

*Dams Burst:
Devolving Gender in Iain Banks's
"The Wasp Factory"*

BERTHOLD SCHOENE-HARWOOD

ANY WORK OF literature written by an author born or bred in Scotland is inevitably vetted for traces of a distinctive, typical Scottishness to see if it merits incorporation into the canon of Scottish national literature. The Scottish literary establishment still tends to concern itself primarily with the question of national identification at the expense of other, perhaps more fundamentally identity-bearing issues that have started to emerge in contemporary Scottish writing, such as gender, sexuality and non-white/non-Scottish ethnicity. Even the problematic of class, which—since James Kelman—has become a hallmark of Scottish literature, does not seem realized in its full complexity within the framework of a nationalist agenda inclined to regard a person's middle or upper-class status as categorically indicative of their Englishness or at least compromisingly anglicized disposition. It seems as if in Scotland critical writing has so far largely failed to catch up with the exponentially increasing diversification of its creative counterpart. Contemporary Scottish literature, authored by both women and men, riddles the traditionalist conception of national identity as definitive self-containment, bombarding the myth of closure with a self-conscious proliferation of ambivalence and heterogeneity. Iain Banks's first novel, *The Wasp Factory*, first published in 1984, is part of this new tradition in Scottish writing, protesting that Scotland's imminent secession from England must not result in the creation of yet another insular monolith but give birth to a vibrant communal conglomerate, aware of its own constitutive self-and-otherness and appreciative of the nation's affiliative

dependency on a wide spectrum of fully emancipated, both internal and external, others.

The neo-Gothic design of Banks's novel, its macabre celebration of violence, horror and death, is not an end in itself but aims to unmask the fraudulence of the old order and, ultimately, to demolish the Law of the Father by probing the subliminal turmoil that both upholds and potentially subverts it. 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 but is in itself a derivative of social conditioning. The chief objective of Banks's narrative is a deconstruction of traditional gender formations that present themselves as manifestations of a congenital inevitability. In unison with Judith Butler's theorizing of gender as a performative "imitation without an origin," which can only perpetuate itself by hazardously disclosing its own immateriality, *The Wasp Factory* eventually releases its central characters, Frank and Eric, into "a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization—depriv[ing] hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (Butler 138).

Banks's novel reverberates with allusions to a wide variety of classic literary masculinities—from *Frankenstein*, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Turn of the Screw* to *Lord of the Flies* and *A Clockwork Orange*—all of which dismantle themselves in light of Banks's central coup of presenting his readers with a typical boy's tale whose hero is *really* a girl. At the novel's climax Frank realizes that he has lived his whole life in drag: "I'm not Francis Leslie Cauldhame. I'm Frances Lesley Cauldhame. That's what it boils down to" (181). Far from natural or authentic, his assumption of masculinity turns out to be a monstrous impersonation synthesized by his Frankensteinian father, "a doctor of chemistry, or perhaps biochemistry—I'm not sure" (14). Expertly parodying psychoanalytic theories about the child's inevitable submission to patriarchal law and its symbolic order of phallogentric gender

differentiation, Banks shows how Frank's sense of self is warped, virtually beyond repair, by his father's arbitrary fabrication of a castration complex. At the age of three, so his father's story goes, Frank was maimed by the family's pet dog, an incident of spurious authenticity that leaves the child traumatized by penis envy. The now male-identified girl begins to deny and discriminate against her own femaleness, which embarrasses her as an "unfortunate disability" (17). The boy she becomes, on the other hand, appears as a manufactured, entirely fictitious creation, obsessively overcompensating for a patriarchally inflicted lack of natural manliness by pursuing an extremist ideal of violent masculine perfection. However, despite his apparent endorsement of a constructionist theorizing of gender, Banks refuses ultimately to commit himself to any one definitive explanation of Frank's behaviour in terms of either nature or nurture. Frank's ultra-violence may be motivated by his detrimental internalization of traditional gender norms. Alternatively, it may be triggered by the male hormones Frank unwittingly imbibes with the food his father prepares for him.

Predictably, the parodic multi-layeredness of Banks's novel—all of whose central protagonist's efforts at manly self-assertion are ironically undermined by their own intrinsic deviancy as a girl's appropriation of allegedly natural masculine behaviour—has never once been interpreted in terms of gender. Rather, reviewers and critics alike have shown themselves eager to integrate *The Wasp Factory* into the Scottish literary tradition, emphasizing its generic resemblances with other canonical texts instead of meeting the challenge of its profoundly subversive, deconstructive potential. In a typical manoeuvre to manage the novel's bizarre oddity, Thom Nairn quickly resuscitates the stereotyping myth of the "Caledonian antiszygy," first introduced by Gregory Smith in 1919 to describe the recurrent dichotomy of the realist and fantastic modes in Scottish fiction and ever since applied as a term of critical convenience that explains the occurrence of practically any kind of contradiction, incongruence or irreconcilability in Scottish literary representation. Insensitive to the possible gender-specificity of the *doppelgänger* motif, Nairn perpetuates the given paradigm of traditional Scottish criticism

which—seemingly impervious to strategies of appropriation, parody or subversion—concentrates exclusively on pointing up traces of historical continuity and national self-constancy. “Potential schisms in the individual (schisms piled on schisms of all kinds) are constantly present in Banks’s fiction,” Nairn writes, “making it comparable to R. L. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*—or Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark*” (129). Interestingly, Adrienne Scullion suggests that this inferiorist, pathologicistic imaging of Scotland as “a culture of madness, or at least mental and emotional instability” may in fact be motivated by attempts to both obscure and contain “society’s fear of the *unheimlich* aspects of the feminine” (201). Perhaps it is even more plausible to argue that the conspicuous popularity of the *doppelgänger* motif in both creative and critical Scottish writing, and men’s writing especially, discloses the Scottish male’s fear not only of a feminine other but also—more significantly—his own intrinsic self-and-otherness, or “effeminacy.”

Within the imperial framework of English-Scottish relations, the Scottish male is already feminized as a disempowered native (br)other.¹ His condition is one of subordinate marginalization which, whilst sensitizing him to the plights of the systemically oppressed, makes it all the more important for him to disassociate himself from the female in order not to compromise his masculinity even further. The result is a psychic split expressing itself in precarious and highly conflictual assertions of the self’s integrity, continuously embattled and destabilized by its own irrepressible alterity. Scottish masculinity occupies no fixed position of indisputable social hegemony but is caught up in continuous oscillation between the diametrically opposed sites of (post)colonial marginality on the one hand and patriarchal dominance on the other. This simultaneous inferiority and superiority make an uneasy blend, highlighting Scottish men’s complicity with a system of oppression whilst, at the same time, necessitating their commitment to counterdiscursive resistance. This quandary appears to find an apt analogy in the odd brotherhood of Eric and Frank in *The Wasp Factory*, which features 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).

As Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin's innovative exploration of the literary metaphors of masculinity suggests, Eric's conspicuous absence from most of Banks's narrative may in itself already signal an exaggerative assertion of the phallic principle in *The Wasp Factory*. Flannigan argues that "masculinity as it expresses itself within patriarchy derives from a very selective and partial conception and experience of the male body [that] makes masculinity monolithic, seemingly without contradiction" (241). Delineating "another bio-logic" (246) that would displace the penis/phallus and (re)inscribe the testicles, he proposes a radical reconception of the traditional male body image and its symbolism. While it is, perhaps, only natural for men to identify with the phallic, they are patriarchally conditioned to do so exclusively, at the expense of the testicular mode, which a man experiences when he is "nurturing, incubating, containing, and protecting" (250). To reach perfect bodily and mental completeness a man must remove "the steel fig leaf" (254) and discover himself as constituted by both the phallic and the testicular. Interestingly, according to Flannigan, the two different modes of manly being "have been historically depicted as complementary in varying degrees in male 'couples' in fiction and myth" (252). Comprising a wide range of examples from Achilles and Patroclus to Superman and Clark Kent, Flannigan's list could easily be continued by adding the brotherhood of Frank and Eric. Ideally, a man ought to reconcile the phallic and testicular modes within his own being. However, since in patriarchy the testicular is often ironically perceived as a set of emasculating qualities, the hero is mimetically disassociated from his *testifying* companion who authenticates his friend's masculine stature at the same time as he infiltrates it with a permanent risk of compromise and potential subversion. Accordingly, Eric's gradual return from the deep recesses of Banks's narrative can perhaps be read as indicative of the imminent disintegration of Frank's insular cultivation of an excessively phallic masculinity.

Parallel to the representations of other phallic/testicular male couples in men's writing (for example, Ralph and Jack in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*), Eric and Frank crucially complement each other's realizations of masculinity. Only superficially does Banks perpetrate a confrontation of two different discourses: one of heroic normality, the other of psychopathic madness. Despite Frank's resolute assertion that "[Eric] is mad and I am sane" (118), reinforced by his authority as the novel's first-person narrator, the brothers appear in fact to be equally disturbed. Moreover, as Frank himself acknowledges at one point, their insanity is shown to reflect the systematic perversity that is encouraged, even necessitated, by the societal order in which they live:

The madder people. A lot of them seem to be leaders of countries or religions or armies. The real loonies.

... Or maybe they're the only sane ones. After all, they're the ones with all the power and riches. They're the ones who get everybody else to do what they want them to do, like die for them and work for them and get them into power and protect them and pay taxes and buy them toys, and they're the ones who'll survive another big war, in their bunkers and tunnels. (112)

In his analysis of the deconstructive potential of Freudian thought, Jonathan Culler infers "that 'sanity' is only a particular determination of neurosis, a neurosis that accords with certain social demands" (160). Accordingly, 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, like the ill-fated group dynamics that control Golding's boys in *Lord of the Flies*, seems to remain—almost—within the socially acceptable boundaries of what boys naturally tend to get up to. Despite the fact that Frank does undoubtedly go too far, his actions are never deviant or subversive but follow the normative guidelines of masculine propriety. Actually, considering the unremitting circulation of idealized images of a violent, domineering masculinity within contemporary society, it seems quite astonishing that Frank's behaviour strikes us as exceptional at all.

Albeit extreme, Frank's masculine self-fashioning is by no means a monstrous aberration but the result of a meticulous self-formation in accordance with hegemonic ideals:

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. (183)

While busily blowing up rabbit warrens and declaring war on the entire animal kingdom, Frank does not hesitate to express dismissive exasperation at Eric's compulsive immolation of dogs: "This burning dogs stuff is just nonsense" (109). One wonders if in contrast to his brother's destructive excesses, Eric's violence is considered unacceptable because it targets man's best friend, unleashing itself amidst society, in the public sphere, rather than Frank's peninsular seclusion. Alternatively, there may be both more complex and sinister reasons for Eric's rendition as a mad misfit and social outcast.

Before he goes mad on witnessing a horrific incident in a hospital during his time as a medical student in the city, Eric was Frank's picture-book hero, "doing what he had to do, just like the brave soldier who died for the cause, or for me." Like other truly great men before him, Eric seemed consumed by "that outward urge and it took him away from me, to the outside world with all its fabulous opportunities and awful dangers" (138). Frank worships his brother who strikes him as a perfect embodiment of all the heroic ideals of patriarchal masculinity. It is against Eric's example of an immaculate adult manliness that Frank, the boy, defines his own position of lack and femininity. His identification is a negative one, conditioned by his "injury" or (con)genital wound, which in accordance to the prevalent laws of gender differentiation confines him for ever to the sphere of the domestic. At the same time, Eric's imaginary progress in the world at large instigates Frank's own microcosmic cultivation of a compensatory masculinity. "I had a vicarious feeling of manly satisfaction in the brilliant performance of Eric on the outside," Frank declares, "as, for my own part, I slowly made myself unchallenged lord of the island and the lands about it" (139). However, the boy's idealization of adult masculinity's perfect heroism reveals

itself as a naïve make-believe projection, as Eric's masculine integrity is shown to have always been but a half-hearted performance that eventually breaks under patriarchal pressure. The older brother's nervous disintegration is equivalent to a total collapse of the phallic ideal. In Frank's view, Eric fails because he allows himself to be permeated by the feminine. His madness is an immediate corollary of his emasculating susceptibility to emotion, pain and trauma:

Whatever it was that disintegrated in Eric then, it was a weakness, a fundamental flaw that a real man should not have had. 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. (147-48)

Emotionality is considered unnatural in a man, a weakness and mad affliction, whereas violence is not. Unaware of his own fatefully engendered subjectivity, Frank blames Eric's breakdown on his father's interference with nature, "that nonsense in Eric's early years, letting him dress as he wanted and giving him the choice of dresses and trousers" (148). Frank refuses to accept Eric's sensitivity and nurturant, testicular rather than phallic qualities as a natural given. As a reader, one begins to long for Eric's own first-person account of his upbringing and socialization. One would expect such a narrative to comprise numerous memories of coldly straitjacketing moments when Eric must have been terrified at his own outstanding deviancy from the masculine norm. "Once he picked me up and gave me a kiss on the lips which really made me frightened" (143), Frank remembers. The reader is left to imagine Eric's alarm at his younger brother's horror and revulsion in response to this perfectly innocuous gesture of fraternal affection. Under pressure, Eric makes an attempt at living up to the stereotype, but even as a medical student he appears drawn to the nurturant and caring (traditionally feminine) rather than scientific (traditionally masculine) aspects of the profession. Significantly, his final emotional

collapse does not result in hysteria, or *testeria* (according to Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, a harmful inversion of the testicular), but in a mad, excessive emulation of phallic heroism. Like Frank's (or Alex's in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*), Eric's ultraviolence is motivated by an overwhelming sense of his own inadequacy, failure and incompetence as a "real" man. Accordingly, it is not the feminine that softens him, as Frank suggests, but the masculine that makes him harden beyond the humanly bearable, to the point of cracking up.

Eric's violence is ultimately designated as madness and thus deprived of all societal authorization because it discloses—in public, for all to see—the deformative potential inherent in the masculine ideal itself. Man's insanity is encouraged and fostered, up to a certain non-negotiable limit, by the system itself:

The conflagration in [Eric's] head was just too strong for anybody sane to cope with. It had a lunatic strength of total commitment about it which only the profoundly mad are continually capable of *and the most ferocious soldiers and most aggressive sportsmen able to emulate for a while.* (127; emphasis added)

In *The Wasp Factory*, Banks appropriates the motif of the *doppelgänger* to demonstrate that masculinity is informed by a systemic confusion of the normative with the normal/natural. No matter if they are labelled "mad" or "sane," boys feel compelled to exert their energies in a continuous effort to uphold their masculine pose of mastery, if necessary by means of violence. Consequently, within patriarchy, masculinity develops, more often than not, into a neurosis of compulsive self-assertion.

Whereas according to psychoanalytic discourse "woman is not the creature with a vagina but the creature without a penis, who is essentially defined by that lack" (Culler 167), man's physical nature enslaves him to the law of "the fictitious phallus and its *hard-(w)on* masculinity, that precarious and ephemeral power that has to put itself constantly on the line to prove itself and to merit its status" (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin 254). In irreconcilable contrast to masculinity's projection of a forever augmenting phallic plenitude, the immediate reality of man's bodily experience is marked by the flaccid penis, not a state of permanent tumescence but the trauma of impotence. Of course, Frank's

dilemma in *The Wasp Factory* is even more problematic. Incapable of ever mustering an erection, he becomes a mere impersonator of masculinity, the irreparably emasculated shadow of heroic man: "I saw myself, Frank L. Cauldhame, and I saw myself as I might have been: a tall slim man, strong and determined and making his way in the world, assured and purposeful" (48). In order to make amends for his failure to embody the ideal, he must inscribe the phallic principle in whatever he does, assertively expanding his self by assimilating the world in acts of autistic identification. Pretending to be as autonomous and neatly enclosed as "a state; a country or, at the very least, a city" (62), Frank abandons "the real world" (24) to re-imagine it as a narcissistic reflection of who he would like to be. Deeply insecure in himself, the island on which he lives becomes his self-aggrandizing fantasy, forever reconstituting itself "to boost [his] ego" (63). Only at his god-like command, after he has imposed his supposedly indelible mark on them, do certain parts of the island emerge out of their primordial formlessness and take experiential shape as "Black Destroyer Hill" (36), "the Snake Park" (41) and "the Skull Grounds" (107), mirroring the lethal trajectory of Frank's extremist masculine self-fashioning.

However, as Frank gradually comes to realize, the territorialist boundaries of traditional masculinity are permeable and ultimately revocable. The artifice of patriarchal law must eventually yield to nature's insurmountable alterity, which disperses the phantasmatic integrity of the man-made subject by continuing to proliferate unpredictable change. Unsurprisingly, Frank identifies nature with femaleness and fluidity, both of which threaten to upset and decentre the carefully established order of his insular world:

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 man 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. (43)

Intriguingly, Banks renders the eventual collapse of Frank's masculinity, as well as that of the patriarchal order in its entirety, not

as a ruinous defeat but as some kind of liberating rebirth or regeneration. In *The Wasp Factory* true authenticity is found in the release and acknowledgement of hitherto repressed alterity, in madness, chaos and familial confusion. The boy's cherished, ferociously guarded sense of self is revealed to have always been a fraudulent imposition, not the result of free self-fulfilment but of remote-controlled self-(de)formation. Determined to preempt yet another successful insurrection of the female—similar to that initiated by Frank's overly autonomous mother, which leaves him limping for the rest of his life—Frank's father manipulates his daughter into identifying herself against her congenital sex. Like all patriarchal discourse, his 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 onto his daughter. Clearly, patriarchy can only perpetuate its structural hegemony if it manages to establish a general worship of the infallible phallus, thereby controlling all alterity, in any shape or form, in both its female and male subjects, within and without the boundaries of the self. In this context, Frank's statement on the science of dam-building can be read as a pertinent comment on the manipulative practices and strategies of systemic containment:

But I have a far more sophisticated, even metaphysical, approach to dam-building now. I realise that you can never really win against the water; it will always triumph in the end, seeping and soaking and building up and undermining and overflowing. All you can really do is construct something that will divert it or block its way for a while; persuade it to do something it doesn't really want to do. (25)

The child's originally chaotic, intransigent nature is moulded into shape by the Law of the Father and its imposition of a rigid societal frame of *Bildung*. Frank's father is shown to wield absolute power over his daughter's understanding of the world, once having her believe "that the earth was a Möbius strip, not a sphere" (12). Language becomes a tool of arbitrary indoctrination and insidious make-believe. "For years," Frank confesses, "I

believed Pathos was one of the Three Musketeers, Fellatio a character in *Hamlet*, Vitreous a town in China, and that the Irish peasants had to tread the peat to make Guinness" (14). Frank is introduced to a universe dominated by her father's "grand scheme" of fraudulent meaning-making, his obsession with "silly Imperial measurements" (12), which the child is required to absorb by rote. As Frank remembers well, to rebel against the obtrusive omnipresence of the father's symbolic order is to court punishment and exclusion:

Ever since I can remember there have been little stickers of white paper all over the house with neat black-biro writing on them. Attached to the legs of chairs, the edges of rugs, the bottom of jugs, the aerials of radios, the doors of drawers, the headboards of beds, the screens of televisions, the handles of pots and pans, they give the appropriate measurement for the part of the object they're stuck to. There are even ones in pencil stuck to the leaves of plants. When I was a child I once went round the house tearing all the stickers off; I was belted and sent to my room for two days. (11)

As a teenager Frank believes he has totally emancipated himself from his father's "little bits of bogus power [that] enable him to think he is in control of what he sees as the correct father-son relationship" (16). Yet, not only is he still living the lie of a paternally engineered gender identity, his supposedly alternative existence replicates in minutest detail the symbolic order he aims to replace. In striking correspondence to the boys on William Golding's desert island, Frank's desire to protest his autonomy ironically effects a re-erection of the phallic self of patriarchal authority. The Wasp Factory is identical with the Lord of the Flies, both of which constitute centralized reference points of (remote) control, order and legitimation.

Like his father, Frank re-maps the world in which he lives, intent on construing symmetrical patterns of regulatory significance from life's elusive contingencies: "From the smaller to the greater, the patterns always hold true, and the Factory has taught me to watch out for them and respect them" (37). However, as it turns out, these patterns are not natural givens but man-made imperatives. In everything he does, Frank is guided by the Factory's oracular prophecies providing him with truths that are

ultimately of his own making. His "personal mythology, with the Factory behind it" (128), is not any less fraudulent and oppressive than his father's scheme of interpreting, and hence manufacturing, the world virtually at random. Frank projects and identifies with the artifice of an imagined authority that does not erase but substitutes his father's hold over him. Once caught up within the order of the symbolic, the subject finds it impossible to retrieve the fruitful indeterminacy and proprioceptive freedom that characterize the lives of young children "before the insidious and evil influence of society and their parents have properly got to them" (87). In *The Wasp Factory*, any conceptualization of an originary, authentic identity is pre-empted by the patriarchal law of binarist oppositioning, which promotes a cultivation of the self at the expense of its others, splitting the individual himself into desirable manliness on the one hand and despicable femininity on the other. As Frank realizes, otherness is invariably a deliberate creation, a particular *breed* of being, designed to facilitate the self's hegemony. With respect to domestic animals and—more controversially—women, Frank suggests that they really represent "not their own stupidity, but our power, our avarice and egotism" (145). The world of *The Wasp Factory* is riven by traditional masculinity's desire to present itself as pure, self-contained, and uncontaminated by (its own inherent) alterity. What is needed to put it back together again, to cure it of its deathly schisms, is not synthetic closure but an eruption of regenerative chaos.

Frank's dilemma not only illustrates how within patriarchy the female is manipulated into experiencing her own bodiliness as an "unfortunate disability" (17), as "too fat . . . chubby . . . strong and fit, but still too plump" (20). It also indicates how even the most dedicated and compliant enactment of the phallic ideal fails to result in a satisfactory incorporation of the heroic masculine body that remains forever out of reach as a purely symbolic, impossibly idealized and exclusive icon of perfection. Frank's desperate emulation of the masculine ideal is rooted in his desire "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." Significantly, he adds that "looking at myself,

you'd never guess I'd killed three people. It isn't fair" (20). Against the patriarchal standard of bodily perfection, both males and females must perceive themselves as physically inadequate, as either hopelessly incapacitated by the fact of castration or haunted by the fear of it. Ironically, as Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin notes, despite "the privileged position that the complex occupies in psychoanalytic theory, neither Freud nor his disciples have ever commented on the paradox that castration literally means the removal of the testicles" (248). Not only does the cultural predominance of phallic symbolism obscure the integrity of femaleness, it also eclipses the originary gynandricity of the male body. Phallogocentric thought effects a selective disembodiment of man, stressing the hard and erect over the malleably soft and vulnerable. It champions an ideal of self-centred, monologic and divisive autonomy over principles of communal dialogue and togetherness. In patriarchy's pursuit of the phallic ideal, testicular as well as traditionally feminine qualities—such as love, nurturance, peace, and harmony—inevitably fall by the wayside, obstructing men's access to a wholesome fulfilment of their congenital complexity.

It seems symptomatic of man's patriarchal conditioning that, when Frank protests his bodily intactness by referring to his "uncastrated genes" (118), he does not assert his *human* indeterminacy or innately gynandric disposition. On the contrary, he is keen to affirm his indisputable natural manliness which, ironically, can only develop into proper masculinity once the boy has internalized the phallic ideal and, with it, every real man's unremitting fear of castration. Taking his father's word "for anything that had happened" (173), Frank succumbs to patriarchal imperatives and becomes a one-dimensional functionary of "the harder sex," eager to incorporate "what men are really *for*—We strike out, push through, thrust and take" (118). Gender, as we know it, inflicts a sentence of definitive, unequivocal closure on an individual's processes of self-identification or, as Tina Chanter puts it, "before you know it you are a girl or a boy, and acting like one" (52). However, as Frank is to discover eventually, there is more to human identity than either masculinity or femininity.

On being confronted with the reality of having lived a lie, Frank resorts to proprioception to maintain a sense of self-constancy.² "I *am* still me," she claims, "I *am* the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done" (182). Proprioception, originally a physiological term defined in contradistinction to perception, designates the means by which the individual receives and interprets self-authenticating information from within herself. Reared on false premises, Frank can only retrieve her proprioceptive faculties once her inferiority complex—imposed by her father, yet internalized and perpetuated by herself—has been lifted off her. As patriarchal *Bildung* aims at a standardization of society in terms of gender, it strategically interferes with the self-formation of society's others: women, sexual minorities and, most overtly perhaps, children. Since patriarchy encourages self-alienating mimicry and conformism, prone to result in monstrous deformations rather than an authentic fulfilment of individual difference, subjects displaying visible aberrations from the standard norm are particularly susceptible to proprioceptive impairment that causes them to fall ill with *Bildung*-induced misperceptions of themselves. Only once her father's symbolic order has been revealed to represent neither nature nor the truth but a fraudulent scheme of arbitrary engineering, does Frank stop perceiving herself as disabled and physically inadequate. Her quest for self-identification is bound to resume. However, this time she will search for authenticity not within the enclosures of patriarchy's gender norms but in an acknowledgement of her own proprioceptive indeterminacy, as her final conclusion indicates:

Inside this greater machine, things are not quite so cut and dried (or cut and pickled) as they have appeared in my experience. Each of us, in our own personal Factory, may believe we have stumbled down one corridor, and that our fate is sealed and certain (dream or nightmare, humdrum or bizarre, good or bad), but a word, a glance, a slip—anything can change that, alter it entirely, and our marble hall becomes a gutter, or our rat-maze a golden path. Our destination is the same in the end, but our journey—part chosen, part determined—is different for us all, and changes even as we live and grow.

(183-84)

In correspondence with Judith Butler and Tina Chanter's theorizing of gender, Banks is careful to avoid "the extremes of complete determinism or absolute freedom" (Chanter 52) by suggesting that although our identities are inevitably engendered against a certain cultural background, there is always plenty of leeway for self-determinative change. Banks urges traditional man to open up to what he has learned categorically to exclude from his psychological make-up. What is abject to the patriarchal system may not necessarily be abject to the individual male. On the contrary, as in Frank's case, what man is conditioned to regard with (self-)loathing may begin to initiate processes of genuine self-authentication. The ending of *The Wasp Factory* hints at a remedial reassemblage of human subjectivity. Injurious distinctions between femininity and masculinity, madness and sanity, have collapsed into a vision of restorative unity beyond the systemic inscription of woman's congenital lack in opposition to man's phallic plenitude. Banks defeats the patriarchal image of woman as man's enemy, as either "an object of horror and revulsion, living proof of the possibility of castration, or else an altogether superior and autonomous being, complete in herself with nothing to lose or gain" (Culler 169). Banks's newly born female is introduced not as a monster or domineering mother figure but as her brother's sister. Promisingly, Eric and Frank's final embrace signals a liberating reconstitution of gender relations beyond patriarchal pressure in an ambience of equality and mutual affection.

Banks's interrogation of patriarchal gender norms is grounded in a general problematization of tensions between standard and difference, centre and margin, the established order and its subversive regeneration from within. Thus, albeit perhaps only analogically, *The Wasp Factory* also addresses the issue of Scottish postmodernity, that is, contemporary Scotland's communal struggle for national (re)identification. Significantly, Frank (as a representative of Scottish man) must eventually abandon his project of heroic self-fashioning. The hitherto unchallenged lord of the island becomes a Kristevan *sujet en procès*, eager to resume his quest for self-authentication but now re-

quired to do so from a position of feminine marginality rather than phallogocentric independence: "I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't stay here, and I'm frightened of everywhere else. But I suppose I'll have to go" (182). Stripped of its spurious self-consistency and fraudulent traditionalism, the new Scotland is left to re-inscribe itself in a dialogic exploration of its own—as well as its others—alterity. Banks's vision of subversive change is not apocalyptic but epiphanic, *deconstructive* rather than purely annihilative. "Poor Eric came home to see his brother," the novel concludes, "only to find (Zap! Pow! Dams burst! Bombs go off! Wasps fry: *ttssss!*) he's got a sister" (184). The apparent cataclysm is parenthetically contained within the notion of a revelational homecoming. Although the old order has undergone an explosive decentralization, it is not radically destroyed but transformed into a welcoming refuge for the uprooted and temporarily insane.

In their confusion, Frank and Eric set fire to the picture-book icons of the Scottish pastoral (rabbits, dogs, sheep). Miraculously, however, despite the fact that it sits on a basement full of cordite hoarded by the boys' grandfather, the family estate of the Cauldhames emerges unscathed from this panoramic conflagration. The old Scotland is not totally erased by the angry insurrection of "an evil demon we have lurking, a symbol for all our family misdeeds" (53). Rather, similar to the traditional gender formations that have sustained it so far, it finds itself at the beginning of a period of regenerative change.³

NOTES

- ¹ For a discussion of postcolonial tensions between Scotland and England, as well as within Scotland itself, see my articles "Emerging as the Others of Ourselves" and "A Passage to Scotland: Scottish Literature and the British Postcolonial Condition."
- ² I originally started using the term "proprioception" within the context of a problematization of identity and self-authentication in postimperial, ethno-British fiction. See my articles "Herald of Hybridity" and "Beyond (T)Race."
- ³ This essay represents a revised version of a chapter from my forthcoming book, *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man* (Edinburgh UP).

WORKS CITED

- Banks, Iain. *The Wasp Factory*. 1984. London: Abacus, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Chanter, Tina. "Can the Phallus Stand, or Should It Be Stood Up?" *Returns of the "French Freud": Freud, Lacan and Beyond*. Ed. Todd Dufresne. New York: Routledge, 1997: 43-65.
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London: Routledge, 1983.
- Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, Arthur. "The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity." *Theorizing Masculinities*. Ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994: 239-58.
- Nairn, Thom. "Iain Banks and the Fiction Factory." *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies. New Visions, Old Dreams*. Ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993: 127-35.
- Scullion, Adrienne. "Feminine Pleasures and Masculine Indignities. Gender and Community in Scottish Drama." *Gendering the Nation. Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*. Ed. Christopher Whyte. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995: 169-204.
- Schoene-Harwood, Berthold. "Beyond (T)Race: *Bildung* and Proprioception in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* [forthcoming].
- . "'Emerging as the Others of Ourselves': Scottish Multiculturalism and the Challenge of the Body in Postcolonial Representation." *Scottish Literary Journal* 25:1 (1998): 54-72.
- . "Herald of Hybridity: The Emancipation of Difference in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1:1 (1998): 109-28.
- . "A Passage to Scotland: Scottish Literature and the British Postcolonial Condition." *Scottlands* 2:1 (1995): 107-22.
- Smith, G. Gregory. *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*. London: Macmillan, 1919.