

‘I *am* still Me’: Gender and Madness in Iain Banks’s *The Wasp
Factory*

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Introduction

It was supposed to be a pro-feminist, antimilitarist work, satirising religion and commenting on the way we're shaped by our surroundings and upbringing and the usually skewed information we're presented with by those in power. Frank is supposed to stand for all of us, in some ways; deceived, misled, harking back to something that never existed, vengeful for no good reason and trying too hard to live up to some oversold ideal that is of no real relevance, anyway.

(Iain Banks)

Since he began publishing in 1984, Iain Banks had created a wide diversity of characters that have a look back on to events that happened in their childhood and observe how these affected their later lives. This is also the case of his debut novel, *The Wasp Factory* which criticises the patriarchal system by representing a micro-community of three people who live on an island. By creating the Cauldhame family Banks presents the reader a style of characters whose personalities hold up a mirror not only to their contemporaries but to their ascendants as well. Banks in his novel uses a first person narrator who describes events from a radical masculine perspective. This is very much telling as on the one hand the story-teller's view of the happenings is limited and egocentric, on the other hand, the portrays provided about women are extremely prejudicial.

In *The Wasp Factory* madness, gender and spatiality function as identity bearing issues which will eventually be disentangled. In the case of gender, Banks openly plays with the reader's notions of gender constructions, providing several questions about the emergence of gender. In the centre of the narration stands Frank Cauldhame who grows up in the belief that s/he¹ was a victim of an unfortunate accident where a dog bit off his/her penis. Banks's story can be read as an initiation story in which the plot is built on extraordinary and sudden events. The biggest twist during his/her initiation is when the father, Angus, tells him/her the truth that s/he was born as a girl and the story of castration never occurred. By his provocative storyline Banks forces the reader to re-consider the question of gender identity and how it evolved.

The question of gender, particularly this twisted form, is not unrelated to the theme of madness, since the other child in the Cauldhame family, Eric Cauldhame, – Frank's half-

¹ To avoid fixing the character's sex and gender, I shall consistently use the pronouns s/he and their corresponding versions.

brother who also has a heterogeneous gender identity – is mad; the only thing at the beginning of the novel known for the reader is that he had escaped from the mental asylum and is coming home. The “brotherhood” of Frank and Eric blends the themes of madness and gender together as it features on the one a hand a girl trying to fix her never existed manhood; on the other hand a boy, who owns feminine characteristics and as a result of the repression of these characteristics goes mad. The third perspective of the paper is spatiality which provides a deeper, more detailed reading to the novel and is also connected to both the themes of gender and madness. By interpreting the crucial spaces of the house in which the characters live – cellar, study, loft – not only the protagonists but also their aims during the storyline become more understandable.

In this paper I shall discuss the themes of gender, madness and spatiality in order to portray how these relate and complement each other during the storytelling of Frank. Though Frank, compared to Eric, seems sane, as Schoene-Harwood argues, the siblings: “appear in fact to be equally disturbed” (136). I will argue that Frank’s and Eric’s sex/gender problem not only represents that the over-idealised and daring masculinity ideal remains unreachable forever, but also signals how a female is forced to recognise her own femininity as inferior to the male dominance.

Chapter I

Gender Constructions and the Surrounding “Ideologies”

The theme of gender identity is used by Banks in a way that it questions heteronormative standards: “Throughout the novel, Banks shows that the ‘obvious’ incontestability of sex and gender as two (and only two) possibilities is an outrageous notion because there are slippages and categorical exceptions at every turn” (Winkler 3). In the centre of the story stands the narrator, sixteen-year-old Frank Cauldhame, whose sex is revealed at the last pages of the novel, as he is a girl. At the age of three Frank is left traumatised by the lack of the penis as according to the father’s story it is bitten off by the family’s bull dog. From that point on s/he develops an inferiority complex relating to other males and starts to define him/herself according to the lack of the penis. The child born to be a female, but developing a masculine gender identity starts to overcompensate for his/her “lack” and becomes a manifestation of a radical and forceful masculinity. From his/her very early years s/he is socialised into rejection and “begins to deny and discriminate against her own femaleness, which embarrasses her as an ‘unfortunate disability’” (Schoene-Harwood 133).

Further on, the story is concerned with the appearance of Frank’s older brother, Eric, who is mad and escaped from the mental asylum. His sex/gender identity is also problematic as Frank’s narration establishes him with a female gender identity. In this chapter, the paper aims to study the sex/gender constructions of the siblings, the relationship they share and the patriarchal environment of the father in which they were socialised. My aim is to argue that sex/gender categories in this case “claim fixity, but offer only ambiguity” (Winkler 15). Firstly, I shall analyse the patriarchal environment in which the siblings were brought up.

The only person on the island possessing absolute knowledge is the figure of the father. Angus Cauldhame – a biochemist by profession – starts to use the child for an experiment from his/her very early ages, during which he gives him/her male hormones with the food s/he eats. As Berthold Schoene-Harwood explains: “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.” (141) All of Frank’s knowledge derives from the father as he is the one who educated him. When s/he was being taught Frank thought “Pathos was one of the Three Musketeers, Fellatio was a character in Hamlet, Vitreous a town in China, and that the Irish peasants had to tread the peat to make Guinness”

(Banks 14). The father, however, can no longer teach him/her false information, as when Frank is old enough to go to the library, s/he can resist the father's control: "I can check up on anything my father says, and he has to tell me the truth. It annoys him a lot, I think, but that's the way things go" (Banks 14). Angus is obviously annoyed by Frank's maturation, because he cannot keep the outside world away from him/her any longer.

The relationship Frank and Angus have is peculiar and strange, Frank's thought about Angus is telling: "[s/he] never knows exactly how much [s/he] really feels for him" (Banks 51). Throughout his life Angus has given two meaningful presents to Frank, two books, Günter Grass: *The Tin Drum* and Gore Vidal: *Myra Breckinridge*; both referring to Frank's condition to some extent. Frank interprets the gifts on his/her special way: "one of the few real presents he has ever given me, and I had therefore assiduously avoided reading [them]." (Banks 51) These intertextual references give hints about Frank's original sex: *The Tin Drum* suggests that s/he will remain a child-adult hybrid who is hopelessly stuck between these two stages. The other novel *Myra Breckinridge* explores the change of sex by an operation. Frank consciously avoids reading these works, and as such s/he refuses to encounter the potential clues to his/her sexual identity. The books further on function not only as intertextual references but as the symbols of the father's knowledge. Angus decides at one point that it is time for Frank to realize something about what happens to him/her, however, by refusing to read them, Frank also rejects to gain knowledge about his/her condition. In this way it does not matter that Frank can check whatever s/he wants in the library – as long as the most important information remains with the father, his control will also remain.

To keep Frank under control is not the only significance of this experiment. S/he is socialised by the father into an environment where the detestation of female qualities and women in general seems normal. Therefore the experiment on the one hand serves to re-programme Frank; on the other hand it is the demonstration of Angus's superiority over women as this power was already questioned by the rebellious behaviour of his second wife – who is the mother of Frank. Numerous feelings, impressions and thoughts primarily belonging to Angus are planted into Frank during the experiment. The result is a teenager containing all of the father's own inferiority complexes he ever felt in connection to women. Frank is the living embodiment of his/her father's fears, a re-programmed and deconstructed body and mind both mentally and physically. The process of deconstruction is "successful"; Frank denies his/her body as it is not threatening (manly) enough to others.

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.
(Banks 20)

These words demonstrate that out of the deconstructed girl a new creature is born. The artificially created masculinity needs a constant re-assurance to maintain its existence, and just like the father, s/he needs to feel s/he is in control.

The teenager Frank tries to get away from the father's authority by the symbolic order of the Wasp Factory, which is located in the loft, in Frank's room. The Wasp Factory is a machine which kills wasps according to their choice. Symbolically, every answer is gained out of one of the twelve methods of death, signalled on the face of the old clock. Every single number signals a different alternative to die, depending on the "wasp's choice." By the death of the given wasp, Frank can predict the future and gain answers to specific questions. Angus does not know about the Factory's existence.

At the age of sixteen s/he believes to be free from his/her father's "control of what he sees as the correct father-son relationship. It's pathetic really, but with his little games and his secrets and his hurtful remarks he tries to keep his security intact." (Banks 16) Thinking that s/he turns away from the father's patriarchal order, Frank obeys the Wasp Factory's prophecies that guide and ensure him/her about the future. Frank's environment is surrounded by bizarre and strange rituals that guide and ensure his/her ideology. Not only does s/he "invent" his/her male self but s/he also establishes a religion which aims to resolve and authorize the acts done in his/her whole life. In Frank's case religion is "an alternative method of explaining the universe, between which [s/he is] being called upon [...] to make choices" (James 5). In the centre of this religion stand s/he and the Factory; its creed is based on symbols for which the Factory functions as an object helping to interpret these symbols. "The Wasp Factory is part of the pattern because it is part of life and – even more so – part of death. The reason why it can answer questions is because every question is a start looking for an end, and the Factory is about the End – death, no less." (Banks 117-118) Therefore, Frank's eventual, implicit intention with the Factory is to gain safety to establish his/her position in the present. Obeying predictions signals Frank's need to break away from Angus's patriarchal order, however, this aim cannot be successful as the Factory functions only as a

replacement of the father's authority. Frank's personal mythology with the wasps and the sacrifices is only a mimetic re-creation of Angus's authority.

There is one specific manifestation of the father's order, namely that the house is full of little stickers of papers. Attached to "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." (Banks 11) By providing the exact measurement of every single object in the house, Angus creates an environment which on the one hand is timeless, on the other impersonal. "Not only because ideology holds out the mirror within which that subjectivity is constructed, but because the latter depends upon a kind of collective make-believe in the commensurability of penis and phallus" (Silverman 15). Silverman's words reflect on the patriarchal power's aim to keep the formed environment in continuity, providing its legacy and safety. Because these measurements are always the same, no change occurs and the knowledge that it is lasting provides safety for Angus, just like in the case of Frank where the Wasp Factory's prophecies give meaning and safety. That is why both the system of *measurements* and the system of the Wasp Factory are artificial, human-created manifestations of authorities serving to provide assurance and safety. Therefore, the desire to break away completely from the authority can never happen since there must be an ideology that can be obeyed; in both Frank and Angus there is an urge to create an order.

Because of Frank's make-believe religion and the lack of the penis, inferiority and superiority complexes are present in him/her at the same time. These must be analysed first in order to understand the relationship with his/her brother Eric. Frank's life is defined by the lack of the male genitalia thus s/he will never be able to position him/herself as whole, when compared to men s/he feels inferior. "I thought I had had all that really mattered in the world, [...] stolen from me before I even knew its value" (Banks 182). On the other hand there is a strong sense of superiority in him/her coming to the surface when talking about women in general. "My GREATEST ENEMIES ARE WOMEN AND THE SEA. These things I hate." (Banks 43) In Frank's case women and femininity serve as the category of the Other, which is undesirable when it is compared to men and masculinity. This attitude perfectly corresponds to Judith Butler's argument: "suppression of the Other is one tactic among many, deployed centrally but not exclusively in the service of expanding and rationalizing the masculinist domain" (Butler 14). For Frank it is obvious that s/he has to belong to the categories of male sex and masculine gender: "I can feel it in my bones, in my uncastrated genes" (Banks 118). Frank exemplifies what happens to an imagined male when becoming deprived of his

manliness. Not only the penis becomes lost, but also what it symbolises: creation, authority and unquestionable manliness.

When talking about manliness, the character who served as an example to Frank is his half-brother, Eric Cauldhame. At the very beginning of the novel what is known about Eric is that he has escaped from the mental asylum and is heading home. This information seems to threaten Angus; Frank, however, describes it as “good-bad. [S/he] knew he’d make it” (Banks 10). The readers get to know him from the narration of Frank. From the scattered descriptions a coherent picture emerges gradually about the older brother. In Frank’s narrative this is one of the recurring themes, the mad brother who is coming, making it obvious that when he reaches the island something apocalyptic is going to happen. Frank is just about to expose the father’s secret about his sex when, at the same moment, Eric arrives at the island, screaming in the midst of burning sheep.

Similarly to Frank’s case Eric has a problematic sex/gender construction but madness also plays a part in it. When Frank is a child s/he adores Eric as in him s/he sees the perfect embodiment of all traditional masculine values. “Before he goes mad [...] 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’” (Schoene-Harwood 137). In Frank’s narrative the reader gets to know a boy who from his very early ages is always the “sensitive one, the bright one; until his nasty experience everybody was sure he would go far” (Banks 38). Being sensitive and bright, Eric’s characterization does not fit into Frank’s radical judgement about “real” masculinity. According to him/her there is one thing both sexes can do very 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.” (Banks 118)² Eric’s feminine gender identity threatens Frank’s hyper-masculine world as throughout the novel Eric is the only person who is capable to evoke sensitive, humanly feelings in Frank: “[S/he] loved him despite his alteration the way, I suppose, he had loved me despite my disability. That feeling of wanting to protect [...] which women are supposed to feel for the young and men are meant to feel for women.” (Banks 136-37)

Compared to Frank’s strong sense of masculinity, Eric’s masculinity only seems to be a weak constellation of the required values, and thus is destined to fail right from the beginning under the pressure of the patriarchal order. The most conspicuous sign for his failure is his

² Beatrix Campbell in her book *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places* states something similar when she suggests “Crime and coercion are sustained by men. Solidarity and self-help are sustained by women” (qtd. in Horrocks 7).

regularly appearing migraine, sometimes lasting for several days. At the final incident³ he also has one, probably one of the worst he has ever experienced: “He'd had a sore head all day, and while he was in the ward it had worsened into a bad migraine” (Banks 140). At the hospital, where the eventual breakage of the older brother happens, he looks after a seriously ill child: “what Eric saw when he lifted that plate up [of the child's head], [...] was a slowly writhing nest of fat maggots, swimming in their combined digestive juices as they consumed the brain of the child” (Banks 142). The figure of the dyeing child resembles Eric since they both have problems in their heads; in Eric's case this problem (the maggot) is the feminine self which later, according to his sibling, causes his fall.

Whatever it was that disintegrated in Eric then, it was a weakness, a *fundamental flaw* that a real man should not have had. [...] I suspect that Eric was the victim of a self with just a little too much of woman in it. That sensitivity, that desire not to hurt people, that delicate, mindful brilliance – these things were his partly because he thought too much like a woman.
(Banks 148)

Consequently, it can be said that the scene where Eric goes insane is the recognition of his own aberration from the expected masculine order. Eric becomes excluded from the patriarchal society because of his feminine self. In the concept of a stable and strong masculinity, a man who is sensitive and delicate is not acceptable, since according to its suggestive ideology “the idea of a fragile masculinity is absurd” (Horrocks 9). In the “special”, radically masculine world of Frank Cauldhame female attributes such as sensitivity and emotionality cannot be tolerated as these intimidate his/her carefully constructed masculine environment. Frank suggests that being a “real man” one has to be strong and they cannot have that “fundamental flaw” in them as that is in the nature of most of the women.

Frank's religion and Angus's experiment both represent their need to control something. Angus controls Frank as s/he is the living proof to a strange experiment in which a girl is raised as a boy. In Frank's case the Wasp Factory functions as a religion constructed in a way that would provide safety for him/her in the patriarchal world. One thing is common in the experiment and the religion: both lack emotionality and they excite strong egocentric approaches without sensitivity. Eric Cauldhame does not fit into this category since he does not own any of these characteristics, and according to Frank, he goes insane because of the

³ The incident described here is examined in the second chapter of the paper as well, but from the perspective of madness.

feminine self – the primary cause for his insanity is sensitivity. The peculiar cases of Eric and Frank Cauldhame suggest that sex/gender constructions are questionable because instead of providing a stable basis for their identities these make their states even more problematic. The polarity of both Frank's and Eric's sex and gender identities is prevalent throughout the text since in both cases gender is problematized because of the ambivalent nature of biological sex. From another perspective gender also problematizes biological sex: were it not for Frank's radical masculinity s/he might have less trouble to fit into his/her biological sex. His/her masculinity will not necessarily change in spite of him learning about his/her "real" biological sex in the end of the novel, since s/he says at the conclusion – "I *am* still me" (182).

Chapter II

Eric's Story: Madness and Repression

Though recognizing “madness” as the “other side” of “sanity” is a liberating insight, it does not necessarily bring us closer to a definition, because “sanity” itself is so seldom openly defined or described. Instead, “sanity” simply operates as a framework based on the acceptance of a prevailing word-view and its “reasonable” norms of conduct, and these are acquired more often by imitation than by indoctrination. “Sanity” usually becomes a point for discussion only as the background when some activity is judged as a violation.

(de Beaugrande 19)

As it can be seen from the quote above sanity is never defined properly; even in the case of Frank it can be seen that what seems sane and meaningful for him/her, makes the reader question his/her mental state. However, from the perspective of madness his/her brother, Eric Cauldhame is interesting, according to Frank his madness is caused by “a self with just a little too much of woman in it” (Banks 148), therefore, he cannot cope with the pressure of patriarchy. In this chapter I shall discuss: the roles of the mothers in the lives of the siblings; the incident where Eric finally gives in; and the circumstances in which he grew up including his “Belfast experience;” and eventually, how Frank and Eric maintain contact throughout the story. These parts in Eric's story are significant as they are determining factors that demonstrate how a male is forced by the patriarchal dominion to repress his emotionality. Therefore, this part strives to study the case of (mainly, but not primarily) Eric Cauldhame, in order to emphasise the possible reasons for his madness.

When Eric Cauldhame was born, his mother, Mary died while she was giving birth to him. Eric's head was “too big for her” (Banks 23) and unfortunately she bled to death – ironically in the marital bed. Frank, later on, describes a picture in which “my father was holding a portrait-sized photograph of his first wife, Eric's mother, and she was the only one who was smiling. My father was staring at the camera looking morose. The young Eric was looking away and picking his nose, looking bored.” (Banks 22) Mary, in the picture, is the only person who is smiling which suggests that in her life she was probably a nice and kind woman, who was indeed ready to fulfil the traditional feminine gender roles. Yet, she can only be present in a picture, which in itself is already a representation. Her death signals that

not only the archetype of maternity dies but also what she represents altogether: kindness and emotionality. However, it should be added that she is still present in the framed picture, which suggests that the values she represented, the feminine qualities, are inaccessible on the island. Because these values will never be recreated, the “brothers” grow up in an environment which does not even recognise these qualities. The fact that she bleeds to death in the marital bed signals that her place as a proper wife and mother will never be filled (not even by Angus’s second wife) and that on the island every future attempt to bring back any of the feminine values will fade away – just like the character of Mary.

His mother’s death traumatises Eric, and not even his father’s second wife, Agnes appears as a mother-figure to him; she detests the innocent child for he is “bad for her karma in some way” (Banks 66). The mother of Frank, Agnes compared to Mary is the antithesis of femininity. She is not willing to take care of her children – neither for Frank nor little Paul⁴. As far as Frank is concerned s/he states that s/he cannot remember Agnes, because if s/he did, s/he would hate her, and also according to Frank she is the one who allowed the Stove family⁵ to take Eric away from the island (Banks 66). She is also the reason for Angus’s limp – when he tries to stop her she runs over him by a motorbike and breaks his leg.

The socialising processes the siblings had are not the same. Talking about childhood, Eric has an experience of a surrogating mother (on the island) but the only thing he got from her was rejection and pain. The only stable point in his childhood on the island is the figure of the father. He is raised only by the father who is considered a bad parent as in “Eric’s early years, [Angus] lets him dress as he wants and gives him the choice of dresses and trousers” (Banks 66). Roger Horrocks in his book *Male Myths and Icons* suggests that a boy “has to become a not-woman. [...] Here the role of the father is often seen as crucial in inducting his son into this other world – but behind the father stands the patriarchal world, with its demand on the boy: become a man.” (15) From the permission of wearing what he wants it is observable that even before the birth of Frank, Eric was raised as a gender-ambiguous child and the above mentioned demand of Eric to “become a man” actually never happened in Eric’s case, but it happened in Frank’s. Tina Chanter’s argument suggests that “before you know it you are a girl or a boy, [you already] act like one” (qtd. in Schoene-Harwood 52). The

⁴ Paul is later killed by Frank.

⁵ The Harmsworth Stove is Eric’s uncle on his mother’s side, who with his wife, Morag take Eric away to raise him in Belfast.

reason that Frank has a strong sense of masculinity is because s/he was raised into the masculine role, whereas Eric was not.

This quote gains relevance to Eric only after he is taken away by the Stove⁶ family to be raised in Belfast at a normal household, as Frank suggests: “away from what he knew” (Banks 66). From the island’s gender-ambiguous environment he gets to a city and a family where (probably) traditional gender roles are enacted. Eric was raised by the couple “for nearly five years, from when he was three” (Banks 36). This means that from the age of three to the age of eight the Stoves and the unknown environment instilled him as a boy and encouraged him to repress his “feminine self” – as in a traditional household it is not proper for a little boy to dress like a little girl. The constant pressure from the patriarchal environment to repress his femininity caused him a complex that destroyed his whole life forever. When Eric returns to the island the only sign that shows is that “he was too sensitive to other people’s feelings” (Banks 137). However, the signs of destruction will only show later, when Eric starts to go to school and comes home for the summer. As Frank suggests: “The summer in between he came back, but he was changed. He still tried to get along with me the way he always had, but I could feel it was forced. He was away from me [...]” (Banks 138)

As such, the “fundamental flaw” (Banks 148) (which is suggested by Frank) that eventually causes his fall is the feminine self that he is unable to repress any longer. Schoene-Harwood has an interesting suggestion about Eric: “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.” (138) Therefore, Frank’s suggestion about the incident (with the seriously ill child whose brain is consumed by maggots) of Eric is only partly true – not the feminine half causes his madness directly, but the repression of the feminine gender identity in his whole life, since he tries to keep his masculinity real towards the world. This is a mental process described by Laing in a way pertaining to Eric’s case: “If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self.” (Laing 42) This is, indeed, the procedure that eventually causes Eric’s fall as he cannot keep his identity anymore with its

⁶ It is indicative that later Harmsworth Stove (successful businessman) commits suicide.

contradictory complexity anymore. Frank's narration portrays Eric as being *always* the sensitive person with his emotionality probably originating from these times of his childhood. Both children at the age of three had a traumatic experience. Eric is raised to repress femininity and Frank is raised to enact the never existed masculinity – both of them perform their gender identity. Each sibling copes with the situation in his/her own way: Frank turning his aggression, originating in his frustration, against the outside world, in the form of killing; whereas Eric, in a “properly” feminine way, turns his own frustration against himself, by turning the incompatible features of his identity into madness.

Eric is unable to deal with the pressures of the patriarchal world. It is worth to explore the reasons of why Frank actually associates femininity with madness so directly. During his childhood and the socializing process Frank himself became the representation of radical, unifacial and basically fictitious masculinity which – as I have argued in the previous chapter – “feels” threatened by the presence of the “fragile” feminine. Frank's opinion about madness recalls nineteenth-century male thinkers' and doctors' approach to the issue which is conceptualized by Elaine Showalter:

The dual images of female insanity – madness as one of the wrongs of woman; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality – suggest the two ways that the relationship between women and madness has been perceived. In the most obvious sense, madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than men.
(Showalter 3)

This statement establishes all females as biologically inferior to males; as such, women are pre-programmed to madness by nature. In the understanding of Frank between the concepts of madness and gender identity the connecting element is femininity. Because from his very early ages Eric was put through several traumatic experiences, (his mother died, Angus allowed him to be taken away) his strongly developed feminine gender identity cannot be repressed any longer; the boy breaks and goes insane. It is not the born girl with the masculine gender identity that becomes a victim of lunacy, but his/her *brother* who has a feminine gender identity.

In the case of the siblings not only their gender identity and their sex, but even their mental states complement each other. The chapter entitled *The Prodigal* is concerned with the appearance of Eric on the island, and with the secret of what really happened to Frank. The

title applies to Eric recalling the parable of *The Prodigal Son* in the *Bible*. The Biblical story of the Prodigal Son is seen through the eyes by his relatives, his father, and his brother. Given everything the outer world has to offer he (the Biblical Son) still comes home feeling miserable. This also applies to Eric who throughout his life received all the things Frank was denied to have. He is a born male, educated in schools; he is able to grow up to become an adult and he exists in the law's eye as the son of Angus Cauldhame (in contrast to Frank). As Frank puts it "[S/he] had a vicarious feeling of manly satisfaction in the brilliant performance of Eric on the outside" (Banks 139). As s/he states it very precisely what Eric does in the outside world of the island is nothing more than a *performance*. He tries to be up to the mark regarding his father, his professors – cares and looks after everyone except for his own self. Regarding his profession, he did a woman's job – nursing and feeding the self-helpless – instead of the scientific part of curing – which is traditionally attributed to a man, at least in the patriarchal gender discourse.

Every now and then, Frank is informed of Eric's state because the siblings maintain contact as Eric regularly phones home. He never talks to the father despite of his statement that he goes home as he wants to see them both (Banks 18). In the book they have five conversations, all five from different locations. From these conversations the reader gets information about Eric's state, and though his sentences and expressions are sometimes hard to understand, some of them refer to his past traumas. His fragmented speech is equivalent with the structure of trauma as well: only fragments can be seen, symptoms that do not necessarily bear direct relevance to the trauma itself. In their third conversation Eric says: "*He never loved me*" (Banks 100) and the reader does not get to know who the referent of *he* is – could be Angus, or even maybe Frank. During their fourth phone call Frank accidentally accuses Eric of forgetting things to which Eric reacts: "*Forget? I didn't forget anything! I remember everything! Everything!*" (Banks 130) Their conversations open new dimensions in the story since they function as recording elements of Eric's journey – though each conversation (or stop) is different, there is a piece of information that regularly recurs: every time he calls, he is closer to the island, to his final destination.

Eric often speaks in riddles, one of these is uttered during their second conversation when he mentions that not sleeping is like becoming a ship as it makes you going (Banks 59). According to Tibor Szabó the motif of the ship can be interpreted by the concept of the *Narrenschiff* (Szabó 38). Michael Foucault in his book *Madness and Civilisation* gives a detailed reading of how the concept developed: "The *Narrenschiff* [...] is a literary

composition, probably borrowed from the old Argonaut cycle, one of the great mythic themes recently revived and rejuvenated” further on he also emphasises that this “is the only [concept] that had a real existence [...] these boats that conveyed their insane cargo from town to town”. (Foucault 7-8) In the *Narrenschiff*, different ethical models, imaginary heroes and social types are on board the same ship and together they go on a great symbolic passage in order to understand their faith and “at least the figure of their truth.” (Foucault 8) If Eric considers himself a ship one of the key elements of his *symbolic passage* is the sea and obviously water.

Making the contrast between the siblings obvious at the level of the metaphor of the ship, it is not coincidental that while Eric identifies with the ship, and thus, with the Sea, Frank abhors the Sea – the feminine.

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.
(Banks 43)

The Sea functioning as a symbol suggests instability, unreliability all those specific characteristics that were attributed to the feminine. For Frank one of his/her greatest enemies is Water which is an obvious reference to all the aspects represented by the feminine “since water is the organic symbol of woman’s fluidity: blood, milk, tears” (Showalter 11). For Frank’s strong, fixed and unquestionable masculine gender identity anything that can be considered unstable is threatening as it can derange his/her concepts about the surrounding world. When Frank realises that his/her brother is heading home s/he also has to consider that something new and unquestionably feminine would enter the island jeopardizing his/her already created system as he says: “[S/he] slowly made [him/herself] unchallenged lord of the island and the lands about it.” (Banks 139) Though Frank considers him/herself a *lord*, s/he still feels threatened because all his/her actual knowledge about women and femininity comes from such visual recreations that are based on one-dimensional representations in the media: “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.” (Banks 148) Eric’s appearance is therefore dangerous because he would bring

motions into the system that have the power to erode what Frank and Angus have built up and consider stable and fixed, which, however, turns out to be only the fiction and myth of stable masculinity, which ironically, can be washed away by the very weak – and as such: detested – liquid: water. On the other hand if we consider his way of homecoming as a symbolic passage in which he is the ship, then it must not be forgotten that he is also the one who is able to navigate on the Sea. Frank also hates the Sea for it always destroys the dams s/he builds. “The topography of Frank’s little world of death and retribution is the topography of his own unconscious self-denial: building dams” (Sage 25). Being the *lord* of the island s/he is in the power to act upon “others” in the name of his/her “law,” but the Sea cannot be controlled by his/her “symbolic order,” which frustrates Frank.

S/he has several strange activities to occupy him/herself on the island. Among these there is one with a special significance: s/he ties two birds (sometimes from different species) together at their legs and watches them. At first the birds try to bear the presence of the other, but after a while they start to fight for life till death. One of the birds surely dies so the living one has to carry the weight of the dead one. There are “special” fights when “determined ones peck the leg off their defeated adversary, but most [are] unable” (Banks 110). In most of the cases the living specimen is also injured because of the fight, during the night it will also expire. Frank reflects on this activity as this “one always struck me as one of my more mature inventions; symbolic somehow, and with a nice blend of callousness and irony” (Banks 111). The description of this little scene is the preface of the seventh chapter entitled *Space Invaders*. It serves to exemplify the theme of the following conversation that is centered around Darwinism and *natural selection*.

Frank is in the pub with his/her only friend Jamie, the dwarf, talking about Eric. During the conversation several expressions are used to describe Eric’s condition: crazy, insane, mad – all of them used in a different context suggesting that to establish clear borders for Eric’s mental state is not easy. However, the conversation moves away from Eric widens and later on will be applied to describe people who own power.

‘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 [...]’

‘Survival of the fittest.’

‘Yeah.’

‘Survival of the [...] nastiest.’

(Banks 112)

In the cases of Frank and Eric, as it is described in the above context, abnormal behaviour is maintained and even reassured by the society’s system in which they live. Frank commits three murders and kills numerous animals for his/her rituals, still s/he is more stable mentally than Eric. As I have suggested in the previous chapter Eric’s madness can be derived from the repression of the feminine. When talking about the mental states of the siblings, two different patterns are compared: on Frank’s behalf “normal” masculinity, on Eric’s behalf deconstructive madness. The basis for Frank’s “appearance and behaviour [is] a socially-given image of ultra-maleness involving violence and misogyny” (Macdonald 6). Within patriarchal society only the strongest is able to stay alive. The Darwinian concept of *natural selection* is applied and distorted in a way that only people who own power and are capable to persuade others to act for them will be the selected few to stay alive. Persuasion, power, wealth are all expressions that describe contemporary society – therefore Frank’s behaviour (within his/her insular confinement) is an acceptable norm, since s/he becomes the unconditional *lord* of the island. Eric’s mental state cannot be accepted and is declared insane because it means an obvious threat to the patriarchal world, destroying it from the inside.

In this way, my claim is that Eric’s destabilized identity is deeply embedded and related to assumptions of normality, as a result of which his femininity means an obvious threat to his sibling. Frank’s rationality and his strong detestation of the feminine reflect a radical type of masculinity which feels extremely threatened by the feminine. The way Eric Cauldhame was socialised during his childhood years planted sensitivity in him from the very beginning by his mother’s death. In contrast to that he was raised by the Sove family on a different way, accordingly to the patriarchal discourse to repress feminine qualities; as such was destined to fail in the outer world of patriarchy – unfortunately right from the beginning.

Chapter III

Spatiality and the Closing-Scenes of the Novel

In this part of the paper I shall provide a close reading to the spatial elements in the story. The house has three significant rooms constantly recurring in the story; all of them have different interpretations. Reading these three spaces, several new perspectives of the text can be given. Spatiality is a crucial aspect in the novel and can be connected to both the theme of gender and madness since the revelation of what originally happened to Frank only becomes known after s/he entered the study. The Cauldhame house contains several rooms, three of them holding significant meaning; the study with its secrets, the loft which is also Frank's room, and the cellar which is loaded with cordite.

When Eric arrives at the island he wants to set the house on fire starting with the cordite filled cellar, which originates from Angus's father, Collin Cauldhame. Frank has a odd opinion about the cordite which is "a link with the past, or an evil demon we have lurking, a symbol of all our family misdeeds; waiting, perhaps, one day, to surprise us" (Banks 53). The cellar is the symbol of the glorious past of the family. The Cauldhames used to be the landlords of the area, but unfortunately they lost all their wealth; the respected family lost its former reputation. By the loss of the family's wealth, (as almost a prophetic sign) came the failure to produce an heir who would bear the Cauldhame name. Angus's brother, Leviticus Cauldhame dies in Africa without an heir, and Angus's two sons – Eric is insane, little Paul is killed by Frank – will not produce any either. This means that the name Cauldhame will cease to exist as no male heir will carry it. Eric's aim to set the cellar and so the house on fire is important since this signals that he wants to abolish the past (his own past as well) and the future of the family as well by killing Frank. For Eric, Frank represents future, the man, who could give the Cauldhame name to his/her child. Eric does not know that he originally has a sister, who is capable of reproduction, but his/her child would not bear the Cauldhame name. Eric cannot achieve his goal – the house will remain standing, symbolizing that past and its consequences cannot be erased. The space, in which the traditional sex/gender relations were so radically enacted, remains standing; at the same time, these relations also become re-defined.

The second room, the loft, is Frank's "domain entirely and home of the Wasp Factory, no less" (Banks 15). The loft with the make-believe prophecies of the Wasp Factory stands for the religious, meaning-making order of Frank, it is also the space in which Frank recites his/her secret catechisms: "They contained my confessions, my dreams and hopes, my fears and hates, and they still make me shiver whenever I say them, automatic or not" (Banks 120). Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* says "in the attic fears are easily 'rationalized'" (Bachelard 19). Since the attic is entirely Frank's territory for him/her this place gives confidence. Accomplishing his/her rituals there, Frank is the only person on the island who has access to the loft, even Angus cannot climb up. The attic fills a crucial role in the house – regarding its function it should serve to store things that are not used temporarily. For Frank, this is quite the opposite; everything that bares significant symbolic meaning to him/her is located in the attic. Moreover, the loft is the place in literature to store the secrets, or as in the case of the Victorian Madwoman – to keep the deviant away from the society. In fact, Frank's case recalls the mad Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Frank exemplifies such radical characteristics that cannot be tolerated in a civilised society, s/he believes to behave as a man, but what s/he actually becomes is nothing more than an artificial representation of all the forbidden features that are taboos. As Bertha Mason is read as a double to Jane by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan D. Gubar, Frank Cauldhame can also be read as a double for Eric Cauldhame, since Frank acts out all the believed masculine features that Eric was never capable to manifest. The other reason the two cases can be read together is conceptualised by Elaine Showalter in connection to *Jane Eyre*: "the madwoman must be purged from the plot, and passion must be purged from Jane herself" (69). This is also true to Frank; by the end of the novel s/he is forced to accept his/her female sex; s/he also has to accept that what was believed to be a manifestation of the radical masculine norm is only a lie. In order to Frank to grow up, s/he must abolish the cherished world in the loft and accept his/her femininity. The symbolic order enacted in the loft must cease to exist.

Before this could happen, Frank must enter the father's study. In contrast to the loft, which is the place of religious rituals, the study symbolises the father's scientific knowledge. The reader is frequently confronted with Frank's dilemma as s/he is unable to get into the study. In physical terms s/he is locked outside and as such deprived of the knowledge of what is inside. Frank's "remaining unsatisfied ambition is to get into the old man's study" (Banks 15); s/he does not know what would be found inside. Frank suggests it several times that s/he is the absolute authority on the island; still, there is one place where s/he has never been in his/her whole life. In the novel the interpretations of inside and outside have deeper

significance since these categories are also tied up with *truth*, about who s/he really is; and *past*, which s/he does not want to acknowledge when s/he awaits for the Factory's prophecies. "I have the Factory, and it's about now and the future; not the past" (Banks 118); but *inside* and *outside*, due to the convoluted and perspectival notion of truth, are not unambiguous in the text.

The space where Frank will find something about his/her castration story is *inside* the study. "Inside is [...] a place for neither beginning nor ending but for undergoing a change" (Madoff 51). At the beginning, curiosity is his/her only reason to get in, and s/he does not know that his/her whole life is going to *change* by entering the study. Frank accepts what s/he is told because s/he does not suspect what awaits him/her inside the study. Frank's comfortable life *outside* (without the knowledge of the inside) is constructed by several rules, orders, routines that provide safety and meaning for him/her, making it obvious that s/he is safe from the knowledge of the *inside*. In spite of this, s/he knows that "there is a secret in the study" (Banks 16) and s/he wants to see what is inside.

Frank is able to get into the study by accident – Angus leaves his coat on an armchair and in one of the pockets Frank finds the key to the study. It is indicative in itself that the key to the study and the key to Frank's room are similar but the key to the study has "a different cut" (Banks 171). As s/he enters, s/he finds immediately a specimen-jar filled with alcohol in which "was a tiny, torn set of male genitalia" (Banks 171). With his/her hand still on the key, Frank collapses and for the first time in the novel s/he starts crying because of the believed loss. One of the secrets of the inside is revealed; however, seeing the male genitalia in itself is not enough to change the protagonist, it only proves that the father's fable about the castration is true; thus Frank's transgression is not complete at this point. The other secret also needs to be revealed, which causes misunderstanding in Frank; this fault will be later the real "key" to the truth. Inside one of the drawers, Frank finds two things: male hormones and tampons. S/he immediately gets to the false assumption that Angus is Agnes and the male hormones and the tampons actually belong to him, believing him to be a woman. With his/her head full of disturbing thoughts Frank rushes out of the room, gets Angus, pulls down his trousers and sees his father's penis; and at the same moment Eric finally arrives at the island screaming, surrounded with a herd of burning sheep. It is not by chance that he arrives when Frank gets assured of his/her father's undeniable manliness. Thus the concept of madness is juxtaposed with masculinity, which goes against its conventional association with the feminine.

Eric's appearance on the island is apocalyptic: "Sheep were everywhere, fire was all about. The grass over the Skull Grounds was ablaze, flames leaped from the shed and the

bushes and the plants and flowers in the garden, and dead, burning sheep lay in pools of livid fire while others ran and jumped about moaning and howling in their guttural, broken voices.” (Banks 175-176) Eric reached the final destination of his journey and the territory of Frank’s lordship gets completely deconstructed by the madman.

When mentioning Eric’s incident, besides saying he was in the wrong *place* at the wrong time, claims: “That’s what you risk when you leave here” (Banks 23). What s/he means is that the *outer* world offers situations that sometimes cannot be controlled; at any moment something strange might occur that can change the person forever, and the individual will not be able to go back to the previous state. This is what is exemplified in Eric’s case. Eric wanted to leave the island and by this decision he risked his own mental stability and since it cannot be pretended that the incident had never happened, Eric is drastically changed. Frank cannot understand the *outside* world properly since s/he never actually saw anything from it. S/he watches a lot of television, and claims that “seen too many nature and travel programmes not to appreciate how limited my own knowledge is in terms of first-hand experience of other places [...] I know who I am and I know my limitations.” (Banks 136) Frank does not want to know and allow anything new into his/her life – *limitation* is a keyword here and it can be associated with his/her lack. Since in the outside world, among other men – who do not have any lack – s/he could not fit in properly. Eric as a whole man tried it and even he failed miserably. What would happen to him/her in the *outside*, in the unknown?

After trying to blow up the whole house Eric runs away; this is time for Frank to call Angus to account for what he has done to him/her – the experiment is explained. Angus holds the male genitalia and it turns to be made out of wax. This liminal, unformed material which the testicles are made are just as artificial as the lies Angus invented to raise a boy out of a girl. “I’m not Francis Leslie Cauldhame. I’m Frances Lesley Cauldhame. That’s what it boils down to. The tampons and the hormones were for me. [...] 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. (Banks 181) At the last couple of pages every detail about the past is revealed making Frank realize that the sixteen years of his/her life with its rituals, murders, routines were pointless – nothing was what it seemed to be.

Schone-Harwood describes the ending in the following way: “Eric and Frank’s final embrace signals a liberating reconstitution of gender relations beyond patriarchal pressure” (146). With the knowledge of what is in the study and in his/her past, Frank is now forced to leave: “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. What a bummer.” (Banks 182) Frank is now “ready” to leave the inward world of the island in order to get to know reality, s/he is forced to acknowledge. However, this is an ambivalent state. Firstly, there is Eric’s case – he went mad while trying to fit into the patriarchal world’s societal order. Secondly, Frank is not recognised legally, as s/he does not have either birth certificate or National Insurance number (Banks 13). One insane boy and one officially not existing girl, both of them “ready” to take the first steps in each other’s company at the gates of their brave new world. Even so, Frank is frightened as s/he has to leave the island and the imagined masculinity ideal behind forever. The symbolic order of the Wasp Factory is demolished.

Conclusion

The final two pages of the novel Frances tries to come to terms with what she⁷ has done so far in life. However, what must not be forgotten is that the state before entering the study will never come back – and the same applies to Eric; the incident with the child cannot be overlooked. While Frances tries to come to terms with the shocking confession of her father she reaches her final conclusion: “But I am still me; I am the same person, with the same memories and the same deeds done, the same (small) achievements, the same (appalling) crimes to my name” (Banks 182). It can be seen that Frances accepts the new circumstances, but at that moment she cannot decide how her initiation shall continue. Being a girl who was raised into masculinity she cannot go on maintaining two different genders. A new Frances is born and she has to accept the world from a perspective of a woman. Frank sits with the sleeping Eric looking at the hated Sea and thinking: “Now the door closes, and my journey begins” (Banks 184). Eric is *outside*, and free from the spaces of the house and the Factory alike, however outside functions in terms of patriarchy as well; sometimes as empowerment, – but as it did in Eric’s case – by the repression of the feminine as well. Hence, “I am still me”, the masculine gender identity remained in Eric, therefore on the basis of the text the question of how the outside patriarchal system will work for Frances remains undecided.

She must go on somehow, but Eric (probably) will never be able to recover and return to his old self. He is broken beyond “repair” and became an example of a male whose only “fault” was that he had a bit too much of feminine inside him. Having only once a mother for five years, spending the most formative years of his life at an unknown place only to get back to the known one could have been a terrifying experience. Eric from his very early childhood was never raised in stability, was dragged between two different environments. Opposed to Eric, Frances had a stable background – Angus gave her one during the experiment, but only to mislead and objectify her. Banks leaves his heroine at a point where the real story begins; raising the question: will Frank be able to fit into the patriarchal order as a woman? Judging by Eric’s madness and Frank’s upbringing my answer would be a definite no.

⁷ By now settled as a she.

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