When Madame d'Ortolan is called a "racist old bitch" (27) by her opponent Mrs Mulverhill, she responds with a well-known conservative defence, declaring that "[s]he not infrequently had black and Jewish people here in her town house" (24). The following paragraph, presented as free indirect discourse, instantly unmasks d'Ortolan as almost cartoonishly flat evil villain, when she muses that

> naturally she was always careful to keep an accurate note of where they sat and what they touched and might have used, subsequently having everything so contacted thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. One could not be too careful.
> But of course she was not a racist. To the contrary, as she could point out, in appropriate company […] had she not tasted of what she thought of as the Dark Pleasures, with blacks, on more than one occasion? The epitome of such enjoyment was, for her, to be taken anally by such a Nubian brute. Privately, she thought of this act as 'going to Sèvres-Babylone', as this was the deepest, darkest and most excitingly, enticingly dangerous Métro station that she knew of. (24)

This blatant racism, shadowed by snobbish classism, is expressed through the dehumanising sexualisation of "blacks" and is used to support Mulverhill's description of d'Ortolan as a "racist old bitch" from within the narrative. D'Ortolan then goes on rambling about a "lesbian Negress" (24) – referring to a female commander of the Concern who is on her death list, as turns out later in the novel; hereby she displays a deeply rooted misogyny and a sexist bias in her general attitude towards women.

However, with a cartoon villain steadily in place, the rest of the novel is more focussed on sexual intercourse as is necessary for a multiverse espionage thriller. The transitionaries travel to different universes, taking only their consciousness with them and inhabiting the body of someone already living in this world, leaving their own body behind. Most of the transitionaries like to test the sexual functions of the bodies they thus inhibit, before, or after, a mission to assassinate someone. Despite the initial paragraphs focussing on d'Ortolan, the main character of the novel is a man named Temudjin Oh. He is an especially gifted transitionary and one of the most successful assassins for the Concern; he is also a former pupil and the current lover of Mrs Mulverhill. In Javoršek's words, he is "caught in-between the rebellious Mrs Mulverhill and the chief operative of the Concern, Madame d'Ortolan" (103). Both women exercise power over him through having sex with him in a multitude of universes. They function as polar opposites: d'Ortolan is the ancient evil head of the Concern, whereas Mulverhill, the reformist, leaves her position as teacher at the University of Practical Talents and employee of the Concern to go underground and fight d'Ortolan's agenda, aiming to dispose of the Concern altogether. Despite fighting against each other, both women display similarities, not only in the (sexual) ways they try to gain Temudjin Oh for their respective sides but also in concerning their claim of authority.

The explicitly depicted sex scenes between Oh and Mulverhill frequently carry the atmosphere of philosophical lessons or tutorials; for example, while engaged in foreplay, Mulverhill questions Oh about who really profits from the work they do as transitionaries, leading him to question not only the morality of his job but also d'Ortolan's intentions as their boss and head of the Concern

(144-151). However, the focus of the narrative is back on outward appearance and masculine heterosexual desire as soon as Oh remembers the time when they first met on campus:

> She wore a long jacket and a high-cut top, ruched but tight across her breasts. […] There was something about the way she pronounced [my name] that immediately brought a blush to my cheeks. […] I was no innocent, had known many women despite my relative lack of years and felt perfectly comfortable in the presence of my supposed superiors, but none of this appeared to matter. It was frustrating to feel reduced again, and so easily, to such callowness. […] I wanted her immediately. Of course I did. (149-159)

Despite the first thing he notices about her being her breasts, her superior position as his teacher and as a highly skilled academic as well as her capability of unsettling him with her voice seem to be the factors that make her most attractive to him. They start an affair during Oh's time at university, which continues during the following years at irregular intervals, even after Mrs Mulverhill leaves the university and research behind, goes rogue, and establishes her own underground network of transitionaries. During their meetings, right after or in between them having sex, Mulverhill informs Oh about what she discovered about Mme d'Ortolan since their last encounter:

> Briefly, Madame Theodora d'Ortolan is a threat to more than just the good name and reputation of the Concern. She, with her several accomplices on the Central Council of the Transitionary Office, will lead us all to disaster and ruin. […] In addition, there may well be a secret agenda known only to the Central Council, and perhaps not even to all on it, which we – or at least, you and your colleagues, given that I am not one of you any longer – are unwittingly helping to carry out. This secret agenda has to stay secret because it is something that people would reject utterly, perhaps violently, if they knew about it. (181)

Without giving concrete proof or, at first, without going into more detail concerning these accusations, Mulverhill tries to win Oh over for her side by painting a picture of the threat d'Ortolan and her secret agenda pose to the Concern, the transitionaries, and the world in general. She goes on to recall her memories of working with d'Ortolan on a secret programme where they experimented with people with rare powers. According to Mulverhill, they tortured those 'subjects' to develop weapons:

> They were broken, mostly useless people; a threat to themselves as well as society. We were doing them a favour, almost ennobling them, by containing their awkward, undisciplined powers and giving them a purpose, making them a part of a programme which would benefit everybody. […] [W]e weren't enjoying it; in fact we suffered maybe as much as they did because we knew more fully what we were doing. They were something like brutes while we were properly functioning human beings: educated, cultured, sensitive. Only the best could be asked to do the worst, as Madame d'Ortolan liked to say. (186-187)

Although in the moment of recollection she distances herself from her time at the research facility, her choice of words significantly resembles that of d'Ortolan. She describes the test subjects as "broken" and "useless", theorising that the people conducting the tests "suffered maybe as much as they did" (s.a.) because of a guilty conscience and because they were so much smarter and more sensitive as opposed to their subjects, whom she calls "brutes" – a word that d'Ortolan used in her racist recollection of her sexual encounters with black men. It stands to reason that during her time in the research facility, which she voluntarily prolonged, her moral compass was similarly defunct. However, Mulverhill states that, at some point, she could not stand to witness or partake in the experiments anymore, and when she "went to Theodora with some misgivings" (187), the latter confided in her. D'Ortolan believes that their worlds were under threat from the outside, a threat she cannot specify, a threat which demanded that they continue testing and torturing their rare subjects in order to develop weapons and methods of perseverance, to be ready to fight back when that outside threat invades their worlds. At that point, Mulverhill decides that d'Ortolan is "mad" (188) and that she has to go underground and fight her. She manages to vanish from under d'Ortolan's nose: "I knew people. I'd made friends with some of the trackers and the septus chemists, taken a few as lovers. Some of them had misgivings too. Some just needed somebody to talk to. Some only wanted sex. When I left […], it was without a trace" (188-189). Thus, Mulverhill indirectly admits that she used sex to further her own agenda, as she is doing with Oh: "I am a bandit queen with a following these days. I have my own small band of outlaws. Care to join?" (189). Even if done so ironically, comparing herself to a queen again invokes a parallel to d'Ortolan. And the parallels do not end there. Right before that conversation, Mulverhill and Oh have sex in a casino; here, she suddenly transitions with him right after the act: "We had fucked once and she was still holding me in her arms and inside her when she took me. Suddenly, I was sitting at the corner of another gaming table in a different casino" (178). This move is not only copied but outdone by d'Ortolan, who, freshly moved into a young and very attractive female body, seduces Oh to secure his loyalties:

> He had wondered if this would prove awkward or difficult, but it did not. He remembered Mrs Mulverhill asking him if he'd fucked Madame d'Ortolan yet (or had she even expressed it as her fucking him? – he couldn't recall) and deciding at the time that his pride would not let that happen. Even that he ought to feel some sort of loyalty, some fidelity to Mrs Mulverhill, both sexual and – what? Ideological? – despite feeling even at the time that this was preposterous, almost perverse. At the very, very least, he'd thought over the last few minutes, he would be cold, or difficult to persuade or rouse, or perfunctory and hinting at contemptuous.

> But, faced with such flattering attention from on high, confronted with such a powerful regard from somebody who had taken such trouble to make themselves so formidably if ostentatiously attractive, there was no part of him that was not responding enthusiastically. (261-262)

Again, Oh is seduced by the power of his mate, by her being his superior, as well as by her beauty, this time despite his best intentions. During both sexual encounters, his position is feminised, if read against the basis of the heteronormative gender binary: In the first scene, quoted above, Mulverhill's performance can be read as stereotypically masculine since she is *holding* him "in her arms and inside her" (178) and, without asking first, just 'takes' him – which in this case signifies transitioning, which, however, carries overtones of sexual domination.

When being subjected to d'Ortolan's sexual interest, Oh's inner monologue as quoted above indicates that he first worries about who is "fucking" (261) whom – indicating an active and a passive part with a different power potential – but is then 'flattered' by the "powerful regard" (262) from a person of such high social position, thus partially inverting the stereotypical image of powerful men seducing young, attractive women. In this case, Madame d'Ortolan is the powerful partner; however, she also went through considerable trouble to look young and attractive – this stereotype proves resistant to inversion in this narrative. When d'Ortoland and Oh "both achieve[…] orgasm at once" (262), she transitions with him through a multitude of other coupled bodies, thus prolonging the sexual ecstasy – and exceeding the number of transitions Mulverhill took him through when they were having sex. As soon as it is over, she seems to be confident to have broken Mrs Mulverhill's spell over him:

> I'm sure she has her own naïve charms, but further experience offers us greater richness, don't you think? It offers us some extra perspective. We compare, contrast, measure and judge. Initial impressions, however enchanting they may have seemed at the time, are evaluated again in the light of something more accomplished. What might have seemed matchless becomes… revalued, hmm? (264-265)

Temudjin Oh finds himself caught between the conflicting urges of flattering and admiring her on the one hand and wanting to dismiss her and get away on the other hand. Overwhelmed, he unveils his loyalties to Mrs Mulverhill through his reaction to her question: "Indeed. There was no comparison" (265). With this answer, he wants to get out of the situation, giving her gratification without betraying his loyalties to Mrs Mulverhill, but Mme d'Ortolan sees through the ruse. Now she knows that Mulverhill has turned Oh against her and tries to get rid of him secretly, which drives him underground as well.

Sex seems to be the most important weapon for both women, and winning over the loyalties of the talented Temudjin Oh seems to be their most important task. In d'Ortolan's case, having sex with Oh most certainly serves the purpose

of gaining control over him, manipulating him and, by proxy, establishing her dominance over Mulverhill. In some way, the fight between the women is a fight over the 'possession' of Temudjin Oh, of his body, his loyalty, and his skills as an assassin. Ironically, as one of the Concern's most successful assassins, Oh is the epitome of a human weapon, whereas the greatest threat to his life is being caught between the two women as a 'sex toy'. In this context, sex is weaponised by both Mme d'Ortolan and Mrs Mulverhill, and their explicitly realised sexuality trumps the threat Oh poses as assassin. Thus, although the protagonist's occupation is connected to stereotypical masculinity, the factor within this novel dominantly serving to invoke patriarchal fears is the threat female sexuality can pose to a man's existence.

Use of Weapons and *The State of the Art* – Diziet Sma

Diziet Sma is an agent of the Culture, more specifically, a Special Circumstances head operative. In *Use of Weapons* (1990), she handles the agent known as Cheradenine Zakalwe[62]. When first introduced to the narrative, she is on a diplomatic mission where the display of status as well as her attractiveness are of importance:

> She made her way through the turbine hall, surrounded by an ever-changing ring of friends, admirers and animals – nebula to her attractive focus – talking to her guests, giving instructions to her staff, making suggestions and offering compliments to the many and various entertainers. (UoW 17)

The emphasis on her being in control is eminent; her influential position as well as her importance as Culture agent and particularly within Special Circumstances is referred to repeatedly throughout the novel. However, the male gaze is apparent in the initial description of her outward appearance: "Her hair was blue-black, like her eyes; her skin was fawn and she looked slimmer than she did on newscasts" (19). The man describing her is one of her sexual exploits, who take up most of her time besides political interventions and crisis management:

> She bowed her head a little, very slowly, letting her shoulder-length hair swing, keeping her eyes on him. […] How long should she spin this out? He was what she wanted, but it would mean so much more after a charged friendship; that long, exquisite exchange of gradually more intimate confidences, the slow accumulation of shared experiences, the languorous spiralling dance of attraction, coming and going and coming and going, winding closer and closer, until that laziness was sublimed in the engulfing heat of consummation. (20-21)

62 The issue regarding Zakalwe's identity has been discussed at length in chapter 7.1. For the sake of coherence with the narrative, the name Zakalwe is kept until referring to the point in the narrative where his 'true' identity (Elethiomel) is revealed by Liuveta.

In this private situation, as in her role for the Culture, she is in control, planning how the encounter between the man and her should be playing out once he "ha[s] been captivated" (21) by her. Her register borders on that of a sexual predator, yet, Sma seems to be nothing of the sort: She is dominant but not violent, she makes sure that her partner explicitly consents and knows about every detail of their agreement: "'Perhaps, now, I'm flattering myself,' she said. 'But, not to put too fine a point on it…' she looked up at him. 'Would you like to fuck?' […] 'Yes,' he said. 'Yes, I wanted to … instantly.' 'There is only tonight,' she said, holding up one hand. 'Just one night […]'" (27). Her feigned insecurity and body language suggest submission and conceal her position superior to that of her sexual partner. With the skillset of a master manipulator, she invites him to see himself as her equal or even to believe himself to be the one in power, despite controlling the situation herself. Thus, she plays on gender stereotypes by displaying coyness to cater to traditional expectations of gender performance.

However, what is indisputably her priority is having full control over all her sexual encounters, and preferably having many of them. When she is forced to abandon her plan of the seduction quoted above for a Special Circumstances mission, a fully mind-controlled stand-in of her is produced to make it possible for her to be in two places at once: "'I don't want the stand-in screwing anybody.' 'Okay,' the drone said as they went towards the partying people. 'It is, after all, in a sense, your body.' 'That's just it, drone,' Sma said, nodding to a waiter, who scurried forward, drinks tray proffered. 'It *isn't* my body'" (27, emphasis original). Her sexual activity is frequently commented on by others. After her participation in an orgy aboard a Culture ship, the drone Skaffen-Amtiskaw remarks that her "appetite and stamina are a credit to [her] species" (86); and in the Culture novella *The State of the Art* (1991), a frequently rejected colleague of hers presumes that her work within Contact has had effects on her sexual preferences: "Basically, what you want, Diziet, is to be fucked by an entire civilization, an entire planet" (TSotA 143). Thus, although there is little evidence to suggest that Sma uses sex for any other purpose than "enjoying herself" (UoW 87), her sexual activities as well as her sexual preferences seem to be noteworthy to the individuals surrounding her, which indicates the reproduction of a sexist stereotype: female promiscuity. It carries a negative connotation and is predominantly used to describe feminine behaviour that deviates from the 'norm'. Since Diziet holds powerful positions within Contact and Special Circumstances, her sexuality is potentially a threat to those surrounding her and at the same time perceived as an oddity or flaw in character, since she is a woman, *despite* being realised in a heteronormative fashion.

A Song of Stone – the lieutenant

"Iain Banks long ago staked out the no man's land between realism, science fiction, and fantasy as his own personal terrain, and in *A Song of Stone* he proves that he remains the unquestioned lord and master of his domain" (Livingstone n.p.). While *A Song of Stone* (1997) is generically located somewhere in this no man's land, the only conclusion to draw is that it is not a Culture novel.

Set in an unspecified place, amidst an ending civil war, the aristocrats Abel and Morgan decide to join the flow of refugees seeking safety. They do not get far before being stopped by the lieutenant and her group of irregulars, who decide to use Abel's ancient family home as a hideout and escort the couple back to where they came from. Abel is the unreliable first-person narrator of this post-morality novella of doom, and the reader follows his verbose recollections of his spoiled youth, the splendid balls with upper-class guests and his all-consuming reminiscences of sexual encounters with Morgan, who is, presumably, his sister. Like many of Banks' protagonists, he is rather unlikeable; while Morgan remains elusive and curiously silent, Abel enters into verbal duels with the lieutenant. The latter is positioned as his antagonist, appearing to him first as a figure rising from beyond a burning wreck, "a rock to foul the flow" (ASoS 7), "her plain face […] dark, nearly swarthy, her eyes grey under black brows" (8), appearing somehow fascinating to Abel despite her lack of beauty. Eventually he finds himself attracted by the "roughness" of her voice, which seems "perversely pleasant, even as [his] skin crawls at a buried menace from her words, a promissory threat" (ibid.). Indeed, the lieutenant is a threat to Abel, as she takes over his castle, including provisions and servants, gets close to Morgan, and finally seduces her. One night, Abel enters Morgan's bedchamber and finds the two naked women sleeping in Morgan's bed. In that moment, the lieutenant and Morgan are subjects to the male gaze. Instead of feeling betrayed, Abel instantly sexualises the scene before him and "aches to join" but knows he cannot since "the lieutenant's shown no sign her tastes run to such inclusion, or that she might acquiesce to what [he]'d wish" (217-219). His depiction of the two naked women in bed fits seamlessly into his tendency to notice and make assumptions about women's bodies, which first becomes evident in his visual assessment of the lieutenant after she has settled into his castle: "[…] her gaudy jacket falls open and, within her army shirt, the lieutenant's breasts press briefly out, I suspect they might be, like her, quite firm" (43). Along with his assumptions concerning the lieutenant's body comes his frustration about her presumed homosexuality: when his manservant informs him that it is nearly impossible to get any information out of the lieutenant, he remarks that this is "probably no more than *man* can get *into* her" (81, emphasis added).

The lieutenant, whose name is never revealed despite Abel's ongoing enquiries, ignores Abel's omnipresent sexual desires and diminishes his patriarchal authority: first, she intercepts him on the refugee trail, then she supersedes him as head of his house, finally replacing him in Morgan's bed. Although he is jealous (81), Abel seems to accept that Morgan chooses the lieutenant as her lover and to only have difficulties with the fact that he is left out. However, the situation quickly takes a turn to the worse: after a failed excursion including a military clash, the lieutenant is left unconscious and most of her soldiers dead. Exercising his revenge for her taking over his possessions and for her attempts on his life, Abel places her head between two mill stones and flees (261). She is beheaded, and the narrative spirals down fast into a feast of gore and violent excesses that culminates in the lieutenant's remaining soldiers parading, raping, and drowning Morgan in front of Abel, who is unable to save her (261-265). The lieutenant is thus punished for her transgressions, but Abel's world still deteriorates at the hands of her soldiers. In his final moments, he reminisces on her demise, inverting the motif of seduction and playing on her gullibility, hinting at her final unfitness in a world of ancient incestuous power and violence:

> Dear lieutenant, I think we all seduced you, deflected you from a course that might have let you live. Seeking something in the quick of us, searching to secure a kind of love with the provenance of age and land and family, you took over our premises; you presumed to the legacy that was ours, and if you did not see that such assumptions have their own ramifying repercussions, and that the stones demand their own continuity of blood, if you did not understand the gravity of their isolation, the solitude of their trapped state or the hardness of their old responsibility, still you cannot fault the castle or either one of us, or complain that you were led to your own conclusion. (273-274)

Abel's account suggests evidence of female domination or at least manipulation; from his perspective, the lieutenant seems to use sex as means of subordination. However, the lieutenant's fate can easily be read as punishment for her transgressions on patriarchal terrain. She and Morgan are both punished for indulging in their homosexual desires, while being portrayed as objects of Abel's heterosexual desire. They choose each other instead of the available men. Thus, their violent deaths can be framed as revenge for not submitting to patriarchal heteronormative expectations.

Sex as Means of Manipulation

Diziet Sma's important role for Contact and her seemingly unusual sexual appetite can be read as similarly threatening. However, as her society, the Culture, does not understand itself as patriarchal, she is not judged guilty of the transgression of gender norms – but still, her sexual activities are featured rather prominently and commented on frequently in both narratives. In emphasising

the particularity of her behaviour, thus implying her deviance from gender stereotypes, the narratives in turn revoke them.

Therefore, not only *Transition* provides readers with an example of sex used as tool for manipulation by two women to secure the loyalty of a man. In *Surface Detail*, as described before, Lededje Y'breq considers the same to enforce the ship's loyalty and protection, and it could also be argued that the same deliberation is, at least partially, behind her affair with Vepper's bodyguard Jasken. However, we do not encounter female domination on a systemic or societal level in any of these novels; all attempts of manipulation or domination through sex seem to operate on a level that makes use of a common stereotypical assumption: that women use sex as a weapon against men; that withholding or offering sex is in fact a woman's only potential to exercise power over men. The same holds true for physical beauty, which, from a patriarchal viewpoint, indicates sexual availability. Although these ideas are fuelled by patriarchal stereotypes of masculine ownership over women's bodies, even in a post-scarcity society like the Culture a woman laying claim to her own sexuality still seems somehow vaguely threatening to her surroundings. The form of violence that is exercised, either through or with the help of sexual actions, by the other female characters analysed above (namely d'Ortolan, Mulverhill and the lieutenant) is, if anything, psychological. As set out in chapter 3.2, psychological and verbal forms of violence are still majorly feminised (Dornberg 12) since, contrary to corporeal violence, these forms of violence do not pose a noteworthy threat to the patriarchal gender order (Seal 7). The goals for the usage of psychological violence by manipulation can be circumscribed as the undermining of loyalty with rivals and the securing of allegiances to expand personal power. These strategies are, in turn, traditionally masculinised in patriarchal societies since they are necessary and proved in the maintenance of hegemonial masculinity. Whenever female characters succeed in the implementation of these strategies *without* challenging the patriarchal order, they oftentimes succumb to the 'strong woman archetype'[63].

Whereas feminised psychological violence remains mostly inconsequential to the patriarchal order, inner-familial sexualised violence and even inner-familial consensual romantic and sexual relationships occupy ambiguous terrain: while they can be portrayed as directly related or even as a consequence of the patriarchal order, they can also threaten said order when publicly exposed.

63 "The Strong Female Character trope often shows us the 'underlying deficit of respect the character starts with, which she's then required to overcome […] – just to bring herself up to the man's level" (Cristea n.p.). The 'strong woman archetype' will be discussed in detail in chapter 8.2.

7.3 Incestuous Relations

> Whether defined in anthropological, biosocial, or psychoanalytic terms the incest taboo is viewed generally as an essential prohibition without which society would not function. The prohibition of incest was defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the 'fundamental step' in forming society, the transgression of which causes atavistic endogamy. (DiPlacidi 4)

Incest not only potentially destabilises society, it also endangers 'healthy' reproduction, which is traditionally, particularly in religious contexts, regarded as the only legitimation of an active sexuality. Jenny DiPlacidi's comprehensive research on gothic incest in 18th- and 19th-century literature states that "[i]ncest, a sexual act associated with transgression, violations of power and violence, has readily been conflated with sexual violence in Gothic scholarship and consigned to one of two gendered plots" (4). She claims that most gothic scholars distinguish between incest represented in so called 'male' and 'female' gothic, reducing the first to the "father's incestuous rape of his daughter as the perverse desire of the older generation to usurp the sexual rights of the younger generation" (ibid.) and the 'female gothic' to the repression of female sexual desires. DiPlacidi criticises this stereotypical distinction because it "relegate[s] individual depictions of incest into categories of overt masculine perversion or feminine sexual repression and entrench understandings of the Gothic novel as written by women as departures from or reactions to male-authored texts", thereby ignoring the motif's subversive and transgressive potential (DiPlacidi 4). Particularly regarding the Culture series, the evolution of the incest motif within contemporary popular culture and science fiction is important for my analysis:

> [I]ncest is a staple within popular culture, which invokes the taboo in order to transgress it, attracting readers or viewers who want to imagine what 'anarchy can do to the measured fears they have been carefully instructed to cherish'. It is not a coincidence that in the nineteenth century, when modern ideas about incest were confirmed through the rise of print culture, it was popular gothic that mediated them. It is therefore interesting that although across a broad range of fantasy novels incest is a recurring theme […] incest features very rarely when it comes to mass-market science fiction works […]. Perhaps this is because the cognitive estrangements demanded by this type of science fiction are in themselves sufficient to provide the sense of 'anarchy' that readers require. (Brown 198-199)

The connection of incest and anarchy is particularly interesting in connection to Banks' works. Banks describes the Culture as anarcho-socialist utopia (cf. "A Few Notes on The Culture"), and in *The Player of Games* it is made clear that the Culture tolerates incest as "just something else people [do]" (TPoG 225); therefore, within the Culture – if based on mutual consent – incest is not per se punishable.

The first and, to this date, only approach to sibling incest in a select body of Banks' works has been made by Robert Duggan with "Our close but prohibited union" (2018). Duggan distinguishes between psychoanalytical and sociological or anthropological approaches to sibling incest. He summarises Otto Rank's (1912) claim that sexual intercourse with close relatives is a deep and unconscious desire in almost every human. He then juxtaposes this thesis with Edvard Westermarck's (1891) theory that people who grew up in close proximity naturally do *not* develop any sexual interest in each other, also known as the Westermarck effect (Duggan 187). Rank, a Freudian disciple, sees infantile sexual desire as the reason why establishing an incest taboo was necessary in the first place, while Westermarck argues that infants who are brought up in close domestic proximity to each other become 'immune' to their respective sexual attraction. Duggan then goes on to introduce economic reasons for the incest taboo as an essential component of human society, because exogamy enforces "the patriarchal exchange of women as means of developing social networks and affiliations without which the community cannot develop and thrive and the move from nature into culture cannot be achieved" (188). However, in the same line of reasoning Duggan asks what consequences this implies for families who do not need or want further economic and social networking and arrives at the "long association of sibling incest with the aristocracy" (ibid.), where incest could serve as a mere means to conserve the family's existing wealth. One of Banks' novels thematically closest at hand is, for me as for Duggan, *A Song of Stone*. Duggan reads Abel and Morgan's relationship as "a sign of their feudal aristocratic status, rather than any putative backwoods immorality" (189). It is, however, important not to equate sexualised violence per se with incest. If based on mutual consent, incest may be a violation of societal taboos but can remain entirely independent from any form of violence, be it physical or psychological. Duggan points out a curious double standard concerning incestuous relationships in the Romantic era, with relationships between siblings being considered "the highest form of love and devotion […], being based on sentiment and mutual respect, and lying outside patriarchal and capitalist systems of exchange" and paternal incest being framed as "evil and tyrannical" (190).

Picking up the respective argument from chapter 7.2, Abel and Morgan's relationship in *A Song of Stone* seems to be based on mutual desire and voluntary agreement. According to Abel, the unreliable first-person narrator, Morgan had initiated the first sexual encounter when they were kids, before they started developing a habit of experimental sexual encounters a decade later (ASoS 190). However, when recalling the night of their first *ménage à trois*, Abel remembers "having so encouraged [her] by hints, cajolings and implied example" (125). This suggests that Abel has a manipulating influence on Morgan, and his proud

remark that as soon as he joined in Morgan was "by a word of [his] stilled, like any obedient mare" (126) further demonstrates his dominance over her, his patriarchal concept of ownership as well as, by him comparing her to an animal, a rather sexist and degrading view of women as property. Excited and aroused by his recollections, Abel decides to have sex with Morgan right in the moment the lieutenant wants him to leave with her on a scouting mission:

> I appear to have persuaded myself. All is silent for a moment. I reach for your ankle, *grabbing it* beneath the covers while you look up, startled, and a door is *brusquely knocked*. The sound comes from my own room. We both look.
> 'Yes?' I say, loud enough.
> 'We're going now,' shouts a soldierly voice. 'The lieutenant says you've got to come.'
> 'One minute!' I yell. I *whip* the bedsheets from you.
> *You look sullen*, raising your hips to tug your nightdress up.
> 'Are we attempting a record?'
> 'Some things will not wait,' I say, minimally unbuttoning as I *hoist myself* towards you.
> 'Well, *don't hurt* …' you say *petulantly*.
> More than pain, such *unexpected forcing* still takes time, however *determinedly* done. I bury my face between your legs, submerging in your scent, at once earthy and sea-salt tangled. I lose a lubricating mouthful of spit, then *rear and take my plunge*.
> Another *shout*. (126-127, emphasis added)

The register and tone of this scene not only imply haste and determination but also roughness and force on Abel's part, whereas Morgan silently submits to her brother's assault. The last sentence seems intentionally dubious, leaving it up to speculation whether a soldier sent by the lieutenant shouted for Abel or whether Morgan is the one shouting – in pleasure, or in pain. What seems to matter most in this scene is Abel's sexual desire, to which everything and everyone must submit. This means this scene can be read as a depiction of sexual violation and masculine domination, which excludes any romantic and subversive potential that sibling incest might have carried in the context of gothic literature. Further, in this scene, Abel is the narrative voice, the 'I', while Morgan is referred to with 'you' – which at the same time potentially addresses the reader. Morgan, the almost voiceless, disappears behind the pronoun and leaves behind an unwilling but passive body, which readers are invited to identify with.

In *Use of Weapons*, as shown in chapter 7.1, the matter of incest is simultaneously clearer and more dubious. Elethiomel and Darckense are presumed cousins; they grew up on a large country estate, together with Darckense's siblings Cheradenine and Livueta. Defying the Westermarck effect, they have an affair as young adults, wherein Cheradenine surprises them mid-act in the summer house (UoW 201). Even though Darckense seems to participate willingly, the scene carries undertones of sexual conquest and violation, and her 'shame' is featured prominently. Later, when Elethiomel holds his foster sister captive, Cheradenine paints Darckense's attraction to Elethiomel as

> something brief and juvenile, something she'd used in her adolescence to get back at the family for some imagined slight, some favouring of Livueta over her. It might have seemed like love at the time, but he suspected even she knew it was not, now. He believed that Darckense was an unwilling hostage […]. (368)

In this patronising tone, he credits her with unthinking infantile defiance that caused her to do something that deepened the rift in the relationship between the foster brothers. The rest of Darckense's story remains in the dark; her intentions unclear, she only resurfaces again as the little white chair. Similar to Morgan, she has no voice throughout most of the narrative, is taken away from the protagonist, and used as a token of power and dominance by the antagonist. Unlike Morgan, though, Darckense is suspected to have been taken against her will and is finally killed by her former lover, who, from the beginning, had weaponised her affection against her brother. In both cases, the incestuous relationship plays a dominant role in the ultimate destruction of the family.

Robert Duggan refers to American writer and professor of literature James Twitchell, who sees a significant difference in the American usage of the incest motif from the previously described ideal of the Romantic era:

> [T]he centrifugal forces placed in a usually motherless family as the male sexual violation of daughter/sister is no longer threatened, but often realised, caused a catastrophe so complete that finally nothing of the family remains. Let the English mythologize incest as did Byron, or metaphysicalize it as did Shelley, the Nineteenth-Century American experience is uniformly horrible, irrepressibly gothic, maybe even characteristically pragmatic. (Twitchell quoted in Duggan 192)

Duggan mentions that Twitchell undersells the extent to which English Romantic plots featuring incest "also tend to end horribly for the characters involved" (192); however, within the framework of Banks' works, Twitchell's assessment of the realisation of the incest motif in American literature as horrible, gothic, and pragmatic seems to be thoroughly applicable, despite the difference in time and country of origin.

In *A Song of Stone*, in *Use of Weapons*, and even in *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, which is Duggan's primary focus of analysis, the incest motif overall serves to mark characters as defective – particularly the male characters involved. In *Use of Weapons*, the relationship between Darckense and Elethiomel openly serves to emphasise Elethiomel's spiteful and inhumane traits as well as his highly manipulative personality and his perilousness. In turn, Darckense is infantilised and ultimately victimised to the extent that she becomes a mere tool in the war between the foster brothers. In *A Song of Stone*, the incest motif supports the reader's perception of Abel as arrogant and conceited, thus pointing to classism and patriarchal sexism. With Morgan, we encounter yet another silent woman, who is first fetishised by her brother, then by the lieutenant, and lastly raped and tortured to death by the lieutenant's men.

The Steep Approach to Garbadale is not nearly as gory, but the incest motif continues twofold within the rich and industrious Wopould family. Protagonist Alban struggles to come to terms with his romantic feelings for his cousin Sophie while still being affected by the mysterious death of his mother when he was just a baby. At the end of the novel, he discovers that his mother was seduced by her brother, Alban's uncle (and father) Blake, resulting in her committing suicide after Alban was born. When the secret is lifted, Blake too commits suicide and leaves Alban a fortune. On the one hand, Alban's incestuous desire serves to underline his depiction as a drop-out of sorts, a "disaffected, youthful character […]" (Duggan 182) at odds with his family on various levels. On the other hand, it marks him as defective, a notion that is supported by his grandmother, the family matriarch, who is adamant in trying to put a stop to the adolescent romantic entanglement of Alban and Sophie and keeps them separate for the following years. This decision seems to mirror the fate of Alban's father, the notorious and egocentric uncle Blake, who had been exiled to Hong-Kong. Again, the incest motif is used to aide in the characterisation of a rather unlikeable male character, whereas the woman involved (Alban's mother Irene) remains unheard, having chosen suicide to escape the unbearable shame (which never seems to befall the men). Moreover, the masculine defect, the tendency towards incest, is hereditary in *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*; thus, the family history serves as a warning to Alban to give up his romantic focus on Sophie and restore the normative social order.

In comparison, the incestuous relationship in *Walking on Glass* also has destructive effects on the protagonists. Graham Park is in love with Sara, a beautiful and mysterious woman introduced to him by his friend Slater. He pursues her but is told that he has a rival, Stock, a stereotypical bad boy on a motorcycle, whom Graham only knows as an indistinct figure clad in black leather. After several months, Sara calls Graham to her, revealing that she has been using him and his affections as cover and that she is not interested in him. In a letter to Graham that he does not intend to send, Slater confesses that there is no Stock, that he and Sara are siblings who have been having sex for several years, and that they agreed to use Graham as a cover. During Slater's revelation, it becomes clear that he hurts and bruises Sara during sex, which is not, unlike the intercourse itself, based on mutual consent: "She had whimpered at the time; cried out, but – perhaps because she was relieved she had received no physical retaliation from Graham – she did not seem to be in a mood to complain today. Still, Slater felt guilty anyway. […] With her, he couldn't help it." (WoG 292) Although the incestuous desire is mutual, as in *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, the execution is violent and has a destructive impact on the narrative.

After being painfully disillusioned by Sara's confession, Graham stands at the canal under her house, stunned. He intends to sit somewhere on the grass to settle his thoughts, but by searching for a spot he finds a porn magazine and parts of a dismembered animal: "Here it was; this was what it all really meant; here was your civilisation, your billion years of evolution, right here; a soiled and tattered wanking-mag and chopped domestic animal. Sex and violence, writ small like all our standard fantasies" (WoG 339). By connecting sex and violence as 'standard' human fantasies, he pinpoints the manner of their intersection in many of Banks' novels as the unmitigated human drives responsible for most of the interpersonal drama. Cynically reminiscing humanity in all its faults and perversity, Graham throws all of it in the canal.

As is the case with *A Song of Stone* and *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, the incest motif carries destructive and violent undertones, even if the sibling or cousin incest can be read as more or less based on mutual consent, as argued before; however, in all three cases, female consent is undermined by the violence inherent in, or following, the sexual encounters.

Whit is one of the few novels in Banks' oeuvre featuring a female protagonist. 19-year-old Isis Whit is the 'Elect of God' in the small religious sect of Luskentyrians, founded by her grandfather decades ago. As a 'leapyearean', born on the 29th of February, a holy date within the sect, Isis is the designated successor of her grandfather Salvador. Her older brother Allan, however, is not particularly happy since he sees himself as the rightful heir to his grandfather's position. Both Allan and Salvador are destructive forces in Isis' life. Salvador, the old patriarch, married two sisters and founded the Luskentyrians. Since then, he has always had women around him who catered to his every desire. Confused by rumours about Isis spread by Allan and apparently directed by the voice of God, he verbally abuses, harasses, and physically assaults Isis and finally tries to rape her. Framing the sexual assault in a scenario where she has to prove her faith in God, Salvador gives Isis a considerable amount of whisky and commands her to undress. Unsuspectingly, Isis obeys, enduring her grandfather's head between her breasts and cooperating to the point where he euphemistically demands that the two of them "must commune together" (W 276); he then tries to kiss her and forces her legs apart. In a physical as well as psychological attempt to fight off his massive figure, Isis reminds him that what he wants is not only socially and morally wrong but also forbidden by their faith (comp. 276-278). Relentlessly, Salvador continues to force himself onto Isis, arguing that they are chosen by God and thus "the rules are different" for them (277). Desperately, Isis makes clear that this is not only incest but attempted rape:

> 'But I don't *want* to do this!' I wailed.
> '*Want?*' he laughed bitterly. 'What has what either of us *want* got to do with this? We do what God tells us to do! We both have to submit to Their will, Isis! We both have to submit! We both have to trust; trust and believe! You promised to trust; you promised to trust and believe, remember?'
> 'But not this!'
> 'Is your love of God conditional then, Isis?' he asked breathlessly, still trying to work his sweat-slicked hand between my legs. His breathing was very quick and urgent now and his face was bright red. […] He gave a grunt and twisted his hand free of mine; it dived between my tightly clenched legs, trying to finger my sex; I heaved and wriggled out from underneath him, rolling away over the bed; he grabbed at me, catching my ankle as I tried to stand, bringing me down on all fours. 'Submit, Isis, submit! Prove your love for God!' He tried to mount me from behind but I wrestled him off. (277-278, emphasis original)

In the graphic description of this scene, the absolute inappropriateness of Salvador's behaviour is enhanced by the first-person narration. The reader follows Isis' perspective and witnesses the assault through her eyes. Salvador's argumentation follows the circular logic of most fundamentalist belief systems and is used to legitimise his patriarchal claim on his granddaughter's body. The use of words like 'submit', 'finger', 'grab', and 'mount' illustrates the hierarchy of power as well as the violence used by Salvador in this situation; when Isis argues that "If God wanted this They would have spoken to me as well" (278), he responds with a stereotypical display of toxic masculinity in an attempt to demonstrate his superiority: "'They spoke to *me*!' he roared, thumping himself on his chest with one fist. He lunged at me […]" (ibid., emphasis original). He then continues to verbally insult her, calling her "*heathen*! […] Apostate, Infidel, Misbeliever! […] Unsaved *wretch*!" (ibid., emphasis original), indicating that by denying him she has denied their faith. Throughout the scene, Salvador is depicted like an animalistic predator, but he is at the same time ridiculed by the rhetoric of his depiction: Besides his vulgar and ideologically blind ravings, he is physically fat, heavy, sweaty, red-faced, drunken, and clumsy, "his engorged manhood poking up at the underside of his belly like a supporting strut" (ibid.). Isis, on the other hand, is young and agile, not stronger but quicker than him, and, despite her apparent distress, she remains defensive but diplomatic until the end of the scene, trying to convince her grandfather that he is misled instead of attacking him, suggesting that they should both "forget this" (279). This mode of depiction successfully conflates religious ideology with patriarchy; however, the at times almost comical or ironic depiction of Salvador's body undermines the severity of the assault, particularly when opposed to Isis' unwavering attempts to talk her way out of the situation. It is only towards the very end of the scene – while feverishly trying to dress herself and still attempting to convince her grandfather of her righteousness, who in turn does only continue to insult her – that Isis finally breaks into tears:

> 'I am *not* a thief; I am *not* a misbeliever,' I said, and then, despite myself, started to weep. The tears strung my eyes and flowed down my hot, flushed cheeks. I was furious at myself for behaving so girlishly. '*You* are the one in the wrong; not me,' I said angrily, speaking through my sobs. 'I have done *nothing*; nothing wrong. I am falsely accused and all you can do is try to… to have your way with your own granddaughter!' (279, emphasis original)

Furious at herself for behaving "girlishly" instead of being furious about Salvador's behaviour, Isis displays signs of internalised misogyny. However, she manages to stand her ground until she gets out of Salvador's bedroom. Comforted by her friend Sophi, who thinks that "he's just a dirty old man" (286), Isis tries to navigate her conflicting feelings as a believing member of their sect and as a victim of sexualised violence. Sophi's assessment serves to downplay the severity of the assault but at the same time calls into question Salvador's patriarchal and religious hubris, thereby denying his deeds a divine mandate and reducing him from the omniscient founder of a belief system to "a dirty old man", thus demystifying him in Isis' eyes.

Together with Sophi, Isis' grandmothers as well as her cousin Morag, she finally manages to identify Allan as the source of all the rumours about her, who has also been manipulating Morag and Salvador to be instated as his successor instead of Isis. With the help of her grandmother, she learns about Salvador's criminal past and uses this knowledge to blackmail him into reinstating her and enforcing a public apology from her brother. In *Whit*, most of the male characters are weak, conceited, and prone to manipulation or rather simple and driven by their sexual urges, so it is the part of the female characters to support each other, to act responsibly, and hold the families and communities together. This reproduces sexist stereotypes on both ends of the binary, even if, as is common in many of Banks' coming-of-age novels, in the end the male characters are chastened and the female characters are in charge, which often comes at the cost of (sexual) trauma on the heroine's part.

In *Transition*, which consists of numerous narrative strands, the incest motif is not at the centre of the novel. In a chapter written from The Philosopher's perspective, a character who works as a torturer for the Concern, readers encounter his first girlfriend, known only by her fittingly equivocal initials, GF. She has been beaten and sexually abused by her father since she was nine years old. As a result, GF cuts herself, and engages in frequent and rather harsh sexual practices with the Philosopher (T 195-200). Regarding the repeated sexual abuse GF suffered by the hands of her father, The Philosopher clearly differentiates between the incestuous component and the violent nature of the sexual assaults:

> I shall be completely honest and record here that I think people make too big a fuss about incest these days. I'm sure it has always gone on. However I had grown to hate Mr F, GF's father, and this was as much about the physical damage he did to her and

> the physical damage that he caused her to do to herself as about the fact that he had raped her from the age of nine, taken her virginity, made her distrust everybody and had treated her like a sex toy rather than a person or a daughter. It seemed to me that he had done something quite literally unforgivable, even if GF had been inclined to forgive him. (T 200)

His emotions seem justified; however, his position remains problematic. Despite having a good grasp of the father's destructive personality traits and their disastrous effects on GF, it is evident that he understands neither GF's reaction to it nor her tendency to forgive her father, or the power dynamics between father and daughter, and maybe least of all how to behave in the situation. When GF tells him that her father has been abusing her sexually, he provokingly asks him if he still wants to "fuck [her] now […], her expression and tone of voice both defiant and desperate" (199). He reacts by asking her whether she trusts him and, after her having confirmed it, ties her up and has sex with her: "Later I untied her and held her while she cried and I told her that she wasn't to let her father fuck her ever again, but that was the wrong thing to say because she went into one of her rages and tried to slap and punch and bite me, screaming that she couldn't stop him" (ibid.). This is a textbook case of victim blaming (comp. van der Bruggen and Grubb 524), because he attributes at least part of the responsibility for the father's abuse to GF, assuming that she carries the responsibility for her father's sexual advances. Further assuming that GF was "inclined to forgive [her father]" (200), he feels that he must take the matter into his own hands. This well-meaning behaviour is transgressive and belittling as well as latently sexist. Moreover, the repeated depiction of both GF's scarred body and The Philosopher's description of her genitalia as "that raw wound" (199) inscribes violence onto the female body. Those traces of violence seem to be a necessary outcome of their "lovemaking" (ibid.), as well as the bruises on her body (197), which turn those The Philosopher did not cause into evidence of her father's transgressions on GF's body, the body The Philosopher has claimed as his to bruise and 'fuck'. Thus, GF's violated body carries the evidence of patriarchal possession, first by her father, then by her boyfriend. Ironically, this story is part of the background narrative of a man who works as torturer for the Concern later, earning his nickname The Philosopher by not taking any pleasure in his job because he perceives it as morally and socially necessary. He even paints himself as a gentleman who does not like to interrogate females, because he "simply does not wish to subject a female to anything unpleasant" (94). His 'revenge' on GF's father, in which she does not have a say, will be analysed in the next chapter.

7.4 Rape and Revenge

Scholarly approaches to literary rape-and-revenge depictions are rare, since they are primarily perceived as cinematic narratives[64]. Film scholar Julia Reifenberger's comprehensive monography *Girls with Guns* (2013) combines psychoanalytic film theory with sociological, criminalist, and cultural studies approaches to advance the cinematic genre of rape-revenge movies. A substantial part of her observations is applicable to Banks' canon, due to his detailed, "wide-screen baroque" (Sawyer 508), (cinemato)graphic writing style.

In her work, Reifenberger presents several stereotypes which permeate rape-revenge movies. She asserts that in cases where violence takes the form of sexual actions, it is clearly used to showcase hierarchical gender relations. Whereas the female victims only acquire the use of violence after being raped, it seems to be genuinely available to the male perpetrator from the start: Because obtain their power qua gender, men can exert violence against others, their power derives from the systematic exertion of violence. Sexual assaults by male perpetrators are, according to Reifenberger, attempts to delineate the masculine from the feminine, which needs to be kept under control. She states that acts of revenge by female characters, in contrast, carry the impulse to overthrow masculine hegemony and achieve social gender equality. Thus, a typical rape-revenge movie would create a scenario of the proverbial battle of the sexes (Reifenberger 10).

In 2007, Banks was interviewed by *SFX* magazine and asked about his thoughts about the idea of some of his books being turned into movies. At the time of the interview, his novel *Canal Dreams* (1989) was intended to receive a screen adaptation; however, Banks admitted that it was his least favourite of all the books he had written. Adding that "by the usual reckoning, the worst books make the best films" (Banks quoted in Branscombe n.p.), he already referred to the cinematographic potential of the novel[65].

Canal Dreams

Refusing to enter an airplane, famous cellist Hisako Onoda is travelling from Japan to Europe as a passenger on a tanker ship. The ship is trapped midway through the Panama Canal on Gatún Lake, by a political uprising caused by the resistance cell 'People's Liberation Front of Panamá'. Hisako passes her time practicing the cello and going diving with her new lover Philippe, who is an of-

64 The genre gained popularity during the 1970s, e.g., through the famously controversial film *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), directed by Meir Zarchi.

65 Despite recurring interest in many of Banks' novels, most of them, including *Canal Dreams*, have not been turned into movies to date.

ficer on another tanker stuck on Gatún. After some time, the tankers on the lake are boarded and taken over by *venceristas*, leftist rebels who proceed to take everybody hostage. At a forced cello recital for the leader of the rebels, Hisako accidentally discovers that the *venceristas* are led by an American CIA operative. Subsequently, all hostages including Philippe are murdered, Hisako is repeatedly raped and tortured, and her cello is destroyed:

> Blood was in her mouth and bruises puffed round her eyes and cigarette burns burned on her breasts and the seed of a boatful of men ran down her thighs and she kept seeing Philippe crumple under the first bullet that hit, but it was the cello; the needless, pointless (apart from to hurt) destruction of the cello that finally killed her. (CD 198)

The rape itself is a narrative gap; its omission is framed by the portrayal of the situation immediately before, where Hisako is dragged into the ship's television lounge by her feet (183), and her description afterwards (quoted above). The emphasis in the scene is placed on the destruction of her cello, which is portrayed as even more detrimental to Hisako than being gang raped, beaten, or tortured with burning cigarettes. The destruction of the cello carries symbolic overtones of the destruction of the female body and the annihilation of female sexuality[66]. Despite the psychological emphasis on the crushing of her spirits through the destruction of the cello, and despite the avoidance of depicting the rape itself, the descriptive focus of the aftermath still is on Hisako's body: her eyes, her breasts, and her thighs are mentioned in a graphic description of the scars and traces of being tortured and raped, leaving the horror of imagining the rape to the readers' fantasy. Within the narrative, the sexualisation of Hisako's body recurs in connection to her playing the cello: in one of the flashbacks to her life in Japan, she mentions that she has gotten used to the comments about having the cello between her thighs; when she first gets close to Philippe during one of their cello lessons, she describes him as her bow; and when she is forced to play for the boss of the *venceristas*, she draws the cello to her, "feeling it between her thighs and against her breasts and neck" (CP 161). Thus, the destruction of the cello is symbolically connected to her being raped, and at the same time she is recurrently portrayed in a sexualised manner. Despite her being the focaliser of the third-person figural narrative, the manner of her depiction frequently reproduces the male gaze and caters to heteronormative sexual desires.

66 Historically, the cello was viewed as an instrument to be played by male musicians, due to its form, which was seen as reminiscent of a woman's body, and its position, as it is held between the legs of the performer. Until the turn of the 20th century, women were mostly prohibited or discouraged from publicly performing the cello or its predecessor, the viola da gamba, due to the 'improper' (homo)sexual imagery that would arise by a female artist holding a 'feminine-shaped' instrument between her legs (Becker 3-4).

Hisako refuses to confront her trauma, pronouncing herself dead and thus "free" (198, 228), distancing herself from her body to observe that "she was a toy, a mascot; they fucked her and made themselves whole, together" (199) – she hereby acknowledges her rapists' desire to 'heal' through exercising violence as well as their need for validation, as Bourdieu exemplifies:

> [M]anliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of 'real men'. A number of rites of institution, especially in educational or military milieu, include veritable tests of manliness oriented towards the reinforcement of male solidarity. Practices such as gang rapes […] are designed to challenge those under test to prove before others their virility in its violent reality, in other words stripped of all the devirilizing tenderness and gentleness of love, and they dramatically demonstrate the heteronomy of all affirmations of virility, their dependence on the judgement of the male group. (*Masculine Domination* 52)

In this detached and almost *understanding* way of dealing with rape as a form of masculine initiation or validation, Hisako is further 'relieved' by her realisation of universal randomness, thinking that "[t]he world was absurd, […] and the pain and cruelty and stupidity were all just side effects of that basic grotesqueness, not the intended results after all" (CD 201). Very matter-of-factly, she refers to the gang rape, explaining that "[t]he pain didn't really matter so much; it was the feeling of being used" (206) and thus preparing to free herself at the first chance she gets. In retaliation for "mattering so little as another human being, and so much as a warm, slippery container, to be taken and crowded over" (ibid.), she manages to kill and strip one of the soldiers who raped her, takes his weaponry, and goes on a bloody rampage. Being trained in several martial arts, she is also instantaneously able to familiarise herself with the workings of pistols, semi-automatic machine guns, and SAM[67] launchers within moments after they fall into her hands, which seems highly unusual for a cellist. While she is gunning down soldiers, blowing them up with grenades at their card game table, or killing her first rapist with the spike of her blown-up cello, she reminisces that "revenge could taste remarkably bland when you'd stopped feeling" (220). After emptying out several tons of oil into the lake and setting it ablaze to kill the last remaining soldiers trying to escape on a rowing boat, Hisako puts on some diving equipment and jumps into the burning lake, diving beneath the flames while the tankers burn up and explode behind her, maintaining her emotional numbness, which she describes as 'death', apparently content with it.

Referring to Carol J. Clover's academic work on horror movie criticism, *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992), Julia Reifenberger concludes that the spe-

67 SAM: Surface-to-air missile, designed to be launched from the ground to destroy aircraft or other missiles.

cific allure of the excessive violence in rape-revenge movies lies, for the male recipient, in the offer to emotionally participate in the experiences of the female character, satisfying different forms of sensation-seeking (Reifenberger 86). Keeping that in mind, it becomes clear that several stereotypical rape-revenge narratives, instead of focalising the female experience, reproduce the male gaze. Rape scenes as well as their aftermath are predominantly described or depicted from the perpetrator's point of view. Instead of witnessing the assault from the victim's perspective as a transgressive and brutal act of violence, the audience is invited to side with the aggressors and literally perceive the attack through their eyes. Psychoanalytical film theory asserts that movies provide offers of identification to their audience, which *can* be stylised to satisfy sadistic or masochistic desires (Reifenberger 45). Moreover, the female victim turned avenger, who enacts her revenge cold-blooded and unfeelingly, mirrors a way a *man* might imagine *himself* reacting to being raped. Thus, both the literary depiction of rape and the depiction of the ensuing revenge walk a tightrope concerning the ethics of representation.

In most representations of the rape-revenge motif, particularly in those cases where the rape victim does not survive, the revenge part is executed by male agents like fathers, husbands, or boyfriends. Thus, the rape carries the connotation of a robbery, as Reifenberger shows: The victimised female characters are removed from the legitimate (sexual) discretionary power of the male heads of the family or community. This infringement of the social order then serves as their justification for violent revenge (Reifenberger 19).

Surface Detail

In *Surface Detail*, ship avatar Demeisen takes over the revenge part of ex-slave Lededje's rape-revenge narrative, doint so in the most condescending manner. The masculine-appearing ship avatar transports her back to her home planet Sichult, knowing that she plans to exercise revenge on Veppers, who was her legal owner as well as her rapist and capturer for most of her life. Demeisen informs Lededje that he cannot help her on her mission, shortly before teleporting her into a room with Veppers. When she tries to attack the latter, Demeisen immobilises her legs and pins her to her seat like a disobedient child. After that scene, however, Demeisen and the Culture ambassador to Sichult agree to let Lededje go and hunt down Veppers. As already lined out in chapter 7.1, in her ensuing hunt for Veppers Lededje encounters several difficulties. The most prominent of them is perhaps her inability to handle a firearm; she shoots at Veppers several times without hitting him, then loses her gun when Veppers throws a knife at her (SD 608-612). Just as Veppers finds Lededje's weapon and is about to shoot her,

Demeisen reappears and immobilises him. He offers her to "finish him off" while at the same time advising her not to take him up on that offer, because "[c]onscience can be a terrible thing. […] Unless you're something like me, of course, […] I don't give a fuck" (615). Lededje subsequently leaves killing Veppers to Demeisen. When the avatar snaps Veppers' neck, obeying Lededje's wish to do it "quickly" (615), she has to look away, and afterwards feels like she is going to faint. In this scene, as in several scenes before, the power dynamic between Demeisen and Lededje adheres to stereotypically patriarchal gender performances. The latter is the damsel in distress, intending to but not able to kill her tormentor in revenge for him enslaving, raping, and killing her[68]. Demeisen is the human face of an almost almighty, all-powerful, and omniscient Culture Mind, able to control her fate, limit her actions, and physically overpower her. In the very moment when her fate seems sealed, he sweeps in and graciously yet cynically saves the day, and her life. She accepts his 'gift' and, as the reader learns a few pages later, becomes a full Culture citizen – fulfilling her female destiny by having five children and "over thirty great-great-grandchildren, which by Culture standards was almost disgraceful"[69] (623).

Thus, while in *Canal Dreams* Hisako Onoda turns off her emotions and takes on stereotypically masculine traits, as for example versatile military combat skills, in a matter of hours after being gang raped, Lededje Y'breq is stuck in a stereotypically feminine gender performance and must rely on Demeisen to enact revenge on her rapist and killer.

Transition

In *Transition*, the thoughts and desires of the rape victim GF have no place in the narrative at all. The perpetrator is GF's father Mr F, and, as Sabine Sielke points out, "such alliance between rapist and father dramatises the 'law of the father' and his ownership of daughters" (Sielke 154). Since GF now 'belongs to' The Philosopher, he decides that something must be done about her father. Consequently, he breaks into the house and tortures Mr F in the basement while GF is away for a week:

> I hadn't really intended to kill him, not at the start, not until I really got into it, I think, but as I worked on him I think he somehow became less human to me, more just this thing that reacted in a certain way to a certain stimulus […]. I think also that I started to

68 For the specifics concerning Lededje's retention after her physical death, consult chapter 7.1.

69 For Culture citizens, it is common to give birth to one child as a female and father one child as a male. Lededje's over-fulfilment of her 'reproductive duties' positions her as an insider-outsider within the Culture and partially relativises her status as full Culture citizen.

> feel I had done so much damage to him that it would somehow be tidier to kill him off. […] I had the nagging, perhaps illogical, but quite inescapable feeling that he was doing this to himself, that, despite my total control over him, he was still somehow responsible for his own torment. (T 202)

Having started as revenge for the violation of GF's body, the torturing and killing of Mr F quickly turns into a rite-of-passage-like awakening for The Philosopher, who finds his calling: "I had finally found something that I just naturally knew how to do" (203). This scene is much more about The Philosopher than it is about GF: the rape-revenge serves as the moral justification for the torture he inflicts. However, Mr F's murder is not motivated by the previous rape and abuse but by The Philosopher's desire to finish things in a 'tidy' way (204). Not only does he justify his actions by framing it as revenge, but he even prides himself in the planning and execution of the deed, even though he admits it was unprofessional (205) – which is another indicator that he did it for himself, not for GF. As is common in Banks' novels, the depiction of Mr F's torture is rather graphic. The Philosopher's detachment from his victim, his perception of Mr F as "this thing that reacted in a certain way to a certain stimulus" (202) prevents the reader's identification with the victim, although the detachment is framed by graphic description of the torture instruments and the creativity of the torturer, which implies the excessive pain on Mr F's part. This graphic depiction of Mr F's experience of violence carries the potential to evoke compassion with the rapist (Reifenberger 81). And indeed, at the end of the novel The Philosopher is punished by being transported – or *transitioned* – into Mr F's body at the beginning of the torture in the cellar, which will end, as the reader knows, with Mr F's death. In the light of this plot twist, the last sentence quoted above foreshadows poetic justice: "I had the nagging, perhaps illogical, but quite inescapable feeling that he was doing this to himself, that, despite my total control over him, he was still somehow responsible for his own torment" (202).

In contrast to Morgan, Darckense, or Lededje, Mr F's violated body is not sexualised but, similarly to that of Salvador in *Whit*, described as aesthetically off-putting; he is passed out drunk, "gone to fat about the upper chest and belly" (200), and when The Philosopher hits him on the back of the head, he goes down "gurgling, breath spluttering from his mouth as though he was trying to snore" (201). *Transition* is the only novel in which the carrier-out of revenge openly admits, mid-procedure, that the preceding rape lost significance as justification for the violence enacted on the perpetrator's body. The rape-revenge topos initially might have served to defend The Philosopher's actions, but the torture of Mr F quickly turns into The Philosopher's personal rite of passage, thus demasking GF's rape as pretext for his self-projection.

Inversions

As the 'odd one out', *Inversions* (1998) was Banks' "attempt to write a Culture novel that wasn't" (Banks quoted in Gevers n.p.). Direct references to the Culture are completely absent from the sixth instalment of the Culture series. As the title indicates, the novel inverts established traditions of previous Culture novels by its narration from the inside of a civilisation on an uncontacted planet; its patriarchal kingdoms and the remnants of a fallen empire, still at war with one another, can be compared to late-medieval Europe.

The narrator positions the novel's protagonists, two (ex-)Culture individuals living in different parts of his world, as social oddities to their respective surroundings. The first narrative strand follows Vosill, the first female doctor in the patriarchal kingdom of Haspidus; the second narrative strand follows DeWar, personal bodyguard of General UrLeyn, Protector of Tassasen. While Vosill actively advocates for and works towards social progress in Haspidus, which results in threats and attacks on her life, orchestrated by the conservative ruling class, DeWar chooses to fully immerse himself in the patriarchal power structures of the Protectorate of Tassasen, fulfilling his role as bodyguard with utmost loyalty.

Responsible for General UrLeyn's personal security, DeWar is also in close contact with the general's favourite concubine, the lady Perrund. Perrund also appears to be very protective of the general and his son and heir, Lattens. Despite obviously being attracted to her, DeWar is content with being Perrund's friend, playing board games with her when the general visits other members of his harem, accompanying her on walks, or entertaining Lattens together. One day, DeWar starts telling Lattens and Perrund a story: "Once upon a time there was a magical land where every man was a king, every woman a queen, each boy a prince and all girls princesses" (I 103). To the experienced reader of the Culture series, it quickly becomes clear that this magical land, which DeWar calls "Lavishia" (104), is based on the Culture. Invoking the very specific linguistic register of the fairy tale serves to further invert the traditional narrative of the culture series: the Culture itself is a distant fairy tale[70], while the potentially fairy-tale-inviting setting of *Inversions* deals with the harsh realities of strict patriarchal hierarchies and social inequality. DeWar's fairy tale of the Culture is starkly contrasted by Perrund, telling him her personal story towards the end of the narrative, claiming that it is "just that of women, especially young women, caught up in a war" (330). When DeWar indicates that he knows where this opening might lead, she reacts with bitterness:

70 Albeit an equivocal one, as Perrund remarks, ironically commenting on the many relativisations DeWar includes in its description of 'Lavishia' – thereby, on a metatextual level, ironically commenting on the ambiguous nature of the Culture as utopia, or fairy-tale.

> 'You see? A story that scarcely needs to be told. The ingredients imply the finished article, and the method of its making, do they not? It is men who fight wars, wars are fought taking villages, towns and cities, where women tend the hearths, and when the place that they live in is taken, so are they. Their honour becomes one of the spoils, their bodies too invaded. That territory taken. So my story is no different from that of tens of thousands of women, regardless of their nation or their tribe. And yet for me it is everything. For me it is the most important thing that ever happened to me. For me it was the end of my life, and what you see before you is like a ghost, a spirit, a mere shade, unsubstantial.' (330)

While her story clearly refers to events specific to her past and the shared history of the Protectorate of Tassasen, she generalises her experience in a way that resonates outside of the novel's setting. Perrund stresses that within the context of war, rape is a common trope and thus every woman's likely destiny – and, more importantly, she emphasises that this destiny is so common, and hers is "no different from that of tens of thousands of women" (s.a.), that it is often used to completely devalue or gloss over the individual victim's life-altering (or life-ending) story, by generalising rape as part of the female experience. In the ensuing discussion with DeWar, who tries to be respectful and comforting, Perrund emphasises the patriarchal limitations of female agency while showcasing the stereotypical masculine camaraderie of the perpetrators, thus putting DeWar on the spot:

> 'Are you upset on my behalf, or your own? Most men would rather not hear what their fellows have done, what people who may indeed be very like them are capable of. Do you prefer not to think about such things, DeWar? Do you think that you are so different? Or do you become secretly excited at the idea?'
> 'Lady, I gain no benefit or pleasure at all from the subject.'
> 'Are you sure, DeWar? And if you are, do you really think you speak for the majority of your sex? For are women not supposed to resist even those they would happily surrender to, so that when they resist a more brutal violation how can the man be sure that any struggle, any protestation is not merely for show?' (330-331)

By forcing DeWar to position himself, Perrund regains the feeling of control, while at the same time denying him the 'comfort' of sympathising and siding with her, reminding him that he, as a man in a patriarchal society, cannot truly understand her perspective (332). She then proceeds to sarcastically point out that she never had the "luxury of being able to say No" (333). When he asks her if the sheer fact that she survived and her current high social position do not give her comfort, Perrund points out that as concubine she is part of "the collection of mates for the foremost male of the pack" (336), again highlighting the patriarchal power structure of the society they live in as well as playing on the violently animalistic nature of men, which results in her not being allowed to experience love or comfort.

The whole exchange between Perrund and DeWar takes up arguments concerning sexualised violence and female agency that have been dominating the discourse for decades, if not centuries. Apart from the remarkable timelessness, the extent of the conversation and positions displayed within are unique in Banks' oeuvre: This conversation between Perrund and DeWar marks the only time in Banks' novels that a female victim of sexualised violence illustrates the long-term effects of the abuse on her life and her mindset. The extent of her story is used, not much later in the novel, as motif for Perrund killing the general, because he and his men had been the ones raping her and killing her family in the war. The narrative uses Perrund's background story to construct a reason for DeWar not to kill her after she killed his general. Instead, he escapes with her, therefore reproducing stereotypes of a heteronormative romance plot. Nevertheless, her account of what happened to her and how it affected her in the long run is unique in Banks' novels, which are brimming with female rape victims. In contrast to Lededje, Chay, GF, Hisako, and Isis, Perrund gets the opportunity to reflect on her story and ventilate her anger, hatred, and desperation, even if only as an expansive prelude to exercising her revenge and getting away with it. Her fate, in the end, resembles a fairy tale ending: She flees together with DeWar, they build a life together in yet another distant kingdom, and "they died after what appears to have been a long and happy life together" (I, epilogue n.p.). Thus, *Inversions* inverts the traditional focus on male hero journeys in favour of the stories and aspirations of two women, Vosill and Perrund, whose journeys include their successes as well as their shortcomings.

In the rest of Banks' oeuvre, there is no scarcity of male heroes. Consequently, some of them find themselves at the receiving end of physical and psychological violence, and fewer still find themselves as victims of sexualised violence.

7.5 Violated Men – 'The Last Taboo'

For the cinematic genre of rape-revenge movies, Reifenberger explains that "even if the position of rape victim is feminine-coded, the biological sex of the victim can also be male, and the perpetrator can be biologically female; even in a rape-revenge movie that takes its dynamic from a brutally sexualised opposition of man and woman, gender is a social construct" (Reifenberger 76).

Although the inversion of the dichotomy 'male perpetrator – female victim' carries subversive potential, it is immediately met with a strong set of societal stereotypes concerning masculinity, and the innate threat of the latter leads to the societal urge of suppression and tabooing:

> Male-on-male rape is labelled the 'last taboo' […] because sexual violation seems to reaffirm a women's femininity yet emasculates the male victim, enforcing a shift in gender position. The distinct status of sexual violence perpetrated by and against men is evidenced by the fact that, in legal terms, male rape for a long time did not exist. Subsumed under the rubric of sodomy, both consensual homosexual acts and sexual acts enforced by men on men were historically considered a crime against nature. (Sielke 171)

Sielke already addresses some problems in this quote. Rape and sexual assault happening to men have long been treated as a taboo, which is reflected in the fact that in most countries they had not been legally acknowledged until rather recently (comp. Turchik and Edwards 216-218) and, moreover, their existence was (and still is) also denied socially:

> [Social] norms specify that men are expected to live up to the heterosexual masculine ideal (i.e., hegemonic masculinity) and possess traits such as toughness, independence, aggressiveness, and dominance [...]. Traits such as submissiveness, emotionality, compliance, and homosexuality are not consistent with social norms regarding masculinity [...]. Socially constructed notions of masculinity are not consistent with constructions of the rape victim as feminine, weak, and defenseless [...]. Thus, based on socially constructed definitions of masculinity, 'real men' cannot be rape victims [...]. (Turchik and Edwards 213)

Male rape victims are thus often ridiculed and 'played for laughs' in popular culture, which is highlighted in the study of Turchik and Edwards[71], but generally understudied as a subject in itself. It has, however, been repeatedly addressed by several self-reflective pop-cultural media outlets and journals[72]. In the medial representation of male-on-male rape, the existence of a number of social stereotypes or 'myths' becomes apparent, which Turchik and Edwards have compiled into a list:

> (a) men cannot be raped; (b) 'real' men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault, he must have wanted it. (Turchik and Edwards 211-212)

71 "There is no other type of violent crime that is as commonly depicted as humorous as male rape. From movies to TV series such as *Family Guy* and S*on of the Beach* to late night show hosts and comedians, male rape has been made light of, promoting the myth that it is not a serious issue and likely discourages reporting from victims" (Turchik and Edwards 216).

72 For example: www.tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DoubleStandardRapeMaleOnMale, www.bitchmedia.org/article/male-rape-no-joke%E2%80%94-pop-culture-often-treats-it-way, www.dubeat.com/2020/11/how-male-sexual-assault-is-played-for-laughs-in-movies/, www.filmsforaction.org/watch/sexual-assault-of-men-played-for-laughs/, all accessed 7 August 2021.

Those preconceptions will serve as basis for the following analysis of two of Banks' works that portray cases of sexual assault against male characters.

Complicity

Complicity has been described as a "political revenge fantasy" in *The Guardian*, "a novel that tortured, raped and gleefully snuffed out various figures representative of the ills of modern Britain" (Tait n.p.). This review combines the previously addressed comedic presentation of male-on-male rape with the legitimation of (sexual) violence against males as means of revenge. The 1993 novel gives the first-person account of Edinburgh journalist Cameron Colley, alternating with the second-person point of view of an initially anonymous killer who targets high-profile politicians, businessmen, and state functionaries. The latter resorts to sexualised violence in the case of an old judge who showed leniency towards rapists. The killer breaks into the judge's holiday home, knocks out his wife, and ties her up in the closet, beats the judge unconscious when he gets home and ties him to a bed frame, cutting off his clothes. He then rapes the judge anally with a vibrator.

Pertaining to item (i) on Turchik and Edwards' list, the assailant notices that the victim's "cock looks slightly engorged" (C 37), an observation that indicates that the victim's body might be reacting to the situation; therefore, he "must have wanted it" (Turchik and Edwards 112). The assailant continues torturing the judge, the whole scene is displayed in graphic detail. Apart from cursing and offering money to the assailant, the victim instantly knows what the attack is about, referring to the trials in question and trying to exculpate himself: "This isn't justice! You don't know all the facts about these cases! Some of them *were* dressed like whores, dammit! They'd let any man have them; they were no better than whores!" (38, emphasis original). Here, the narrative invites readers to side with the assailant on two different levels: On the content-level, the judge's sexist and misogynistic recollection of the women involved in the rape trials serve to justify the assault as revenge for a former rape; on the level of the second-person narrative, "[t]he pronoun 'you' sometimes seems to address the reader directly as a reading accomplice that should by now be familiar with pain and screams", as Sandrine Sorlin formulates it (Sorlin 46). In her 2015 article on the use and effects of the second-person singular pronoun in *Complicity*, she decodes the differentiation between first-person narrator Cameron Colly, the journalist who is trying to unearth a conspiracy behind the high-profile murders and therefore becomes a suspect in the murder investigation himself, and the second-person narrator, murderer, and assailant, who by the end of the novel turns out to be Cameron's long-time friend Andy:

> The readers have then no other choice than to turn into 'forensic linguists', leaning on textual fingerprints to determine which frame of mind they are in. Combined with other linguistic markers, the personal pronouns are of course particularly helpful, except when, at one point in the novel, one of the narrators stages what I call stylistic impersonation, bringing about confusion regarding the identity of the protagonists. At the end of the novel, adding to the mirror-effects created by the I/you dyad, the 'I' protagonist-narrator switches to the second-person pronoun that has so far been the stylistic preserve of the assaulter. (Sorlin 1)

This stylistic twist in the end of the novel underlines the fact that Cameron has made himself complicit in Andy's 'righteous vendetta' by ultimately letting him get away before calling him in to the police, but it also points to the potential complicity of the readers. The second-person narrative gives room for Andy to describe his actions in a calm and neutral manner, sometimes using elements of comic relief to gain distance from the violence displayed: "He moans and farts at the same time. You have to turn your head away from the smell, but you push the vibrator in further" (C 38). This descriptive element humanises both the victim and the perpetrator, facilitating the identification with the latter while at the same time providing 'humorous' distance from the fact that this is a rape scene. When Andy is revealed as the killer, ten pages of the novel are dedicated to justifying his actions and motives (comp. 295-305). Although Cameron opposes Andy's methods of 'bringing people to justice', he acknowledges that he does not think Andy is mad, he just thinks that what he does is wrong (301) – and in the end, he lets him get away. *Complicity* elaborately discusses matters of morality, justice, and social responsibility, inviting readers to side with the murderous avenger through the second-person narrative situation, thus running perilously close to relativise or even legitimise rape and murder while at the same time actively testing the readers' moral compasses.

The Bridge

The Bridge (1986) is one of Banks' early novels, the third one to be published after *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and *Walking on Glass* (1985). Similar to the novels published before, *The Bridge* clearly transgresses into genre fiction, leading British science fiction critic Paul Kincaid to the assessment that "these three novels are most revealingly read as works of science fiction […] because all three novels depend on layerings of reality and a sense of divided identity that have long been consistent elements in what might be termed the Scottish fantastic" (Kincaid, "Far Too Strange: the Early fiction of Iain Banks" 23). Kincaid here subsumes the three novels' elements of science fiction under the umbrella term of 'the (Scottish) fantastic' and does not differentiate any further between science fiction and other fantastic genres such as fantasy and fairy tale, thus allowing for the analysis of the effects of all modes and motifs of 'the fantastic'

within the layered dream-within-a-dream sequences that constitute the structure of *The Bridge*.

The initially unnamed narrator of *The Bridge* suffers a serious car accident on Forth Road Bridge[73] and remains hospitalised and comatose thereafter. He is, as indicated by certain narrative hints and doubling strategies, an alter ego of John Orr, who awakes in a hospital of an alternate society with full amnesia. This society is situated within the enormous structure of a seemingly never-ending bridge and is hierarchically structured into different classes, in accordance with respective jobs, segregated living quarters, and different languages. As he speaks the language of the engineers, who constitute one of the upper classes, and arouses the interest of popular psychiatrist Dr Joyce, he is given a favourable treatment, upper-class living quarters, and a generous monthly allowance and is in return expected to work on regaining his memory while navigating the societal structure on the bridge:

> Orr arrives on the bridge with no past, no memory, and must try to make sense of a world that does not make sense. He can see out […] but cannot make sense of what he sees […]. But no one can see in. Within this private world, Orr finds himself unavoidably caught up in seemingly meaningless social, psychological and sexual rituals. (Kincaid 28)

Psychiatrist Dr Joyce wants him to record his dreams for analysis, but Orr does not dream, so he makes up dreams to discuss with Joyce, who remains unimpressed and finally demotes him from his upper-class apartment to a small room in a sub-level workers district under the railway level of the bridge. His clothes, his generous allowance, and his engineer social circle are taken away from him, and Orr starts to dream: of the barbarian, who exclusively speaks in a Scots dialect, raping and murdering his way through fantastic, medieval, mythological, and science fiction landscapes, of the man caught on a bridge he cannot cross, ever-taunted by beckoning, seductive ladies on the side of the bridge he will never reach, and finally, Orr is seeing the image of an unmoving, comatose patient lying in a hospital bed every time he turns on the TV. All are fragments of

73 "*The Bridge* is suffused with nostalgia for Scotland. The Forth Road Bridge, which had dominated his [Banks'] childhood, provided the structure of the novel as well as being Orr's Unthank-like distorted mirror of Scottish society. […] And it's not just the bridge, Scotland is inherent in every part of the novel from the barbarian's coarse dialect, to the anti-Thatcher politics […], to the lovingly described landscape. […] It is for this reason that I think *The Bridge* is both the most personal and the most successful of Banks's novels. It does stand comparison with *Lanark* as an expression of the Scottish fantastic, dividing and doubling the characters and their worlds so that the real can only be understood in its relationship to the fantastic, and vice versa. But the way that neither the fantastic nor the real can be privileged, how the one is integral to the other, is important in fully understanding all three of these early novels." (Kincaid 34)

Orr within different layers of the narrative, and Orr is the avatar of the comatose protagonist, whose name can be pieced together, by combining narrative hints, as Alex Lennox.

Before his car accident, Lennox was a successful Edinburgh engineer from a working-class Glaswegian background. He engages in a troubled relationship with Andrea Crammond, herself a privileged but independent descendant of a wealthy Edinburgh family. Andrea splits her time between Edinburgh and Paris, where she entertains another lover. The jealousy and uncertainty Lennox experiences because of this echo throughout all the narrative layers and dream sequences of the narrative.

Orr, Lennox' alter ego living on the bridge, ultimately engages in a romantic relationship with Abberlaine Arrol, an artist with rich parents whom he met in his social circle of upper-class engineers. She helps him out after his demotion and offers him an unused old apartment which is in her family's possession. The ensuing sex scene is detailed, the criss-cross design of Abberlaine's stockings and corset explicitly echo the structure of the bridge they inhabit. While the sexual encounter is consensual, the doubling of the woman and the bridge becomes quite literal throughout the act:

> She cries out, arches her spine, head thrown back, hair hanging between her shoulder blades, her fingers splayed, arms in a V behind her, extended and straining. I lift her, suddenly conscious of myself within her inside that structure of dark materials, and as I strain, taking her weight, suddenly in that moment I am aware of the bridge above us, towering into the grey evening with its own patterns and criss-crossing and massed Xs, […] above us, above me, pressing down. I struggle to support that crushing weight – Abberlaine arches further, shouting; grips my ankles with her hands – then comes down groaning like some crumpling structure […]. She lies on me, breathing hard, perfumed hair tickling my nose. I ache. I am exhausted. I feel like I have just fucked the bridge. (TB 231-232)

Despite the physical effort involved on Orr's part and the potentially fear-instilling imagery of collapsing heavy structures, he and Abberlaine have sex numerous times that night. As the first-person narrator, Orr recalls that the "final time takes the longest, and contains, like the best works, many different movements and changes of tempo. Its climax chills me though; something makes it worse than joyless, makes it frightening, terrifying" (232). Instead of feeling pleasure, relief, or exhaustion, he details his climax as completely devoid of any bodily sensation:

> My orgasm is nothing; a detail from the glands, an irrelevant signal from the provinces. I shout out, but not with pleasure, not even from pain. That gripping, this pressure, this containing of me as though I am the body to be dressed, enfolded, strapped and parcelled, lined and laced, sends something crashing through me: a memory. Ancient and fresh, livid and rotten at one; the hope and fear of release and capture of animal and ma-

> chine and meshing structures; a start and an end. Trapped. Crushed. Little death, and that release. The girl holds me, like a cage. (232-233)

Kincaid reads Abberlaine Arrol as Andrea Crammond's avatar, corresponding with Orr as Alex Lennox's alter ego within the bridge. He also agrees to the fairly obvious equation of Abberlaine and the bridge and concludes that "in fucking the bridge Orr has become one with the ritual space he has created" (Kincaid 33). Certainly, the unification with the bridge via a sexual act that culminates without emotional or physical release is a necessary progress for John Orr to realise that the "ritual space he has created" (s.a.), is a cage, a prison which, despite its comforts (as portrayed by Abberlaine) is holding him back from moving on and regaining his memories, and ultimately reintegrating his divided selves (the barbarian, Orr, Alex Lennox) into one.

However, reading the sex scene between Orr and Arrol as sexualised violence is also suggested by the danger for Orr's life that is transported through the dominant imagery of collapsing structures and the fright he experiences when he realises, orgasming, that he is trapped within Abberlaine, within the bridge. The 'memory' evoked by the feeling of being "dressed, enfolded, strapped and parcelled, lined and laced" (TB 233) directly relates to Alex Lennox in his hospital bed, presumably being dressed, enfolded, and parcelled by the hospital staff at whose mercy he is during the months of his helpless comatose state. After the sexual encounter with Abberlaine, John Orr boards a train, determined to leave the bridge, and embarks on a journey that will take him through "a series of increasingly threatening, war-torn scenarios" (Kincaid 32).

A few pages later, the narrative focalisation shifts back to Alex Lennox in his hospital bed, as he struggles to make sense of the fragmented outside information reaching his consciousness while sarcastically voicing his disapproval of being handled, moved and, medically treated without giving consent: "Who asked *me*, you bastards? Anybody ask me? Eh? Anybody think to say 'Mind if we move you, what's-your-name?' *Hmm*? No. Maybe I was happy where I was, ever think of that?" (247-248, emphasis original). Embedded into other pieces of fragmented outside perception, the narrator suddenly exclaims "Raped! What a bloody nerve! I'll sue" (249). Toward the end of the novel, the narrative perspectives of Lennox and Orr start to get more and more fractured and entwined, indicating that Lennox is ready to come out of coma. "I am in a long, hollow, echoing place, lying in bed. There are machines around me, drips into me. People come and look at me, occasionally" (369). Slowly, Lennox starts to recognise the faces of the hospital staff around him: "Some of these people look familiar. Dr Joyce is here. He wears a white coat and he makes notes on a clipboard. I'm sure I saw Abberlaine Arrol, just fleetingly, a while ago … but she was dressed in the uniform of a nurse" (370).

Taken together, my reading is that of a comatose long-time hospital patient who is raped by a staff nurse. The event is carried through all of the different layers of the narrative, corresponding to the layers of Alex Lennox's fragmented psyche. When Orr has sex with Abberlaine Arrol, it is initially consensual, but the tone changes throughout the night: the equation of Abberlaine and the bridge within another metaphorical structure, where the bridge represents a comfortable but arcane prison, resonates in an impending sense of doom for the protagonist and the reader alike. The weight of the woman who is the bridge atop of him, the sense of her collapsing onto him, burying him, and his orgasm fully devoid of emotion or release frighten Orr. The terrifying orgasm is his initial impetus to leave the bridge, to regain his agency and his sense of self, to flee from being "dressed, enfolded, strapped and parcelled" (TB 233). While Orr boards the first train he can get on and starts his increasingly violent journey through strange lands and battlefields, Alex Lennox struggles to regain his autonomy in his hospital bed. In his interior monologue, he complains about the lack of his consent in everything that is happening to him, shortly before starting to conduct the hard work of reconstructing his sense of time and place in order to be able to regain consciousness and control over his body.

Different from my reading of Aberlaine Arrol as the avatar of a hospital nurse raping Lennox, Kincaid sees Arrol as Andrea's avatar. Throughout throwbacks in the narrative, which present Alex and Andrea's troubled relationship before the car accident, Andrea emerges as a strong, independent woman who is unwilling to agree to a monogamous relationship with Alex (276). Alex's feelings towards Andrea's independence and polyamory are initially portrayed as progressively liberal, near-feminist: "he was appalled to find himself jealous when Andrea slept with somebody else, and cursed the upbringing that had told and retold him that a man should be jealous, and a woman had no right to screw around but a man did" (135). However, Andrea's lack of monogamous commitment affects all levels of the narrative (and thus all levels of Alex's fragmented psyche) and is particularly prevalent in Orr's dream of a man who cannot leave a moving bridge, while constantly being tainted by seductive ladies just off the bridge who occasionally make love to each other, which he experiences as infuriating: "Bitches! Ingrates! Bloodly torturers! Hellbags! What about me? Come here!" (189). Moreover,

> [e]very few tens of days, small men, swarthy and thic-set and dressed as satyrs, come running out of the forest behind the meadow and fall upon the ladies, who after *a show of resistance* and displays of coquetry, *surrender* to their small lovers with unaffected relish. These orgies go on for days and nights without pause, every form of sexual perversion is practiced, red lamps and open fires light the scene at night […]. (190, emphasis added)

The explicit portrayal of sexual acts between the ladies and the 'small men' displays racist language as well as the sexist and misogynistic idea of the male narrator being entitled to have sex with said ladies; he feels like he is being taunted by their actions and appearances, and thus he is tortured by being deprived of sexual satisfaction as much as by his inability to cross the bridge[74]. The quote can be read as satirical comment on the masculine sense of entitlement, but it can also be interpreted as self-righteous complacency; the latter is echoed by Alex Lennox's interior voice shortly before he comes out of his coma: debating Andrea's frequent absences and her other lover in France as reasons why Alex is unwilling to regain consciousness and face his life again, the critical voice inside him muses that "You always did what she wanted, she used you, not the other way round; it was role-reversal all right, and you got screwed." (377) Victimisation and feminisation are equated in this quote, reinstating a normative binary within the framework of gendered violence. A part of Alex accuses Andrea of transgressing gender roles and taking on a stereotypically masculine role in their relationship and shames him for wanting to go back to that relationship. Despite having had sex and short-lived relationships with other women in Andrea's absence, Alex's inner voice succumbs to the patriarchal stereotype he criticised before. The narrative technique of employing an 'inner critic' addressing the protagonist in the second person is used to personify different personality traits and allow them to voice their conflicting opinions – similar to the different personality traits presented as the protagonists of Orr's dreams (the murdering, raping, and Scots-speaking barbarian, the man caught on the bridge with the seductive ladies to the side, etc). On the one hand, this narrative method is useful to illustrate conflicting personality parts within a round character and illustrate that they too can have conservative, stereotypical, or even inappropriate and offensive thoughts and tendencies despite generally presenting as progressive and liberal, thus critically framing regressive (inner) voices. On the other hand, giving these regressive or offensive voices a platform can always be read as advocacy and complicity.

74 The assumed masculine entitlement to sexual intercourse displayed here illustrates the growth of anti-feminist politics and sentiment that started in the 1980s as a response to second-wave feminism in the globalised West. In the 2000s, this assumed entitlement took roots in the anonymised internet culture of *incels*, or involuntary celibates, who are unable to find sexual partners and whose motivation it is to 'educate' men about the misandry of feminism (Høiland V). Although the idea of men being entitled to sexual intercourse with women stems from centuries-old patriarchal ideas about marriage and ownership of women, its public reemergence and literary/medial representation in the 1980s within the anti-feminist climate of Thatcherism is an important milestone in the development towards the violently anti-feminist internet-culture or "manosphere" (ibid.) of today.

Complying with the interpretation that Lennox's exclamation about rape refers to himself, and that it translates into Orr's world as the final sex scene between him and Abberlaine, and pertaining to Turchik and Edwards' collection of social myths about rape, as a male rape victim Lennox/Orr cannot comply with the "socially constructed definition of masculinity" anymore, since "'real men' cannot be rape victims" (213). The social myths about rape Turchik and Edwards collected thus challenge Lennox/Orr's masculinity on numerous levels, particularly pertaining to the assumption "(e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man" (211-212). Since sexual violation seems to reaffirm a woman's femininity yet emasculates the male victim" (Sielke 171), Lennox's rape would represent the climax of his subjectively experienced emasculation, which increasingly affected him throughout the relationship with Andrea. The danger to his masculine identity that this bodily and psychological violation carries, leads to the activation of his survival instincts: whereas Orr finds the courage to leave the bridge and travel through numerous war zones in search of some place or society that makes sense to him, Lennox battles (his inner unwillingness) to come out of his coma. Sexual assault as a threat to the masculine core identity is thus used to initiate a flight forward to escape victimisation and feminisation.

Immediate narrative evidence of Alex Lennox's rape in his hospital bed is scarce. It is, however, supported by the strikingly parallel structure of patient 8262's narrative strand in a novel published more than 20 years later: *Transition*[75].

Transition

Transition (2009) is, as mentioned before, a novel about a gifted male protagonist who gets caught between the influences of two powerful females. While the novel is presented from many different narrative angles, in the end two of the narrative strands are revealed to concentrate on the same person: Temudjin Oh, the transitionary, is also patient 8262, hiding out in permanent care of a mental hospital in a remote universe, on the run from Madame d'Ortolan and the Concern after their last disastrous encounter. Patient 8262 is sexually assaulted twice during his time in the hospital. The first time, he pretends to be asleep when someone comes into his room, lifts the blankets, and then inserts their hand into the patient's pyjama pants to grab his genitals. When Oh opens his eyes and turns around, he cannot make out the fleeing figure in the dark of the room. He

75 The connection between the two novels is explicitly referred to by Banks in an interview with *The Guardian* in 2009: "With Transition, I wanted to prove something. I wanted to show I could do something like The Bridge again because until now, that has been my favourite." (Walker n.p.)

calls the incident "the violation" (T 302) and feels he is being "reduced to […] the sexual plaything of some drooling, sub-sentient inmate of a benighted cretin depository", which is "a shame" particularly in regard to "[his] past, [his] achievements, [his] status" (304) – which he considers diminished by the assault. When he tries to report the assault to the medical stuff, a "solid, square-set woman with no-nonsense glasses" (330) hands him a doll and asks him to show her what he thinks has happened. Disturbed by having to use a "girl doll" to demonstrate where he has been touched, he demands to be given two "male" dolls (331). Equipped with those and demonstrating what occurred that night, he loses confidence in his assessment of the situation:

> At this point it occurs to me that I am not absolutely certain that the person who did the attempted interfering was indeed male. I did not see them clearly enough and could not tell from the touch of their hand, the feel of their skin or their smell what gender they might have been. I just assumed it was a man. (ibid.)

In this situation, Oh is infantilised through his disguise as a patient in a mental institution, thus being a member of a group that is statistically at higher risk to become the victim of sexualised violence, and by being forced to reenact the assault using "dolls" (ibid.). The register used in the quote implies his refusal to name the sexual assault as such, calling it an "attempted interfering" (ibid.) instead, which may indicate his refusal to confront the severity of the situation and recognise his position as a victim. The last sentence of the above quote is another reflection of the social stereotypes outlined earlier: whereas he as the victim is feminised – which is enhanced through him having to use a "girl doll" in the reenactment – he automatically assumes that the perpetrator is male; both factors are traditionally perceived as threatening to a heteronormatively masculine gender identity.

In both narrative strands, the one of the transitionary and the one of patient 8262, it becomes quite clear that heterosexuality is an important factor of Temudjin Oh's identity. He does not "appreciate" transitioning into gay men (80) and thus overtaking their bodies for a limited amount of time; and when he hides in the mental hospital, he "take[s] care to masturbate in the toilet on the morning of a bath day, so as not to embarrass [him]self in front of the nurses" (51), but considers abandoning that practice if "the pretty blonde" (ibid.) nurse ever shows signs of sexual interest in him. He thus transgresses from the professional into the private space, perceiving the nurse, who is his caretaker, as a potential sexual partner.

The second sexual assault happens at night when Oh is in his bed, sedated by sleeping pills, conscious but initially unable to control his body. In a drugged, half sleeping state, he thinks that the person entering his room is there to make his bed and tuck him in, and he feels safe and comforted. This scene recalls

stereotypical images of childhood sexual abuse. Abusers usually exploit the child's assumption that what is happening is normal and disguise their assault as an expression of love or caretaking (comp. Elliott et al. 584). Oh soon realises that his first innocent assumption is incorrect; the intruder takes away his bedclothes and unties his trousers, forcibly pulling them down. Oh reacts with dissociation at first:

> In all of this it is as though I am watching everything on a screen, feeling it not as something that is happening to me but as something that is happening somewhere else to somebody else […]. I am dissociated from what's going on. This is not happening, or at least not to me. So I have no need to react, to try to do anything, because what good would that do? It's not happening to me.
> Except, of course – as one part of my mind has known all along, and is still bellowing and yowling about – it entirely *is* happening to me. (T 421-422)

The powerful role his heterosexual masculinity and social status as employee of the Concern granted him is cancelled out by casting him in the role of a child which is at the mercy of the surrounding 'caretakers'. In the following pages, Oh's thoughts, associations, and emotions during the sexual assault are presented through him as first-person narrator. While the assailant touches him, Oh muses over the question whether it would be better if he were unconscious, and suffers from his inability to physically fend off the assailant: "What heat there is in tears of such frustration. How can I let this happen to me? How can somebody do something so base and selfish and debased to another person?" (423). His self-deprecation turns into self-defence when the perpetrator turns him around and penetrates his anus with a finger: "I summon one vast wave of disgust and fury and put it all into one arm, striking back at my assailant" (ibid.). Oh manages to scream, which scares the rapist off. While he is fleeing, Oh recognises him as one of the male duty nurses. Right after the attack, Oh suffers a cardiac arrest and has to be reanimated:

> They tear open my pyjama top and I want to protest. Please; passion, something shared, wanted, yearned for, not imposed, not this. Wrong. They put my head back, put their lips to mine, and kiss, blowing into me. I smell her perfume. Oh, that old sweetness. I will miss that. But still unasked for, still a sort of violation. Also, frankly, been eating garlic. (424)

The last sentence breaks with the traumatic consequences of the sexual assault, which carry over into the first aid measures administered to Oh, by ways of comic relief. Up until then, the focus of the narrative had been on Oh's violation, his paralysis and fear as well as his anger and self-deprecation, which does not adhere to Turchik and Edwards' list of male-on-male rape 'myths' and could thus potentially serve to deconstruct popular stereotypes. After recognising the assailant, Oh is unable to pursue him, and even later on he shows no interest in retribution. However, still recovering from the assault and his cardiac arrest, he

has to fend off an assassin sent by the Concern. Not only does he do that successfully, but he also manages to kill the assassin, making it look like an accident. He does so by reembracing his identity as an exceptionally skilled transitionary and by taking advantage of his position as an injured patient in a mental institution: when he hears the commotion that the intrusion of the assassin caused on the corridor, he hides a knife under his sheets and switches off his heart monitor (461). When the assassin enters his room, he pretends to be in a drugged sleep. The hired killer tries to smother him with a pillow, and Oh goes along with it, pretending to struggle and playing dead after a while. However, Oh is connected to an oxygen cylinder with a tube to his nose that is not visible to the assassin in the twilight of the room. When the assailant removes the pillow, Oh strikes at him with the knife, using the moment of surprise to drive the assassin to a panicked, thoughtless retreat (461).

> They find my attacker in his crashed car, dead, early the following morning. […] What was there was, was me; briefly inside his head as he drove away. Long enough to unfasten the bastard's seat belt and tug hard on the steering wheel before dancing back out of his head again an instant before the crash.
> It was as long as I could have stayed in there anyway, and it hurt, plus it wore me out for days. But it's a start. (462-469)

After years of hiding out in the mental hospital, dependent and infantilised, and after two accounts of sexual assault, which he was unable to fight off physically and which deeply disturbed him psychologically, Oh regains his sense of agency by fighting off a man who was sent to kill him. What is more, he even reactivates his transitionary abilities, which he had denied for his stay in the hospital, gaining back a sense of security through being able to kill the assassin by jumping into his head. On the one hand, these actions serve to diminish the threat of feminisation he was facing through the sexual assault and reestablish his reputation as an assassin and a transitionary. On the other hand, he regains power and control through accepting and utilising his infantilised and relatively powerless situation. This display of flexibility and adaptability carries the potential to undermine a stereotypically masculine gender performance and, taken together with his position in between two powerful female characters, serves to create a more nuanced presentation of masculinity.

In contrast to *The Bridge*, the sexual assault of a hospitalised man is made explicit in *Transition*; but compared to the first novel, the resulting stereotypical feminisation by victimisation is discussed and confirmed as a threat to the protagonist's masculinity. In both novels, the sexual assault on the protagonists initiates their active efforts to regain their independent personhood, integrate their fractured personalities, and restabilise their threatened (heterosexual) masculinity. In *Complicity*, the narrative perspective is inverted: readers witness the sex-

ual assault of men from the perpetrator's perspective. This carries the potential of making readers complicit with the attacker, a notion that is supported by the well-argued motives Andy brings forward when he is unmasked as the killer of high-profile politicians, businessmen, and state functionaries. The sexual assault of a judge, which is depicted in detail, is legitimised as revenge for the judge's leniency towards rapists. The judge's masculinity is thus undermined by his rape, while his physical reactions to the assault are ridiculed to establish an alienation effect between readers and the victim. With *Complicity*, all three novels containing sexual assaults of men are connected: Whereas *Transition* explicitly echoes Alex Lennox's narrative strand in *The Bridge* with the story of patient 8262, who turns out to be an alter ego of Temudjin Oh, just as John Orr serves as Lennox's alter ego in *The Bridge*, Lennox and Andrea get their clandestine happy ending not in *The Bridge* but in *Complicity*[76]. In all three novels, the male protagonists are injured, fractured, violated. Turchik and Edwards' myths are partially revoked, partially catered to by the narratives – in terms of explicitness, male rape victims are no taboo in Banks' novels. In terms of depiction, the novels alternate between subverting and reinforcing stereotypical attributions of violence and gender so that readers and critics alike can be on the fence about the ambiguity of the depictions.

7.6 Narrative Evidence of Hierarchy, Domination, and Subversion

Despite carrying subversive potential, Banks' scenes of sexualised violence often recreate stereotypical power structures. The reasons for this are mainly twofold: First, Banks uses drastic forms of sexualised violence and masculine domination to characterise Culture antagonists and legitimise violent interferences, thereby addressing questions of ethics and morality:

> Of equal validity is the idea of having the kind of discussion Banks actually did have in every one of his Culture novels: an earnest argument about the moral fringe territories and the ethics of intervention on the part of a society that retains its view of itself as a Good Place despite engaging with the Bad Ones. (Caroti 107)

Thus, the Culture's self-identification as egalitarian society is critically addressed; however, the Culture prevails in every conflict or war that it enters, and its status

76 *Complicity*'s protagonist Cameron spends a night drinking in a bar with his "pal Al" (C 114), who then, before escorting drunk Cameron to a taxi, buys flowers for his wife "Andi" (120). "The idea was that *Complicity*, for all its final bleakness, does have a happy ending. It's just that it isn't its own happy ending, and it's not at the end" (Banks, *Raw Spirit* 290).

as "a Good Place" (s.a.) is established *in relation* to the respective antagonist. For example, in direct comparison to the Affront, one of the very "Bad Ones" (s.a.), it is rather easy to promote the Culture as peaceful and egalitarian. What comes with these intergalactic civilisational confrontations is not a thorough interrogation of the Culture's moral principles, its societal power structures, its standards and norms but rather the realisation, coming with a narrative 'shrug', that the Culture may not be perfect, but that it seems to be better than 'the others'.

Further, as many scholars have stated, Banks' gusto for transgression in the realms of gender and violence provokes estrangement on the readers' side. This leads some positive critiques to the assertion that the sheer display of patriarchal gender norms and violent interpersonal transgressions questions problematic societal norms:

> The question of war and violence in Banks's fiction is often explored through the prism of gender identity and sexual transgressions, which constitutes yet another of the author's main preoccupations. Many female characters in the Banksian universe take on characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, which helps the author to foreground the connection between gender and power relationships. (Pisarska 28)

Banks' novels do foreground the connection between gender and power. Mostly, they do that through the display of 'old white men' in power, their immoral and sexist behaviour, and the severity of the struggles that particularly the female characters have to endure to remove those men from their powerful positions. Within those frameworks, female characters tend to "take on characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity" (s.a.), as is the case for Diziet Sma, the lieutenant, Isis, Mrs Mulverhill, and Madame d'Ortolan, whereas Lededje is shown failing in taking on 'enough' masculine traits to remove her oppressor from his position of power. What those female characters have in common is that they are all publicly judged or punished because of their transgression of gender identity, perceived as such by their social surroundings. This could be interpreted as addressing gendered structures in social power hierarchies, but the fates of these female characters run perilously close to an uncommented reproduction of gender stereotypes in matters of sexualised violence.

The fate of violated females in Banks' narratives can be summarised in three categories: transcending, caring, and vanishing. Chay, the pavulean academic from *Surface Detail* qualifies for the first category. After having endured multiple lifetimes of physical and psychological torture in a virtual hell, she is liberated and given free choice of her fate. Abandoning her body in 'the real' and the virtual alike, she chooses to purely transcend into a benevolent function:

> [S]he had become whatever the Virtual equivalent of institutionalised was, and there could be no returning. […] She would remain a creature of ending and release in the Virtual; the angel of death who came for people who lived in happy, congenial Afterlives and who – tired even of their many lifetimes lived after biological death – were

> ready to dissolve themselves into the generality of consciousness that underlay Heaven, or who were ready simply to cease to be altogether. (SD 622-623)

The protagonist of *Whit*, Isis, takes control over her community, the sect of Luskentyrians, with gathered evidence of her brother's betrayal and manipulation and her grandfather's past crimes. Not addressing the sexual assault she suffered at the hands of her grandfather, she decides that he must remain within the community as their founder and a respected person. She plans to share the leadership with him, taking control of the day-to-day business and keeping him as a figurehead. Taking her place as the spiritual leader of her community, she transcends beyond her physical violations, her corporeal self, to take care of her fellow believers: "Here was what mattered; here, looking out over these stunned, bewildered, awed, even fearful faces, here was action at a distance, here was palpable power, here was where belief – self-belief and shared belief – could truly signify" (W 455). In leaving behind their bodies, either figuratively or literally, to pursue more spiritual functions, both take on the institutionalised but still traditionally feminised role of caring for other people. Thus, the potential their disembodiment carries for subverting gender stereotypes is not realised.

However, the flight into caring and nurturing roles after being subject to physical and psychological violation is even more evident in the cases of Lededje and Livueta. After having been rid of her legal owner and rapist Veppers, Lededje settles in the Culture and becomes a full citizen. Contrary to Culture customs, she has five children and a great number of grandchildren and apparently finds fulfilment within her role as mother and the procreative function of her body. *Use of Weapons*' Livueta, who survived the death of her siblings at the hands of Elethiomel, who then took on the identity of her brother and worked for the Culture, hides out in remote parts of the universe, working as a nurse and caregiver for many decades. Her sister Darckense, on the other hand, is a prime example for the fate of the third category of violated women in Banks' narratives: she vanishes. As is apparent from the quotes above, she is killed and her bones and skin are crafted into a chair; but after the spectacular delivery to her siblings, Darckense, as the person and the chair, vanishes from the narrative. In *A Song of Stone*, Morgan is raped and tortured to death – what happens to her remains is unclear. Lastly, in *Transition*, GF vanishes from the narrative soon after The Philosopher killed her father and thus took the first step towards his career as torturer.

Casting off the corporeal female body, and thereby diminishing the risks and threats that come with it, as well as fulfilling feminine fates in nurturing or caring roles, or the silencing or eradication of female characters within the narrative, are well-established female tropes which are present in almost all literary forms and epochs.

> Banks' texts return time and again to the vulnerability of the body. This focus on vulnerability comes through in many different ways: graphic depictions of violence against the body, posthuman manipulations of the body, the use of particular claims about the body to support ideological positions or prejudices, and attempts to abandon the body in order to escape its vulnerability, but at each juncture the fundamental vulnerability of the subject as embodied is reinforced. (Roberts, "Vulnerable Masculinities" 48)

This assessment seems applicable to most of the female characters encountered in this chapter. In the above quote, Jude Roberts, however, refers to the 'vulnerable masculinities' in Banks' works, particularly in the first three Culture novels, *Consider Phlebas*, *The Player of Games*, and *Use of Weapons*. Based on Judith Butler's critical theory of the vulnerability of the body, Roberts argues that "[i]n focusing on the male body in particular", Banks "disrupts the gendering of the mind/body split that has characterized Western thought since Descartes" (49). Referring to *The Wasp Factory*'s Frank, exhibiting a "hypermasculine excessive gender identity" (52), Roberts argues that this demonstrates the socially enforced means "by which the masculine subject constitutes and maintains himself as masculine" (ibid.). Drawing on Butler's theory of gender performativity, she concludes that those activities are "performative reiterations of the dominant regulatory fiction of hegemonic masculinity" (ibid.). Drawing on Berthold Schoene-Harwood's influential assessment of the devolution of gender in *The Wasp Factory*, Roberts transfers this approach to Zakalwe and other male characters who display similar 'hypermasculine' gender performances. In the case of Zakalwe, she tries to show that the character's underlying trauma and "fundamental vulnerability" (53) are the basis to his excessive performance of masculinity and argues that Zakalwe's body is also repeatedly subjected to violence, concluding that "in demonstrating the masculine body as fundamentally vulnerable and subject to violence, Banks disrupts the binary division of bodies into male and female" (Roberts 58). Considering my analysis of the depiction and particularly the *sexualisation* of female versus male violated bodies, I wholeheartedly disagree. It is true, though, that Banks shows masculine bodies as potentially vulnerable, thereby breaking with traditions of "techno-muscular masculinity" (54) of science fiction. However, acknowledging the potential vulnerability of male bodies does not equal a disruption of the binary division of bodies, and Banks' prevailing focus on the journeys and developments of male protagonists, even if they express signs of vulnerability and trauma, often "perpetuates the exclusion of the feminine" (59), as Roberts admits in the last paragraph of her essay. Even if Banks' fiction subtly modernises and diversifies the depictions of traditional masculinity, progressive potential is rare in the depiction of feminine characters, particularly as they are so often the victims of sexualised violence. Banks' novels clearly portray immoral, inhumane, and sexist behaviour of men as problematic, and this behaviour is mostly sanctioned by fate.

However, they also show women's emotions, their needs and drives as an enigma to the male protagonists; they portray a number of women who exploit and seduce innocent naïve young men, who are temptresses and damsels in distress and sometimes both, which severely limits the subversive potential of Banks' novels in terms of the disruption of gender stereotypes. Sometimes the didactic take-away seems to be on a tie between the implied prompt towards the male characters to put some work into their own emotional maturity, and the regressive assessment that boys will be boys and women will remain an eternal mystery.

8. Is the Culture Anti-Patriarchal?

In her 2021 article "The Culture Against Patriarchy", Sara Martín Alegre argues that despite the negative critical attention Culture novels received from "women scholars" (90), the Culture actually does take an anti-patriarchal stance towards its opponents, who are often highly hierarchical, militaristic, and structurally sexist societies. This argumentation naturally sparked my interest since my own analysis of gender and (structural) violence in Banks' fiction points towards a more ambiguous picture concerning both the progressiveness and the absence of patriarchal structures in the Culture. Since the representations of gender and gender stereotypes I examined up to this point do not exist in vacuo but are necessarily connected to the societies they are presented in or stemming from, I will expand my analysis of the Culture to take a stand on Martín Alegre's claim. As an anarcho-socialist SF utopia, the Culture more readily lends itself to an analysis of its progressiveness and its anti-patriarchal standpoint than the societies presented in Banks' non-SF or 'mainstream' works would, since they mainly adopt patriarchal social structures as a backdrop, to maintain a 'realist' setting.

Up to this point, I have used Bourdieu's concept of masculine domination and occasionally that of Connell's masculine hegemony rather than the term patriarchy in relation to Banks' fiction. The three concepts are closely connected, while patriarchy is the oldest of them, having been used by social scientists as referring to "a system of government in which men ruled societies through their positions as heads of households" (Walby 19) since the 1940s. Since then, the concept has been problematised and reworked multiple times, particularly in feminist and Marxist theory, trying to conceptually connect the subordination of women with production and class exploitation (Beechy 66). In 1990, Sylvia Welby defined patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women […]. [T]his is present in articulation with capitalism, and with racism" (20). bell hooks emphasises the intersection between patriarchal structures and racism, colonialism and capitalism, in "Understanding Patriarchy" (2004) with her description of an "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (n.p.) and points out that men too are severely limited by the patriarchal order and that women can partake in this order as substantial pillars.

Since the Culture is conceived as a post-scarcity socialist society, the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism mostly plays a role in the societies it positions itself against, which would support Martín Alegre's claim that the Culture is anti-patriarchal in comparison. Racism is apparently also not a problem in the Culture, since it encompasses a multitude of species, and different skin colours

as well as other bodily modifications are readily available for anyone. The same is undoubtedly true of biological sex and has been analysed repeatedly throughout this study, mostly with the outcome that gender stereotypes are still prevalent despite the eligibility of either biological sex. Nevertheless, there are not many traces of systemic social hierarchies being reproduced among the civilian members of the Culture.

What remains is a remnant of hierarchical structures in the Culture's intelligence sections Contact and Special Circumstances, which both employ hierarchical command structures. As Connell states, the distribution of power and power relations are central to patriarchal structures (Connell, *Gender* 58). Whereas the Culture's intelligence sections are not traditionally patriarchal, they (necessarily) do not function in the same egalitarian manner as the rest of their society since they rely on their agents as the executors of the Mind's political intent. Since the readers encounter Contact and Special Circumstances agents more frequently than 'regular' Culture citizens, it seems rewarding to further examine characters within that hierarchical structure, which is also present in *Matter*.

In her article, Martín Alegre primarily analyses *Matter* (2008), the eighth instalment of the Culture series, to exemplify the anti-patriarchal significance of the female protagonist, Djan Anaplian, who works as an agent for Special Circumstances. After having provided my own reading of the novel, I will critically address her analysis of *Matter*, and analyse Djan Anaplian not only as a standalone protagonist but as representative of a typical female Special Circumstances agent acting within the potentially hierarchical framework of the Culture's intelligence section. From there, I will outline Banks' 'strong woman archetype', denoting a type of female character who is perceived as strong and powerful and possesses a certain amount of agency within hierarchical or even patriarchal structures, does not, however, subvert or eradicate these orders. This type of female character is also transferable to Banks' mainstream novels, as will be demonstrated at the end of this chapter.

8.1 Princess vs. Patriarchy: *Matter*

"Djan Sery Anaplian, who had been born a princess of the house of Hausk, […] and whose middle name basically meant fit-to-be-married-to-a-prince," (M 72) is a royal member of a human society "of faux-medieval fantasy fiction" (Poole n.p.), the Sarl. Instead of marrying her to a prince, her father gives her to the Culture as a "payment" (M 92), trading her as a commodity in exchange for a favour he received from a Culture operative. This trade serves to illustrate the Sarl as a stereotypically patriarchal society. As a new member of the Culture,

which perceives itself as a decidedly anti-patriarchal society, Djan receives an education on civilisational history, ethics, and morale, through which she comes to the conclusion that her father is just one among many sexist, war-faring, patriarchal monarchs and that Sarl society is fundamentally barbaric. She first joins Contact and then Special Circumstances as an operative and regards it as her duty to "serve the Culture to repay it" (ibid.) for her father's debt – it is therefore clear that she has not completely severed ties with her Sarl heritage, despite her Culture education. As Culture citizen, she receives certain genetic alterations and modifications that allow her to consciously control her body, its functions and its appearance, including sex changes. "She had been a man for a year. That had been different" (M 163):

> She kept a couple of intermittent, unbothered lovers even as she changed, then, as a man, took many more, mostly female. It was true: one made a better, more considerate lover when one had once been as one's partner. […] He was never sure why he decided to change back. For a long time he thought to return to Sursamen as a man, see what they made of him then. Apart from anything else, there had been a couple of ladies at the court he had always been fond of, and now felt something more for. […] He'd be unstoppable; he could *take* the throne if he wanted. That would be hilarious. Oh, the looks on certain faces! But that would be cruel at best, he thought. At worst, the results might be something between melodrama and the bloodiest of tragedies. Anyway, to be king of the Sarl no longer seemed like the greatest thing a soul might aspire to, not by some long measure. He changed, became a she again. The lesson regarding being a considerate lover did not change. (M 170-171, emphasis original)

In this quote, the binary construction of gender via Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix is obvious, down to the outright equation of gender stereotypes with heterosexual desire as well as the explicit display of masculine gender stereotypes such as a lust for power, an enhanced sex drive, and an exaggerated sense of entitlement, which is then swiftly rectified by the stereotypically feminine qualities of peacefulness, contentment, and deescalating diplomacy, culminating in Djan's reversion to a female body. Within this passage, a male body automatically produces heterosexual desire for female lovers, while it is claimed that a sex change enhances the person's quality as a lover in the heterosexual matrix. This statement potentially subverts itself, as per its logic it posits a *homosexual* pairing as the ideal: both partners have, within a sex binary, similar bodies with similar genitals and share similar sexual experiences, therefore they must be ideally qualified to be 'considerate' lovers.

The fact that, in a male body Djan feels "something more" (M 170) for some of the ladies of the court – whereas she did not before, in a female body – echoes a masculine stereotype, implying that men cannot avoid feeling sexually attracted to women around them. The heterosexual normativity enacted here erases the transgressive potential evoked in the first sentence of the quote. Djan's transition period between the female and the male body remains largely

elusive, except for the assertion that she had a "couple of intermittent, unbothered lovers" (ibid.). By its sheer existence in this phrase, the second adjective, 'unbothered', indicates that potential sexual partners could have been bothered by a transitioning body, and it also implies the need for an uninhibited sexual drive in a person having intercourse with a non-binary or transitioning body, therefore compromising the potential of normalising queer and non-normative sexualities.

In the case of Djan's transition, the male body primarily affects sexual preferences, as the majority of Djan's lovers are now women. Thoughts about returning to Sursamen to "*take*" (ibid., emphasis original) the throne carry a violent potential and finally result in diplomatic reservations that herald the start of the detransition. Djan thinks that claiming the throne would be "cruel", potentially resulting in "melodrama" or "the bloodiest of tragedies" (ibid.). Rejecting these violent outcomes, Djan turns biologically female again. However, this does not mean that she is opposed to violence in general. Djan is introduced to the narrative as a very emotionally withdrawn character who, as an SC agent, exists amidst – and is responsible for – a fair share of violent interferences. Partnered with a drone named Turminder Xuss, she is tasked with interfering in the development of a society which is on a comparable developmental level as the Sarl on her home planet. During those violent interferences, there are "[b]ound to be a few casualties" (M 7), which she accepts with indifference: "Oh well" (ibid.). She even enjoys the spectacle of the drone's violent intervention with military ground troops: "It was, Anaplian thought, a scene of entirely satisfactory chaos, outrage and confusion. She smiled. This was an event of such rarity that Turminder Xuss recorded the moment" (ibid.). Despite having a certain taste for chaos and violence herself, Djan takes on a supervisory role opposite the drone, whose taste for violence seems to be even more pronounced:

> 'Still,' the drone said, sounding weary, 'we should have done more.'
> 'Should we.'
> 'Yes. You ought to have let me do a proper decapitation.'
> 'No,' Anaplian said.
> 'Just the nobles,' the drone said. 'The guys right at the front. The ones who came up with their spiffing war plans in the first place.'
> 'No,' the woman said again, rising from her seat and, turning, folding it. […]
> 'Just the two nasty dukes? And the King?'
> Anaplian held on to her hat as she looked straight up, squinting briefly in the sunlight until her eyes adjusted. 'No.'
> 'This is not, I trust, some kind of transferred familial sentimentality,' the drone said with half-pretended distaste.
> 'No,' the woman said, watching the shape of the module ripple in the air a few metres away. […]
> 'And are you going to stop saying 'no' to me all the time?'
> Anaplian looked at it, expressionless.
> 'Never mind,' the drone said, sighing. (M 8)

In direct opposition to the drone, Djan acts as a boundary-setting parent, casting the drone in the role of the whining child. Despite her taciturnity, Djan hereby fulfils a benevolent, life-protecting function, which potentially speaks to the traditional female stereotype. While herself instrumentalising and also appreciating violence as a method to further Special Circumstance's interests, she is nevertheless responsible for upholding ethics and morale and keeping the drone members of SC in check, similarly to SC operative Diziem Sma in *Use of Weapons* and *The State of the Art*.

Culture novels generally gravitate towards a binary categorisation of violence as *justified* and *unjustified*, which echoes the majority of Western social sanctions and approvals: The use of violence is justified when a person is defending themselves, it is potentially justified in the form of retribution, and it is unjustified as an unprompted attack, and also as a form of indulgence or sport. Boundaries between those cases are fluid and highly subjective. As most female characters in Culture novels, Djan predominantly exercises violence that is justifiable as defence or retribution:

> Eventually she alighted on the flat, low-walled roof of a modest building where a rape was in progress and a small child cowered in a corner. The four soldiers waiting their turn gazed at her with annoyance when she appeared seemingly from thin air, stepping off the seatrider. Their frowns were beginning to turn into appreciative if unpleasant smiles when she drew a sleek chunk of a gun from a shoulder holster and, smiling thinly back, set about punching head-sized holes in each of their torsos. […] The man raping the woman was looking up at Anaplian, mouth open. She walked round a few paces to get a clear shot at him without endangering the woman, then blew his head off. […] She kicked the soldier's body off the woman, but she was already dead. (M 74-75)

In this scene, Djan's appearance mirrors that of a (traditionally male) action hero in a Western; she kills five men nonchalantly while taking care that their victims are not endangered through her actions. Only when she discovers that the woman is already dead, she has to calm herself down with the help of her inbuilt drug glands. Threatened by the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching, she makes the decision to take the child with her. "And what exactly do you intend to do with it?" (M 76) is the first question the drone Turminder Xuss asks when she arrives with the child. "You should have left him where he was," (M 77) Xuss remarks disapprovingly, Djan agreeing by acknowledging the irrationality of her decision: "I know. That didn't feel like an option at the time" (ibid.).

Martín Alegre interprets Djan's walking of the fine line between gender stereotypes as evidence for her progressive and anti-patriarchal character conception. She asserts that *Matter*, along with most of Banks' other novels, "focus[es] on women protagonists in plots that highlight their resilience despite their self-acknowledged vulnerability. This is for Banks a human and not just a gendered, masculine concern" (Martín Alegre 85). The character conception of

Djan Sery Anaplian does combine strength and resilience, traits that would conventionally be regarded as masculine, and (guarded) emotionality and vulnerability, which would be considered feminine following the traditionally binary system of gender stereotypes. This conception results in the presentation of a round, dynamic character who does not easily succumb to gender stereotypes, despite her social background in a patriarchal medieval setting that explicitly picks up on fairy tale and fantasy tropes:

> Despite being King Hausk's supposedly privileged daughter, Anaplian is actually disempowered because of her gender. She is partly aware of her oppression but, once she is rescued by the Culture, Anaplian realizes that Sarl is a barbaric society. Partly, she joins Special Circumstances to alter the fate of similar patriarchal civilizations, though her allegiance to Sarl is not totally severed. (Martín Alegre 86)

As the daughter of a sexist king ruling a patriarchal kingdom, Princess Djan was expected to serve said king by being strategically married off to secure allegiance and to spend her life in "the requirement to please a man and produce a litter of petty royals" (M 93) before being rescued from that fate by Culture citizen (and presumably Contact or Special Circumstances operative) Xide Hyrlis, who intermittently serves as advisor to her father, the king. What appears as a clear revival of the damsel-in-distress trope, which originated in folk and fairy tales and has since permeated into fantasy, science fiction, and popular culture respectively, is seen by Martín Alegre as only one of two possible explanations:

> Hyrlis sees in princess Anaplian either a damsel in distress – an unconscious pariah beginning to understand her own oppression – or a potential defector suitable for future Special Circumstances recruitment. His act can be read either as ideological anti-patriarchal subversion against Hausk or just patriarchal gallantry towards a dispossessed young woman. Of course, Anaplian's rescue is not a pro-feminist intervention, since Hyrlis makes no attempt to persuade the Sarl men to grant their womenfolk equal rights. Only Anaplian is singled out to receive the benefits of the Culture's utopian enlightenment. Anaplian herself never thinks of returning home to free the other Sarl women. Instead of a feminist mission, Banks gives her a hero's mission to save her whole planet. (88-89)

Martín Alegre makes clear that her reading of the Culture as anti-patriarchal does not imply that it is necessarily feminist, and that Anaplian should therefore not be read as a feminist heroine. Although the differentiation between a "hero's mission" and a "feminist mission" may indicate that they are oppositional to each other, Martín Alegre presumably uses the differentiation to emphasise Anaplian's positioning as a female heroine in what would, in traditional science fiction, be a male hero's quest: the endeavour to save her home (world) and her family. Despite ultimately failing at the latter – which which might be beneficial to the Culture[77] – Anaplian rushes to the rescue of Sursamen and her brothers,

77 The epilogue indicates that roughly a year after the events in the novel, to modernise Sarl society, the Culture has a hand in installing a parliamentary democracy on Sur-

notwithstanding their estrangement and the grudge she may hold against their late father:

> *Matter* asks the question of how a woman liberated from patriarchy would behave once she could enjoy complete freedom. The answer Banks provides is that she would follow down to the last consequences her own moral and ethical values rather than what her native or her adoptive ideologies dictate for her. (Martín Alegre 86)

Martín Alegre differentiates between Djan Anaplian's own moral and ethical values in contrast to those of the Sarl and those of the Culture. When Anaplian first decides to go back to Sursamen after having spent several years in the Culture (upon receiving the news about her father's death), she is told by her immediate superior, Jerle Bantra, that she cannot go there as an official SC agent. She is stripped of several of her bodily modifications and enhancements and is warned that she might potentially lose her position as an SC agent if she is gone for a longer period of time. Nevertheless, Anaplian decides to go. In the course of her travels, the true magnitude of the manipulation and the hierarchical power struggles between the several different species involved[78] in and around Sursamen becomes apparent to the Culture so that SC revokes its former decision and reinstates Djan as agent with an official mission. Meanwhile, her brother Ferin, who secretly witnessed the violent murder of his father King Hausk by the king's right hand and second-in-command tyl Loesp, flees his home world on

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samen (M 589-593). For the Culture's endeavour, it is thus beneficial that all male members of the late king's family are deceased and cannot contest, or be used to contest, the abolition of the monarchy.

78 As an artificially constructed Shellworld, Sursamen consists of sixteen concentric spheres, each its own independent world with an individual atmosphere, connected to the other 'levels' by towers that can be traversed if authorised. The Shellworld is mentored by two rivalling non-human species, Octs and Adultrians, who both proclaim to be the true heirs to the civilisation who initially constructed Shellworlds and vanished millions of years ago. Consequently, Sursamen hosts not only the Sarl on level eight, a roughly post-medieval society, but also a number of completely different non-human societies on different levels towards the surface. Oct and Adultria both report to the Nariscene, an insect-like superior civilisation, who in turn are supervised by the Morthanveld, a non-human species whose civilisation is similar to that of the Culture in terms of societal development, power, and influence in a galactic context. Difficulties arise from the sheer number of civilisations involved in supervising each other in a hierarchical structure, structured according to the different levels of civilisational development. The Nariscene fail to notice that the rivalry between Oct and Adultria has led to the Oct illegitimately assisting and furthering the Sarl in their war against the Deldeyn, who live on level nine and are tutored by the Adultria. Amidst the war and after the killing of King Hausk, an ancient artefact is unearthed on level nine. The Oct presume that the artefact, which is a millennia-old AI, will prove their identity as 'true heirs' of the Shellworld. Instead, it proves to be an ancient machine built to destroy the Shellworld and soon to be on its way to the core of Sursamen to fulfil its purpose.

level eight of Sursamen. Together with his servant, he embarks on a quest to contact his estranged sister Djan and plead for her and the Culture's support in exercising retribution and protecting the life of their younger brother Oramen, who has been installed as regent-in-waiting under the care of the usurper tyl Loesp.

Ferin advocates for Djan's help in a bloody revenge plot against tyl Loesp, whereas the Culture demands her to "take a professional interest in events on Sursamen" (M 428) while maintaining an undercover status to establish plausible deniability. To the Culture, it is particularly important that the supervisory civilisation, the Morthanveld, are not antagonised by drawing attention to a Special Circumstances mission in their galactic territory, which includes Sursamen. Djan rejects her brother's request to kill tyl Loesp for him, citing the importance of the judiciary system as opposed to "summary justice" (465) and asking him to put the fate of his kingdom before his own need for revenge (466), thus trying to instil in him a voice of reason according to her own moral standards, concerted with the Culture's intentions of keeping the operation on Sursamen as quiet as possible. In conversation with her direct superior in Special Circumstances, however, Djan proves slightly rebellious when voicing her indifference towards treading lightly on Morthanveld territory, as she considers her timely arrival on Sursamen to be more important:

> 'If our Morthanveld friends are insulted, then so be it. We've pitty-patted round the Morthanveld long enough. I grow tired of it.'
> 'You assume a deal of authority here, Seriy Anaplian,' the construct [Jerle Batra's mind-state] – currently housed in the shuttle's AI matrix – told her. 'It is not for you to make or remake Culture foreign policy. […]'
> 'I am a Culture citizen,' she replied. 'I thought it was entirely my right and duty.'
> 'You are *one* Culture citizen.' (431, emphasis original)

In Martín Alegre's perception, "Batra denies her autonomy and agency" (93) with his emphasis on Djan only being one out of many Culture citizen. "Her being an *agent* is thus a paradox: Anaplian may represent SC's *agency* but she is deprived of hers" (ibid., emphasis original). Acknowledging at the same time that Djan is "far from rebelling" (ibid.) against Culture guidelines and her SC superior, Martín Alegre makes an important point which contradicts her previous statements, including the claim that Djan Seriy Anaplian was liberated from patriarchy by the Culture and now enjoys complete freedom to follow her own path (86). As becomes clear throughout the narrative, neither does Djan consider herself free and independent within the Culture nor has she completely severed ties with the Sarl. She might be freed from the ultra-patriarchal, late-medieval, misogynist society on Sursamen, which she herself calls an "idiot backwater" (M 93), but she still enters the Culture with the idea of it being her "duty" (94) because "her father had said so" (ibid.). Despite her enjoying life in a presumably egalitarian society and indulging in the joys, freedoms, and bodily enhance-

ments the Culture has to offer, she continues to write letters to her family back home to keep them updated about her development and even informs them about her career in Special Circumstances. Upon arriving in the Culture, it takes her a while to realise that she is "expected to have at least a chance of becoming part of this prestigious, if not entirely respectable organisation" (167) that is Contact. "She served with distinction for only five years […] before the invitation to join Special Circumstances arrived. […] She was reunited with the drone Turminder Xuss, who had always been intended as her companion" (172). Evidently, the Culture not only interferes with outside civilisations, it also has a distinct set of expectations towards the outsiders in its midst, which might influence and direct their behaviour on a subtler level than strict rules and regulations would. This behaviour of the Culture, on the in- and on the outside, cannot be interpreted as blatantly patriarchal, but there are unquestionable hierarchical structures within Contact and Special Circumstances, as well as imperialist tendencies towards outside civilisations. This becomes apparent and is also ironically commented on in *Matter* after Djan blows her cover on a mission and rescues the child from a rooftop full of his mother's rapists and murderers, afterwards speculating about the consequences her actions might entail:

> She was not quite yet at the level where the Minds that oversaw this sort of mission just gave her an objective and let her go with it. She was still in the last stages of training and so her behaviour was more managed, her strategy and tactics more circumscribed and her initiative given less free reign than that of the most experienced and skilled practitioners of that ultimately dark art of always well-meaning, sometimes risky and just occasionally catastrophic interference in the affairs of other civilisations. (M 79)

While the first part of the quote details the hierarchies within Special Circumstances with the Minds on top, which might be applicable to the Culture total, the last sentence can be read as a satirical comment on what has always a point of criticism concerning the Culture, intradiegetically by other civilisations and extradiegetically by some Banks scholars, namely the ethical and moral implications of having an organisation like Special Circumstances within an allegedly peaceful and egalitarian civilisation like the Culture:

> Farah Mendlesohn calls SC 'the Culture's KGB' (2005: 121), arguing that this utopia is decadent not because of its hedonism, which is its mainstay, but because of its foreign policy. […] English author Gwyneth Jones sees SC as 'the Culture's CIA' (2008: n.p. online), whereas Canadian-born Sherryl Vint suggests that 'the parallels between the Culture's imperialism as guided by its Minds and US capitalist imperialism as guided by the 'needs' of corporations provide a useful structure for generating insights into the implications of cultural imperialism' (2007: 93), of which SC is an insidious manifestation. (Martín Alegre 92)

Martín Alegre does not share the assessments of the Culture and SC she summarises here and which she uses as proof to her claim that "recent analyses of the

Culture are mostly negative, particularly those produced by women scholars" (90). She quotes Djan Anaplian, who – when faced with explicit criticism concerning the nature of SC, its interference with other civilisations and its usage of "all the dirty tricks" (M 291) – asserts that SC agents are constantly ashamed[79], but that they can "prove that it works. The interfering and the dirty-tricking; it works. Salvation is in statistics" (292). Martín Alegre seems to share this utilitarian approach to fictional intergalactic politics where the end justifies the means. She cites Banks in one of his last interviews with the journal *Foundation*, during which he asserts that the Culture "can feasibly argue that, when it does interfere, it has the best interests of the populations it is interfering with at heart" (92).

Although neither utilitarian philosophy nor having the best interest at heart redeems the Culture from accusations of imperialism with patriarchal implica-

79 The conversation takes place between Anaplian and a member of the Peace Faction who previously split from the Culture because they felt that Special Circumstances in particular employed methods too violent to be compatible with the progressive and peaceful (self-)image of the Culture, thus reasoning that they themselves represented the true spirit of the Culture. Anaplian is the reflector in this third-person narrative situation, and her reaction to her dialogue partner is completely ambiguous at first:

> 'It's still violence,' he told her. 'It's still what we ought to be above.'
> 'It can be violent,' Anaplian acknowledged, nodding slowly. […]
> 'We should be above that. Do you see?'
> 'I see.'
> 'We're strong enough as it is. Too strong. We can defend ourselves, be an example. No need to go interfering.'
> 'It is a compelling moral case you make,' Anaplian told the man solemnly.
> 'You're taking the piss now.'
> 'No, I agree.'
> 'But you're in SC. You interfere, you do all the dirty tricks stuff. You do, don't you?'
> 'We do, I do.'
> 'So don't fucking tell me it's a compelling moral case then; don't insult me.' The Peace Faction guy was quite aggressive. This amused her. (M 291)

Both the tone of the conversation and Anaplian's amusement about the man's indignation serve to ridicule the idealistic standpoint of the Peace Faction. Anaplian continues to have a half-serious, half-ironic conversation with the man, feeding into his anger until he leaves. Only when she is alone, her true feelings about the topic are shared: "Anyway, of course they worried they were doing the wrong thing. Everybody she'd ever met in SC entertained such thoughts" (293). Then, once again taking up the ironic undertone of the conversation, she asks herself if the 'Peace Faction Guy' might be an SC agent himself, sent "by the ship, or by one of the Minds overseeing the Mothanveld situation, just to be on the safe side" (ibid.), making sure that she is disarmed as promised. This turn fittingly illustrates the lack of trust and potential disempowerment she feels towards SC and plays into the image of SC as an intelligence agency furthering the Culture's imperialist tendencies.

tions, Martín Alegre remains adamant in her thesis that the Culture is indeed an antipatriarchal society:

> The word patriarchy is never used in the Culture novels but it is evident that all the civilizations inimical to this utopia are patriarchal. The first scholarly analysis of the Culture, by Simon Guerrier, calls these other societies ''masculine' communities' (1999: 33), confusing, as is habitual, patriarchy and masculinity. His claim that the Culture is a 'feminine organization' (33) defined by caring must be, therefore, read with caution for Banks's utopia is not primarily feminist but anti-patriarchal. Palmer also noted that the hedonism and tolerance of the Culture 'has a dark shadow' in empires which are 'violent, masculinist and competitive,' and, thus, similar to real-life Earth (1999: n.p. online). This key aspect of Banks's science fiction, however, remains unexplored because, as I have noted, Banks is misjudged as an implicitly patriarchal writer who only interests men. (87)

Although Martín Alegre rightly calls out the fault-prone use of 'masculinity' instead of 'patriarchy', her takeaway disregards a number of academic reviews following Guerrier and Palmer whose balanced portrayals critically assess Banks as an avant-garde writer in terms of gender portrayals, particularly those concerning themselves with the correlation of gender and violence[80], most notably Jude Roberts' "Iain M. Banks' Culture of Vulnerable Masculinities" (2014), which reasons that the Culture overcomes the gendering of the Cartesian mind-body split.

After identifying the Shellworld Sursamen as an intricate and patriarchal web of advanced civilisations, controlling less advanced species and civilisations who in turn do the same down the food chain, which results in an inherently dangerous and unstable environment of hierarchical manipulation, Martín Alegre draws the conclusion that, as a woman educated within the Culture, Djan Anaplian is the only possible solution to a problem created by patriarchal power structures:

> The plot of *Matter*, nonetheless, hinges on Banks's firm rejection of patriarchy. […] Since Anaplian's timely intervention saves Sursamen, *Matter*'s lesson is transparent: only a woman who understands patriarchy because she has become a conscious pariah (thanks to the Culture) can undo the damage done by the rigid hierarchical structure of her planet and of her home civilization. (87)

Towards the end of the narrative, Djan sacrifices herself to save Sursamen from an ancient Iln machine[81] about to destroy the inner core of the Shellworld. Djan tricks the machine into letting her get close to it while the machine is dismembering her. In the end, Anaplian is able to detonate a mini-antimatter reactor in

80 For example: Brewster (2006); Degenring (2008, 2010); Macdonald (2007).

81 The machine in question is a weapon of mass destruction constructed by the Iln, a long-vanished highly developed species who made it their mission to destroy as many of the Shellworlds as possible. During archaeological excavations on Sursamen, the ancient and disguised AI is discovered and activated. Once activated, the AI makes its way down to the core of the Shellworld, intent on destroying Sursamen.

her head, while only consisting of head and spinal cord anymore, thus destroying the Iln machine by committing suicide (M 565). In doing so, she demonstrates an act of centripetal, self-harming violence. Unlike Martín Alegre, I do not read this self-sacrifice as anti-patriarchal: what was needed in that final scene was not so much a "woman who understands patriarchy" (Martín Alegre 87) – or a woman whatsoever – as an intelligent Special Circumstances agent with an anti-matter reactor in their skull. Her self-sacrifice for the benefit of her patriarchal home world does not support the claim that the Culture as a whole is anti-patriarchal. While it might have overcome patriarchal societal structures within its civilian population, the Culture's intelligence divisions still operate on remnants of patriarchal and rather imperialist structures, as I have shown. Thus, whereas the Culture is apparently anti-patriarchal in comparison to its opponent civilisations, it is not consequently anti-patriarchal within.

Since she is an SC agent, Djan's body is potentially expendable. It can be grown back or replaced since her mind-state is backed up within the Culture. With that technology, as Jude Roberts already pointed out, the Culture abolishes the gendering of the Cartesian mind-body split. However, as Sheryl Vint claims, the mind-body split is at the same time emphasised in a society where identity relies on backed-up mind-states. Expendable bodies also potentially invite violence, particularly in a post-capitalist, post-scarcity Culture where new bodies can be produced without price or payment.

However, while Culture bodies are biologically sexed, they are not per se gendered. They can be designed to display sexual characteristics but can be altered back and forth and beyond at will. Mind-states however, or individual consciousnesses, are very much gendered in Banks' Culture novels. This might not be representative of the Culture in total, as it understands itself as egalitarian and its citizens as free in their individual identity expression, but the gross of characters readers encounter in Culture novels are Culture "insideroutsiders"[82] (Martín Alegre 89), meaning either agents that were not born into the Culture like Djan Anaplian, or Culture natives who display a certain aversion against the assumedly egalitarian values the Culture represents and sympathise with more hierarchical or patriarchal societal structures, like Zakalwe in *Use of Weapons* or the Affront-sympathetic Genar-Hofoen in *Excession*. The latter's narrative explicitly demonstrates gender as an *essential* identity marker, not to the body but to the mind (comp. chapter 6).

82 Martín Alegre borrows the term from French philosopher Martine Leibovici, who defines an 'insideroutsider' as someone who is simultaneously outside of a society and included in it, potentially being perceived as a competitor or threat by insiders, but in their liminal position able to develop analytical capacities unattainable to insiders of said society (Leibovici 91-92).

The freedom that Culture citizens experience in their (bodily) choice of gender can be termed feminist. It explicitly includes the positioning of one's body in the realm of androgyny or gender ambiguity, or completely abandoning the human form and finding bodily fulfilment in the form of a bush (like Djan's superior Jerle Batra in *Matter*, who despite a non-human exterior form is still perceived as male and referred to by masculine pronouns). The assertion that most Culture citizens revert to the physical gender expression of the gender they were assigned at birth is an acknowledgement of the human urge to find peace and stability in well-known, long-established binary categories which, in the infinite playground of galaxy-spanning science-fiction worlds, do not necessarily serve a practical purpose anymore but are more of a remnant of old times, unfortunately supporting the reemergence of binary gender stereotypes.

8.2 Strong Woman Archetype

Martín Alegre's assessment that "[w]ith Anaplian's deeds Banks shows that often the fate of patriarchal civilizations depends on the generosity of women" (95) rings true insofar that Banks' fictions repeatedly rely on the generosity (and intelligence) of female protagonists to prevent catastrophes, solve problems, end systemic violence, transform patriarchal societies, and transform the mindsets of regressive male protagonists. *Consider Phlebas*' Perosteck Balveda falls into this category, as does Diziet Sma in *Use of Weapons* and *State of the Art*. As powerless-princess-turned-powerful-protector, Djan builds the bridge between other powerful but generously self-sacrificing female SC agents like Sma and Balveda on the one hand and victim-turned-avenger women like *Surface Detail*'s Lededje and Dajeil from *Excession* on the other hand.

Banks' Culture series thus establishes its own 'strong woman archetype', portraying women whose endurance, resilience, and generosity allow for them to fix the mess left behind by male Culture ambassadors, hired mercenaries, ultra-patriarchal societies, and other 'morally' misguided individuals. Like Djan Anaplian, these women are allowed to use *legitimised* physical violence as means to an end: for example, to kill rapists and other violent masculine transgressors, to save children, and to sacrifice themselves to save others.

Considering the traditional roles female characters played in SF until the 1980s, Banks' 'strong woman archetype' can be considered progressive in comparison:

> Since Genre SF developed in a patriarchal culture as something written chiefly by men for men (or boys), the lack of female protagonists is unsurprising. When women do appear they are usually defined by their relationship to the male characters, as objects to

> be desired or feared, rescued or destroyed; often, especially in recent, more sexually explicit times, women characters exist only to validate the male protagonist as acceptably masculine – that is, heterosexual. Before the 1970s even Women SF Writers tended to reflect the prevailing view about women's place by writing about men's adventures in future worlds where women stayed home to work the control panels in automated kitchens. (Tuttle n.p.)

In her science fiction anthology entry "Women in SF", Lisa Tuttle summarises that SF novels experienced an increase of public interest and favourable criticism from the 1960s onwards, as it was "increasingly seen to have the potential to explore serious human issues" (ibid.). As the 'New Wave' of science fiction writers began to disregard or even oppose the gender stereotypes manifested in the pulp magazine era, and sales numbers started to rocket, SF became more interesting for female readers and writers, and "the role of female characters in sf became more important not only for aesthetic, personal or political reasons but also for commercial ones: surveys have shown that more women than men buy books, so a would-be bestseller cannot afford to alienate the female audience" (ibid.). Inspired by the 'New Wave' in science fiction and space opera, Banks set out to "challenge the stereotypical constructions" (Bogstad 170) of the Golden Age and pulp magazine era:

> As a leading figure in New Space Opera, Banks was well aware of his responsibility to correct this pattern. Banks told Jude Roberts in 2010 that he was very concerned with the way he represented female characters in his writing, and always made an 'attempt to redress the (im)balance' he found 'in so much other fiction or other fictive media.' Furthermore, Banks intended the Culture itself to be a 'post-sexist' society that has eradicated gender inequality and patriarchy. (Norman, *The Culture of "The Culture"*144)

Banks' attempt to redress the imbalance resulted in creating strong, morally upright female protagonists opposite morally questionable male (anti-)heroes whose (postmortem) salvation is oftentimes dependent on the generosity of said women.

"The Strong Female Character trope often shows us the 'underlying deficit of respect the character starts with, which she's then required to overcome […] – just to bring herself up to the man's level" (Cristea n.p.). Female Culture operatives like Diziet Sma and Djan Anaplian overcome this "deficit of respect" (s.a.) by openly displaying their use of physical violence and by demonstrating their power via status[83]. In contrast,

> [t]here is no such thing as a Strong Male Character, it is just assumed that the male characters are inherently strong. This is largely due to the patriarchal society we live in.

83 Their status as Special Circumstances operatives distinguishes them from the rest of the Culture citizens, therefore challenging the supposedly egalitarian character of the civilisation. Many Culture citizens aspire to work for Contact or Special Circumstances, both giving the air of elite clubs while many outsiders to these 'elite clubs', like the members of the Peace Faction, despise these institutions altogether.

> Often when a female character is described as being 'strong,' we associate her traits to masculine ideas of strength – power, aggression, warrior. (Gonzales 7)

While Sma and Anaplian are powerful warriors *for the right cause*, dutifully managing rogue mercenaries (Sma) and single-handedly saving a whole world from destruction (Anaplian), others start their journey towards the strong woman archetype by an initial victimisation which needs to be overcome. Thus, the strong woman archetype is potentially transferable to Banks' novels set outside the Culture series: *Whit*'s Isis is responsible for leading her grandfather's community into a better future after uncovering his deceit and enduring his sexual assault as well as her brother's betrayal. In *Canal Dreams*, protagonist Hisako turns into a bloodthirsty avenger after surviving the mass execution of her fellow travellers and being a victim of severe sexual assault.

In *The Business*, high-up manager Kate starts out as the strong woman, dominating the businessmen around her, treating sex as a commodity, but also receiving unwanted sexual attention by 'Uncle Freddy', who is a higher-up in her firm and thus wields patriarchal power over her. At the end of the narrative, she decides to give up her position in favour of a matrimonial life, but she is at the same time providing a critical meta-commentary about this 'counter-feminist' life-choice:

> What *is* this shit? Because in one way of looking at it, this is just another example of the same old sad self-sacrificial martyrdom crap I've lamented in my gender throughout my life. We have spent so many generations thinking of others, thinking of our families and thinking of our men, when all they do in return is think of themselves. Just in the last few generations, finally able to control our own fertility, have we been able to act more like men and contribute more with our brains than our bodies. I loved being part of that. I loved feeling that I was helping to make a case for my half of the species being worth more recognition than that due to a womb alone. And yet here I am going back on all that, or seeming to. (B 388-389)

To be strong, economically successful, and socially powerful in this world, according to Kate women have to be "able to act more like men and contribute more with [their] brains than [their] bodies" (ibid.). Analysing *The Wasp Factory*, *The Business*, and *Whit* with an emphasis on gender representation, Sarah Falcus concludes that whereas "[t]here is a clear desire in these novels for women to be seen as just as strong, if not stronger, than the men around them, reversing the traditional binary of gender associations", "the positions of equality, if not dominance, achieved by these women are based upon traditionally male attributes such as strength, power and resourcefulness, and success is measured in competitive terms" (Falcus 126).

As ascertained before, the reversal of gender stereotypes, or gender associations in this context, does not equal their subversion or deconstruction. Whereas Banks' novels do depict strong and determined women, which, as Fal-

cus points out, "might suggest that Banks is insistent on a simplicist position of gender equality" (123), these women must achieve power by sacrificing "the specificity of feminine experience in favor of the valorization of stereotypically male values" (Falcus 126).

On the one hand, Banks' novels critically address (and forefront) the inequality and gendered violence inherent in patriarchal societies and their effects on interpersonal relationships. The counternarrative they offer in contrast to patriarchal power structures puts emphasis on 'feminine' values, feminised (emotional) intelligence, and traits such as compassion and respectfulness in contrast to dominance and control. At the same time, Banks' Culture is understood as an egalitarian society that has overcome scarcity and sexism alike. In a civilisation where everybody can be anybody, where anybody can choose their sex (and gender) as they please, there is no need for discrimination and inequality, or so the plan. However, the plots take us to the fringes of the Culture, foregrounding the work of Special Circumstances operatives in (potential) warzones, where they try to charm, manipulate, or extort their opponents into doing 'the right thing'. Male agents working for Special Circumstances are mostly social outsiders, like champion game-player Gurgeh in *Player of Games*, who accepts his remote post because he is the victim of extortion by a cunning SC drone and unwittingly stumbles into the game of Azad, which decides the future of the ultra-patriarchal empire. Gurgeh is used for his skills and played upon by SC instrumentalising his position as a social 'oddball' within the Culture; he leaves as an 'unreconstructed' male and returns to the Culture reformed. In *Use of Weapons*, SC this time employs a Culture outsider, psychopath Elethiomel/Zakalwe[84], for his manifold combat experience and war skills. While the Culture uses male 'insideroutsiders' for their strengths, also exploiting defective moral compasses, all the while offering a path to redemption and to 'reformed' masculinity, female operatives like Balveda in *Consider Plebas*, Sma in *Use of Weapons* and *State of the Art*, and Anaplian in *Matter* have to walk a tightrope between displaying feminised compassion as well as an intact moral compass on the one hand and masculinised combative strength as well as the use of physical violence on the other hand. The desired situational fulfilment of masculine and feminine gender stereotypes leaves little opportunity for subversive exploration of the spaces between and outside the gender binary. To prove their value and to assert themselves in the faces of their opponents, female operatives have to exert patriarchal

84 He returns in *Surface Detail* as the soldier Vatueil, dying thousands of virtual deaths in order to find a successful combat strategy to destroy the substrate of the virtual hells. This indicates that he may be striving for absolution by giving his life over and over again in an effort to realise the Culture's goals, while the Culture is officially not involved in the military struggle over the virtual hells.

power. As Cristea laments, "if we're constantly expecting these strong women to be – let's face it – female incarnations of our rudimentary SFF heroes (traditionally and typically male)[…][, h]ow are we supposed to really start demonstrating realistic characters?" (Cristea n.p.). Still, in Banks' oeuvre, women must not be too threatening; their usage of masculinised violence and methods of manipulation and domination has to remain situational so that their feminised traits of compassion, morality, generosity, and non-violence can remain the flagship of the Culture on the outside. The Culture's trademark idealisation of 'feminine values' makes it a child of what Merrick and Tuttle call the 1980s 'feminised SF':

> In one of the first detailed studies of the topic, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988 […]), Sarah Lefanu makes a distinction between feminist sf and 'feminized sf'. The latter, she argues, while it challenges established sexism by valuing women and feminine values over men and masculinity and has been an important influence on the development of sf as a whole, does not dispute the man/woman paradigm or question the construction of gender as more radical feminist writings do. (Merrick and Tuttle, "Feminism" n.p.)

While Banks' Culture novels, as well as his whole oeuvre, situationally go to considerable lengths to challenge established sexism, even if only by portraying a sexist character in a highly unsympathetic way or by (violently) punishing them for their regressive beliefs and politics, in the end, Banks' novels tend to reinstate the dichotomous construction of man and woman, male and female, masculine and feminine, including the binary ascription of gender to behaviours and emotions. Since patriarchal power structures greatly rely on the binary construction of sex and gender, a lasting deconstruction of said binary would be necessary for the Culture, and for the whole of Banks' oeuvre, to be truly anti-patriarchal.

9. Conclusion

In this study, I set out to provide a comprehensive analysis of gender in its interconnection with violence in Iain Banks' fiction and to take a stand on the prevalent assessment of his works as 'progressive' in terms of gender portrayal. Following Kincaid as well as Cox and Colebrook, my study bridged the established separation of Banks' science fiction and 'mainstream' works; although I leaned more on the examination of Banks' science fiction series, since qua genre the Culture is promised to offer a greater possibility for new and creative gender representations.

After providing the state of research on the topic and outlining my interdisciplinary approach to a qualitative literary analysis, I gave an overview of the genres most frequently connected to Banks' fiction, including an introduction to gender stereotypes that emerged within these genres. The introduction of these generic stereotypes overall proved fruitful to my analyses. Banks' novels repeatedly pick up on the SF trope of the masculine space cowboy, the man on a mission, as can be seen in *Consider Phlebas*, *Use of Weapons*, *Player of Games*, and *Excession*. Most of these male space cowboys remain unreconstructed and unreformed, whether their stereotypical gender performance is ironically called out (as is the case with Genar-Hofoen in *Excession*) or sanctioned by fate, often through a violent death (as is the case with Horza in *Consider Phlebas*). *Use of Weapons* demonstrates that even if a male space cowboy is beyond reformation, he can still be used as a tool to advance the Culture's political interests. In *Player of Games*, the reformed and now Culture-adequate masculinity of protagonist Gurgeh gains him his stereotypical prize: (sexual) access to the female character who rejected him before. She is representative of a common SF, fairy tale, and fantasy trope: the woman as prize to be won after successful completion of the quest.

Banks' SF and 'mainstream' novels also frequently employ the stereotypical damsel-in-distress trope originating in fairy tale and fantasy. Whereas Djan Anaplian's story in *Matter* only starts with a damsel-in-distress trope, other female characters revisit or remain in that category throughout the narrative, such as GF in *Transition*, Lededje in *Surface Detail*, or Dajeil in *Excession*. The trope is oftentimes connected to an initial victimisation of the respective female character, either physical or psychological, which is used to cement their stereotypical gender role. Whereas male characters' rites of passage are characterised by the use of violence, female characters predominantly find themselves as the victims thereof in Banks' novels. To be able to investigate this correlation, I introduced a range of theories on gender in chapter 3 of my study.

Developing Goffman's perception of gender as the basis for a binary distinction of social roles and spheres for men and women, West and Zimmerman do not see gender as the property of individuals but as "an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements" (126), serving to legitimise societal divisions. According to this rationale, I set out to analyse gender and gender performances in selected social situations and different societies in Banks' works, often encountering heteronormative romance plots. In analysing these, I referred to Judith Butler's exemplification of the heterosexual matrix, as well as her concept of heteronormativity, which is never truly challenged in Banks' works, despite the gender-bending potential that is offered by the Culture series in particular. On the contrary, many of the plots reproduce the sort of gender essentialism Butler critically refers to in her preface to *Gender Trouble*, explaining that we see gender "operat[ing] as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates" (xv). This is particularly relevant to most of the romance plots in the Culture series, where characters display stereotypical gender performances in opposition to each other, whereas separately they might have carried subversive potential.

To fully explore the dominant conjunction between gender and violence in Banks' oeuvre, I introduced sociological, criminological, and psychological theories to my examination of femininity and masculinity. In this context, it was important to recognise that the body plays a central role in the social construction of gender and sexuality and is often essential in matters of social domination and violence (Messerschmidt 41). Representations of femininity and masculinity have always been shaped by cultural and societal constructs, and they are often equated with or compared to other dichotomies and binary oppositions, such as nature and culture, reinforcing stereotypical gender norms and expectations. Historically, violence is connected to masculine power and authority, while femininity is, at best, associated with passive and self-harming forms of violence. While men are socialised towards violence, which is encouraged and rewarded in various ways, women who engage in physical violence challenge societal norms and are only socially sanctioned to express their 'deviant' behaviour when relativising factors such as a prior victimisation apply. As Bereswill states, it is important to recognise that violence, including sexualised violence, does not have a gender, whereas its appropriation and exertion are deeply gendered ("Sich auf eine Seite schlagen" 112). Gendering the appropriation, the exertion, and the processing of violence is a vital factor in the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies, such as the patriarchy. Thus, an analysis of sexualised violence in particular must be conducted within the framework of the corresponding societal structures. In Banks' Culture novels, the social hierar-

chies within which sexualised violence occurs are ultra-patriarchal and systemically sexist civilisations the Culture stands in opposition to: the Affront, Sichult, the empire of Azad, Sarl, and numerous other unnamed societies. In his non-sf novels, families, religious cults, international companies, hospitals, and a psych ward are the sites of sexualised violence and assault – thus accumulating environments which are subjected to strict patriarchal hierarchies, or are containing potential pools of victims unable to defend themselves. And although that in itself can be read as an explicit criticism of (violent) patriarchal structures, in their manner of depiction these scenes reaffirm many stereotypical gender expectations. Throughout my analyses of gender and violence in Banks' novels, I repeatedly recurred to Bourdieu's explication of masculine domination to show how deeply violence is ingrained in the patriarchal prowess of being a man and how "soft violence" (*Masculine Domination* 32) does not eradicate patriarchal structures but rather supports dominant stereotypes of femininity, thus rendering feminised violence and the majority of female violent offenders innocuous. Furthermore, I have referred to Dornberg's stereotypically binary categorisation of centrifugal violence (which he masculinises) and centripetal violence (which he feminises) several times, because his approach can be applied to the stereotypical gendering of violence in most of Banks' novels and serves to highlight the potentially regressive depiction of gender in the novels of an author who is celebrated as progressive in terms of gender portrayal.

In *The Wasp Factory*, Frank sets the bar high as the original gender bender in Banks' oeuvre. Schoene-Harwood was the one to start to celebrate the gender-subversive potential of the novel, and many critics followed. Banks' first published novel can be read as a strong criticism of the manipulable construct that gender identity is. Frank's character challenges societal norms and questions the construction of gender. In the end, the acceptance of a new gender identity potentially allows for a non-violent lifestyle, but it also highlights the perversion of Frank's violent actions as a result of an 'unnatural' gender transgression. Ultimately, Frank's final declaration of still being the same person emphasises the impact of individual decisions against gendered predeterminations and challenges the perception of gendered violence.

Instead of continuing to critically interrogate gender norms and performances, the following Culture and non-Culture novels reproduce the masculine gender stereotype that was critically addressed in *The Wasp Factory* and establish the exertion or endurance of violence as inherent necessity for the characters' gender performance. In *Consider Phlebas*, Horza is depicted as a conquering space cowboy, killing without hesitation to fulfil his mission and to maintain patriarchal power hierarchies. In his character conception, Horza displays the way in which violence and risk-taking are tied to constructions of hegemonic

masculinity. In relation to him, potentially gender-subversive characters like his love interest Yalson and the Culture agent Balveda demonstrate stereotypical gender performances and feminised forms of violence. However, (compared to Horza,) Yalson and Balveda present more complex and less stereotypical gender performances, which challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes. Ultimately, Horza's fate can be read as a critical commentary on gender stereotypes, with his traditional masculinity proving obsolete and the Culture triumphing over the masculine stereotype that is presented by the Idirans. However, the novel still presents heteronormative romance plots and upholds the traditional gender binary despite the virtually unlimited possibilities offered by the science-fiction setting.

In my analysis of *Excession*, I set out to explore the gender-subversive potential of Amorphia, the intentionally androgynous, 'sexless' avatar to a powerful Culture ship. Amorphia has an unsettling effect on the humans it interacts with because the avatar's physique and choice of clothes resist a binary gender classification, leading to other characters being unable to predict Amorphia's behaviour according to traditional gender norms. The avatar does, at first, challenge the other characters' (and the readers') reliance on gender as a dichotomous concept. However, the narrative connects Amorphia's androgyny to lifelessness and death on the one hand and relativises it on the other hand by emphasising the fact that it is a dependent entity, only representing one possible embodiment of an infinitely intelligent and ambiguous Culture mind, and thus separated from the realm of human gender performance. In contrast to Amorphia, I analysed the relationship dynamic of Byr Genar-Hofoen and Dajeil, who started out as a traditionally heterosexual couple, moved through changes of their respective biological sex to facilitate mutual impregnation of either person, and seemingly ended up as a biologically female homosexual couple until their violent separation. My analysis highlighted the way in which Byr Genar-Hofoen maintained a both stereotypically masculine and sexist gender performance during his time as biologically female person, cheating on his partner Dajeil, verbally abusing her, and denying her pain. In comparison, Dajeil's use of physical violence in aborting Byr's foetus is relativised and feminised by her prior victimisation and her following 40-year-long stagnation in the last weeks before carrying her child to full term. Thus, the subversive potential of this SF novel is scarcely realised in terms of gender roles and performance, despite the potentially progressive setup.

Combining and expanding the findings of the previous chapters, the cross-sectional analysis in chapter 7 focussed on sexualised violence in selected science-fiction and mainstream novels. Here, I clustered my analyses to be able to first summarise and compare instances of victimisation and repression of female

characters that were systemically embedded in the social structures of their respective civilisations. Analysing three Culture novels, *Player of Games*, *Excession*, and *Surface Detail*, it became evident that the Culture positioned itself strongly against these sexist and patriarchal civilisations with the intent of containing them, reforming them from within, or bringing about their downfall. What is essential in this context is the planting of Special Circumstances agents and freelancers, mostly Culture 'insideroutsiders' close to or within these civilisations. However, the male agents found in these positions are often a liability to the Culture themselves, sharing or sympathising with the violently sexist politics of the societies the Culture positions itself against. These male characters must then be reformed morally, which is not successful in most cases, and concerning their gender performances, while most female characters suffer systemic sexualised violence and struggle to deal with or escape their victimisation. If their escape succeeds, they are culturally sanctioned to exercise their revenge in response to their prior victimisation. Whenever they actively employ physical violence, however, their agency remains limited and they frequently depend on male or masculine-presenting agents to exercise their revenge.

To examine the possibility of inverting the ever-present masculine domination in these analyses, I examined socially and economically powerful as well as sexually dominant female characters in *Transition*, *A Song of Stone*, *Use of Weapons*, and *The State of the Art*. Whereas those characters all used sex as means for manipulation and domination and thus succumbed to a popular feminine stereotype, none of them made use of sexualised violence, given that all sexual encounters were consensual. I did not find evidence for female domination on a systemic or societal level and was thus unable to invert Bourdieu's concept of masculine domination. However, the pattern strongly emerging was that female sexuality lived out openly was portrayed as unusual within the narrative and perceived as threatening by the characters' social environments, particularly if combined with the intent to manipulate others towards own political gains or to extend one's power. Thus, while dominant and sexually active characters of either sex are often villainised in Banks' novels, male characters can predominantly indulge in patriarchal ideas of ownership and systemically embedded practices of sexualised violence, while female characters are individualised and depicted as manipulative and *other*, but their actions remain mostly inconsequential to patriarchal power structures.

Due to the accumulation of incest narratives in Banks' oeuvre, my subsequent cross-sectional analysis focussed on the intersection of gender and violence within dysfunctional family relations, examining both instances of consensual incestuous affairs and cases of sexualised violence and rape. While analysing scenes from *A Song of Stone*, *Use of Weapons*, *The Steep Approach to Gar-*

badale, *Walking on Glass*, *Whit*, and *Transition*, a few patterns concerning the intersection of gendered violence and incest occurred. In *Transition*, the sexual violation of GF at the hands of her father is just a backdrop to The Philosopher's coming-of-age narrative, one of several instances in Banks' oeuvre where the victimisation of a female character enables a male character to embark on a hero's journey – although the ways in which many of them act out their heroism or revenge are depicted in a manner that allows for a critical interrogation of the masculine ideals they enact, as is the case for The Philosopher, who is a prime example of Banks' unlikeable characters. The male protagonists of *A Song of Stone*, *Use of Weapons*, and *Whit* are similarly unlikeable; here, the incest motif serves to mark them as defective and destabilising to the social order. Even if the occurrences of incestuous affairs are based on mutual consent, the non-consensual violent execution of most sexual encounters undermines the former agreement and evokes gothic motifs of sexual transgression, endangering social structures and marking the family as dysfunctional. On the receiving end of these transgressions there are mostly silent women, enduring their brothers', cousins', or (grand-)fathers' attempts at sexualised domination. Some of them just vanish from the narrative, some are violently punished for their partaking in the sexual transgressions, and some are forced to act responsibly, holding families and communities together, as is the case in *Whit*. Frequently, the narrative invites a critical position towards these male characters and invites the reader to identify with the females, although the manner of depiction is ambiguous insofar as it also reproduces sexist stereotypes on both ends of the binary, even if, in the end, male characters are punished and female characters assume the responsibility over their communities.

Examining a common motif in literature and media that was frequently discernible in my analyses before, I examined the victim-turned-avenger topos in rape-revenge narratives. Julia Reifenberger's monography *Girls with Guns* was essential to understand gender stereotypes within this predominantly cinematographic subgenre, since she pointed out that the excessive violence displayed was furthering the male gaze instead of promoting the victim-turned-avenger's perspective. Thus, the female protagonist, enacting her violent revenge, caters to the way a man would perhaps imagine himself behaving after being raped, which is readily applicable to *Canal Dreams*' protagonist Hisako. Revisiting *Transition* under these premises resulted in the identification of The Philosopher's revenge on GF's father as an egocentric rite of passage, which he is punished for towards the end of the narrative. Concluding the examination of the topos with *Inversions*, it became clear that this novel stood out from the rest due to its careful and immersive handling of sexualised violence and female agency represented in the conversations between Perrund, the rape victim, and DeWar,

bodyguard to her rapist. Despite the heteronormative fairy tale ending, Perrund is the only female victim of sexualised violence in Banks' oeuvre who openly reflects on her traumatisation, her hatred, and her desperation, and therefore presents as a rounded character not easily succumbing to gendered genre or topoi stereotypes.

In my concluding analysis of male victims of sexualised violence, *Transition*'s protagonist Temudjin Oh, alias patient 8262, echoes Perrund's unusually insightful dealings by being at the receiving end of sexual assaults, broken by postmodern forms of satire and ironic detachment. However, all novels analysed under this premise (*The Bridge*, *Complicity*, and *Transition*) clearly demonstrated that the perceived 'feminisation' going along with being subjected to sexualised violence poses an integral threat to the masculine identity that must be fought off or rectified at all costs. Whereas *The Bridge* and *Transition* mirror the perspective of the male protagonists being assaulted, in *Complicity* the narrative sides with the perpetrator's point of view, making the readers complicit and alienating them from the victim (a judge who demonstrated leniency towards rapists) via sarcastic depictions of the assault. Here, the literary depiction of a male-on-male sexual assault can be read as a tool to critically address the inherent sexism of the patriarchal establishment of 1980s Britain.

In the final part of my analysis, I took a stand on Sara Martín Alegre's claim that the Culture is anti-patriarchal. Whereas Martín Alegre bases her assessment predominantly on her reading of *Matter*, more precisely on the character conception of the female protagonist and Culture 'insideroutsider' Djan Anaplian, I could also refer to the findings of my previous analyses (chapters 5.4, 6.3, 7). Conceptualising patriarchy alongside Bourdieu's masculine domination and Connell's hegemonic masculinity, with a special emphasis on the distribution of power in patriarchal hierarchies, I traced remnants of patriarchal structures within the Culture's intelligence sections Contact and Special Circumstances. I highlighted the difference between the Culture acting in an anti-patriarchal manner in comparison to opponent civilisations, which is the basis to Martín Alegre's claim, and being consequently anti-patriarchal within. Demonstrating how female SC operatives must assert patriarchal power, I returned to Sarah Falcus' assessment that within Banks' oeuvre, SF and non-SF alike, 'strong' women dominate by taking over a masculinised habitus. Thus, strength in female characters is presented by character traits and behaviour traditionally associated with masculinity. Outlining that while Banks' 'strong women' might still be progressive compared to depictions of women in the majority of 1980s SF, they tend to not lastingly eradicate or subvert patriarchal structures.

Apart from the 'strong woman archetype' I established in my analyses, whose use of physical violence is legitimised as means to an end and often in-

cludes a self-sacrifice of sorts, I discovered other patterns in the fate of female victims of sexualised violence, grouping them under the terms *transcending*, *caring*, and *vanishing* (cf. chapter 7.6).

Whereas Banks' fiction can be said to aim at modernising and diversifying traditional representations of masculinity, often sanctioning the misogynistic behaviour of male characters through their violent demise or complete eradication, the sheer number of female characters subjected to sexualised violence severely limits the subversive potential that the depicted forms of gender transgressions hold. Coming back to the Foucauldian 'flash', which highlights the impermanence of transgression and the reinstitution of the limit or boundary transgressed (Foucault 34), Banks' 'transgressions' in the realms of sex and gender lastly cannot destabilise the traditional gender binary or completely eradicate (patriarchal) hierarchical structures.

Violence remains a central element in constructing and maintaining of gender in Banks' novels, and the violence displayed is almost always deeply gendered. Gender transgressions in both SF and 'mainstream' novels are oftentimes superseded by normatively gendered violence. Contrary to the progressive world- and society-building potential inherent in science fiction as a genre, and despite every Culture individuals' ability to change sex at will, Banks' Culture novels present themselves (particularly in their outcome) as more conservative concerning gender than the rest of his novels, which can partially realise a less restrictive and more playful approach to the topic.

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Examining the complex interrelations between gender and violence in the works of Iain Banks, the study focusses on both his mainstream and science fiction novels. It critically analyses how gender roles are portrayed in Banks' novels, and how this portrayal interacts with acts of violence. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, the study is drawing from sociology, psychology, and philosophy.

Gender and Violence in Iain Banks' Fiction includes a cross-sectional study of sexualised violence in Banks' works, examining how sexualised violence is used to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. While Banks' works frequently highlight the inequality and violence inherent in patriarchal societies, they often fall short of fully subverting traditional gender binaries. The recurring theme of gendered violence, whether in the form of physical or psychological abuse, underscores the persistent influence of patriarchal norms.

The study provides a thorough analysis of the complex interplay between gender and violence in Iain Banks' fiction. It highlights both the subversive potential and the limitations of Banks' gender portrayals, offering a nuanced perspective on the ways in which literature can both challenge and reinforce societal norms. It underscores the importance of critically examining gender representations in literary works to understand their impact on broader cultural discourses.

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