

The Banksoniain #15

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

March 2010

Editorial

This issue spectacularly failed to be a special one timed to coincide with Iain's appearance at the Satellite 2 convention in July 2009, so after then getting caught up with a great deal of the Hitchhiker fandom activity that accompanied Eoin Colfer's sixth book in Douglas Adams's trilogy it has ended up being the 26th anniversary of *The Wasp Factory* edition, and late for that as well!

Focussing on *Transition*, we look at the timeline of the book and the reaction to it. We take a look back at the stage production of *The Wasp Factory* from 2008 including an interview with director Ed Robson. Gary Lloyd talks about the approach to the *Espedair Street* album. As usual Banks's own public appearances in the media and on his travels since the previous issue are documented with reports where available and his forthcoming appearances are listed.

Thanks for this issue to Ed Robson, for answering questions on the stage production of *The Wasp Factory*, Jeremy Sanders for details of the Cambridge event, the gang at the Iain Banks Forum, Darren at the official Banks website, Gary Lloyd and, of course, Iain M. Banks himself.

Unwritten Banks 1

The Wasp Factory Film Saga

A Mr I. Banks from Fife writes to inform us that he thought issue #14 was "illuminating and thorough". He then goes onto to impart some news that the rights to *The Wasp Factory* are back with the author, and there is apparently renewed interest from film-makers in the property. So the prospect of a film is less remote than it has been for some time. Maybe for the 30th anniversary of the book?

Banks's Next Book

Banks's next book is an M. It was originally listed by Orbit for publication in September 2010, but now seems to have been put back until February 2011.

Iain said in October 2009 that he was working on the plan for the new novel and in late 2009 that he would begin writing in in the New Year, i.e. January 2010 and be finished by the end of March. Banks was originally going to be Guest of Honour at PCon7, in March 2010, but pulled out as he wanted to concentrate on the novel. At the end of January 2010 disclosed that he was about a third of the way through the first draft, his working title was *Surface Detail* and it was "going splendidly". Attendees at Eastercon may well be treated to the first public reading.

UK Hardback ISBN: 978-1841498935

Trade paperback, audio download, audio CD, and ebook have their own ISBNs and are scheduled for simultaneous release.

Unwritten Banks 2

A Culture Film

The news broke in October 2009 that Banks's short story *A Gift From The Culture* was in development as a film project by a company called Film & Music Entertainment.

The screenplay is being co-written by the director Dominic Murphy and Shane Smith who previously teamed up on the critically acclaimed *White Lightning*, which premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.

The latest reports (**ScreenDaily** 13/02/10) have the budget in the region of £13million with casting in May and filming in South Africa in September. More in the Media Scanner section, page #5.

Transition

This article discussed the pre-publication knowledge of Iain's latest book. Blurb, prologue readings, etc. So if you only want to know about the title then stop reading now.

Timeline

12/10/2008 At Newcon4 Iain says he will be starting the new book a week tomorrow, i.e. October 20, 2008.

Late 2008 A book, *Untitled Iain Banks 2*, is listed on Amazon with a publication date of September 3, 2009. [I believe the "2" comes from this being the second book of this particular contract with Little, Brown].

13/01/09 The name of the new book is announced on the website iainbanks.net. The book is described on the Little, Brown website as "The stunning new novel from Iain Banks, which echoes his much-loved classic *The Bridge*".

09/02/09 Iain reports that, "*Transition* is undergoing the process of second drafting (that'll teach it). Due back to Little, Brown by Feb 28th."

04/03/09 *Transition* is read from at Iain's appearance in Cambridge. See page #10.

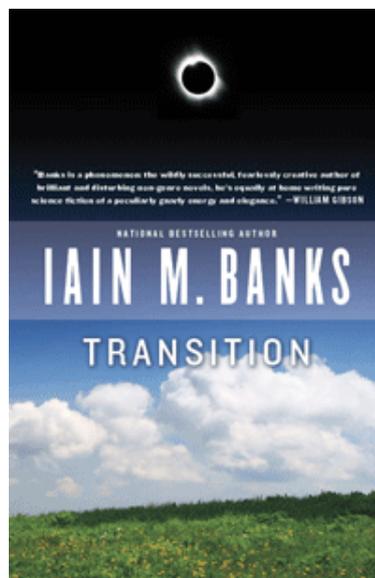
11/03/09 Orbit's US website listing their Fall/Winter 2009/2010 schedule has the book listed as an M, a cover and this blurb:

"A dazzling feat of the imagination, the new novel from Iain M. Banks, set in our world, confirms his place as a master storyteller and writer of extraordinary vision.

The Philosopher is a torturer, and proud of it. AC is a dealer who became a trader who became a hedge-fund manager. Madame d'Ortolan seems to control nearly everything, while Mrs. Mulverhill the younger hopes to frustrate her. Mr. Oh is a reluctant assassin, amongst many other things. The person in the hospital bed is not entirely sure who they might be, or where, or even when.

What all of these characters have in common is the Concern: an organization committed to protecting the world from outside threats. The world itself, however, is far more complex than we imagine; and the threats far more subtle."

It seems that in the UK it will be a non-M, and in the US an M. Given the investment that Orbit US has made in the Iain M Banks brand, releasing backlist titles, *Consider Phlebas*, *The Player of Games* and *Use of Weapons*, along with *Matter* in 2008, as well as *Against A Dark Background* in July 2009, this seems a sensible move.



US Hardback Cover

18/03/09 Banks was one of four authors asked by the BBC News website about 'How sci-fi moves with the times'. In his reply there was this snippet about *Transition*: "My new book is a mainstream novel that borrows science fiction tropes. It plays with the idea that there are an infinite number of different worlds. So it's using speculative hard science. And it's important to the book that there's a degree of respectability about the idea of the multiverse, or the many-worlds theory."

30/03/09 The description on the Little, Brown website changes to "The long-awaited and stunning new novel from the unrivalled Iain Banks - a high-definition, hyper-real apocalyptic fable for our times."

01/04/09 Another public reading of the prologue, and Iain mentioned the fact that *Transition* is being published as an M in the US but not in the UK, and how it is a bit "skiffy". See page #10.

07/04/09 Another book description found on the Little, Brown website: "A world that hangs suspended between triumph &

catastrophe, between the dismantling of the Wall & the fall of the Twin Towers, frozen in the shadow of suicide terrorism & global financial collapse, such a world requires a firm hand & a guiding light. But does it need the Concern?"

An article in the online edition of **The Bookseller** (23/07/09) blew up an Internet storm when Hachette Digital, Hachette being the owners of Little, Brown, announced that *Transition* (albeit an abridgement), would be serialised free on iTunes. The statement that caused most offence was the claim that "This is the first time an audio has been serialised in this way, and we're very excited to be doing something so groundbreaking." This drew out a number of fans of authors that had previously released free podcasts and also some of the authors themselves.

03/09/09 was the official publication date, but as usual shops put their copies out as soon as they received them. A short publicity tour followed the publication including an appearance at The Roundhouse in London, a venue more associated with music rather than literature.

05/09/09 **The Bookseller** hardback fiction chart for the week ending September 5 lists *Transition* at #10 with sales figures of 1,991. A week later it falls to #23 on sales of 2,000. In the week ending September 26 chart position was #16 selling another 1,404 units.

16/10/09 Eoin Colfer interviewed in **The Independent**, said that he was reading *Transition*, and added, "I've often thought that if they were looking for another sequel to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, he'd have a good stab at it." Iain dismissed this idea when it was put to him.

01/12/09 The unabridged audio-book is made available in both CD and cassette formats by Clipper Audio. It was originally made available only as a download from Audible, and demonstrate how much more expensive bits can be over bytes.

01/07/10 the UK paperback edition of *Transition* is listed for publication. The cover is red and uses the same imagery as the UK hardback which was black and produced by Nathan Burton Design.

Transition Commentary

Some of the ideas and concepts that Iain used in *Transition* had been previously mentioned by Iain, and it is interesting to see how things that failed to make it into previous books, and phrases from interviews have been included in the new novel.

The first line of *Transition* begins with the same phrase that *Matter* was going to have (see **Banksoniain** #9) which hints that his previous book was originally intended to be more complicated. This is something that Iain had wanted to do for a while and finally managed with *Transition*.

The initial spark for the story was revealed in an interview in **The Times** (13/09/09) "the very first idea was someone sitting at a cafe in Paris, drinking a cup of coffee, between reality's dimensions". From there he took a number of ideas/storylines he had stored away over the years and wove them with new ones into the novel.

The torturer storyline is one that Iain had previously thought of and mentioned. When he was going to write a short story for a collection for Amnesty International (see **Banksoniain** #13) this was the subject he chose. That project didn't happen but Iain developed the idea for this novel.

The phrase "Golden Age" that occurs in the prologue is something that Banks had previously used in interviews. The earliest I could find was from **The Times** (02/02/2008) where he is quoted as saying "We had a golden age for a time between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, but we didn't really notice it."

In the **My Planet Rocks** interview (see page #8) when talking about *Transition* Iain said "It is 51% Mainstream", but then added, somewhat mischievously, "a) I may be biased and b) I may have miscounted".

The source for the magnifying glass scene was queried by the interviewer at an event in Edinburgh. Iain explained that it came from walking with his friend Gary Lloyd in Chester and seeing a man sunbathing in his tiny front garden and thinking about how vulnerable he was and what could happen to him.

Transition Reaction

Both reader and critical reaction has been mixed but generally falling on the positive side. There is a lot to like but also dislike. Some readers picked up on the anti-Capitalism or the anti-Religion and decided they would not like it because they interpreted that as anti-American or anti-Christian.

At Satellite2 in July 2009 Charles Stross was getting his proof signed and commented that he thought it would be very well received in the States [where it was published as an M] and possibly get Iain onto the Hugo ballot.

“Transition is a clever novel: an exhilarating read that leaves a timebomb of philosophical engagement ticking in the reader's mind.” said Naomi Alderman in the magazine **Prospect** which published one of the first reviews in its August edition.

On the SF website **io9** (23/09/09) there was a more succinct appraisal of the novel as one that “will jelly your brains in brilliant weirdness.” Michael Marshall in **New Scientist** (19/09/09) was a little more cautious, “*Transition* may not be one of Banks's very best, but it is thumpingly good.”

Patrick Ness in **The Guardian** (26/09/09) was more circumspect, “In the end, *Transition* is neither general nor science fiction. Filled with sex, torture, cod philosophy, multiple realities, more sex and the aforementioned plethora of assassinations and breasts, this is an airport novel, something for the flight from JFK to Eafrow. You're welcome to take that for as much of a recommendation as you choose.”

James Walton said in **The Telegraph** (05/09/09), “The prologue may lead us to expect - rather excitedly in my case - a dark conspiracy thriller. What we get instead feels more like a bundle of half-formed bits and pieces that were knocking about in Banks's notebooks.”

A more dissenting voice was Glen Humphries in the Illawarra Mercury (31/10/09) who commented, “The book only comes alive with the story of drug dealer turned stockbroker Adrian Cubbish. Sadly, he's just a bright spot in a bit of a confusing mess.”

Media Scanner

Banks Related News Items

2009 began with a flurry of radio related Banks media coverage. Iain was interviewed by Mariella Frostrup on **Open Book** (22/02/09), talking about the then forthcoming adaptation of *The State of the Art*.

The Wasp Factory was chosen for discussion by the DJ Huw Stephens for the BBC Radio 4 programme, **A Good Read** (03/03/09).

The **Independent on Sunday** (01/03/09) included *The Wasp Factory* in its list of ‘Ten essential 1980s novels’, saying, “Teenage child murderer Frank lives with his father on a Scottish island. Revolting rituals, poignant deaths and a fearsome final twist had critics alternately retching and cheering.”

The **BBC News Website** asked a number of science fiction writers (18/03/09) whether “the genre need to stay up to date with the latest breakthroughs in order to be relevant?” Banks was one of those asked and replied it was just common sense really, “having a rough idea of how things really work.” He does this by reading **New Scientist** and **Scientific American**, but not peer reviewed journals, “I consider myself a reasonably well-informed lay person... Occasionally, I take ideas and inspiration from these sources and incorporate them into a science fiction novel. But I certainly don't feel pressure to keep stories completely realistic.”

An interview with Ian McDonald in **The Sunday Times** (22/03/09) throws up this interesting statement: “He cites Iain M Banks, the sci-fi writer, who said that most writers move at the age of five. “It's that sense of disruption - all writing is an attempt to create a stable environment which you control.” “[I believe Bank's own move from the east to west coast of Scotland happened when he around the age of nine.]

The Bookseller online (29/06/09) reported that Little, Brown were making some authors' works available “via the iTunes App Store, in partnership with Scrollmotion, creators of the Iceberg Reader.” Included in the list of authors was Iain M. Banks.

July's edition of **Ansible** (30/06/09) reported that Iain "will be awarded a Ph.D. by Middlesex University on 10 July". Whilst we are talking degrees, there is news from the man himself is that he will be picking up another honorary degree, this one from the Open University, at a graduation ceremony in Glasgow on Saturday 29th May 2010.

"Iain Banks reveals petticoat fixation" was the unlikely heading in **The Guardian** (18/08/09), especially when on reading the accompanying article it became clear that Iain was expressing his admiration for the way another author used shock plot twists, "If it's good enough for Jane Austen, it's jolly well good enough for me. I worship at the woman's feet!" he was quoted as saying.

At the time of publication of *Transition* in an interview with **The Guardian** (08/09/09) Iain revealed that he was getting less money for his next contract. In the audio that accompanied the online version of the article Iain said the next book would probably be half the length of *Matter*, and more "elegant" but still having the "goshwowery", as he didn't want to get into a routine. Iain also said he was a "fan of his fans" and that he thought writing the science fiction books he did meant that he didn't attract the wrong sort of obsessives, "you don't tend to get creepy rationalists". There were easier targets for stalking than the author of *The Wasp Factory* or *Complicity*.

In **The Independent** (11/09/09) he hinted at the contents of his next two books, the first "complete with laser guns and spaceships ... followed by a book that will be as visceral as *The Wasp Factory*." Iain also revealed that his father had died in June, around the time that Iain's divorce had been finalised. His mother hurt herself in a fall as well. On the *Transition* tour appearance in Ely (15/09/09) Iain also mentioned that his ex-wife had died, all in all making 2009 not a year he will remember particularly fondly.

"My ambition is to die part-way through a novel" was the heading from the **Hull Daily Mail** (28/09/09) which in reality boiled down to Iain saying he would carry on writing as long as he was published.

Culture Film Reaction

After the news of the Culture film broke (see page #1) Iain was interviewed about it. In **EmpireOnline** (02/11/09) he admitted, "I have mixed feelings about it, as I knew I always would." He continued, "I particularly worry about in the Culture stories is how the spaceships might look." Asked about whether other Culture films were planned he said that, "it's obviously in the back of everyone's mind, but a lot depends on what happens with this one. My agent certainly loves the idea that it's the start of something big."

The choice of *A Gift from the Culture* was a little surprising, and Banks was asked about this in the **Empire** interview saying that he thought it was because of "what it sparked in Dominic and the direction he thinks he can take it. I think he wants to do a lot to it, rather than just literally filming what's there."

The Times (08/11/09) picked up the Empire interview but added the information that Stephen Daldry was involved through being the chairman of the production company. Daldry had been attached to a consortium that had been looking to make a film of *The Wasp Factory*.

The closest an Iain M Banks story has previously got to being made was *The Player of Games*, see **Banksoniain** #5 for that story, and the same team behind this project had shown an interest in *The State of the Art*. In fact a **Variety** (5/12/2008) article about Film & Music Entertainment's included it in a list of their productions in development.

The Wasp Factory An International Bibliography

A little project of the **Banksoniain** team for last year's 25th anniversary of *The Wasp Factory* was to gather information on all the various editions we could and produce an illustrated international bibliography of the book. We managed to find fifty editions, although some rumoured ones eluded us, and the Traditional Chinese edition was published in July last year didn't make it in time, but is noted on the last page of this fanzine. A 2.75Mb PDF of the booklet is available at: <http://efanzines.com>

Wasp Factory on Stage 2008

2008 saw a revival of the Malcolm Sutherland adaptation of the stage version of *The Wasp Factory*, although in quite a radically different form. The history of the stage show of Banks's first published novel was recounted in **Banksoniain** #13.

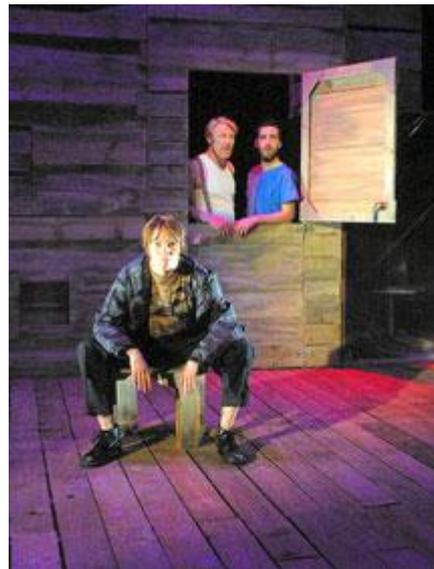
The main departure was in the number of actors playing Frank. In this version there was just the one, Nicola Jo Cully, and she was assisted by two male actors who played a variety of other roles although were most notably Father, Ian Sexon, and Eric, Robbie Jack. Esmeralda, Paul and Blyth were all represented by puppets that made their various demises somewhat surreal. The absurdity of Frank's treatment of the animals on the island was put into perspective by using fluffy toys, mainly bunnies, to embody the animals on the island that Frank engages in his once sided warfare with. It was impressive how menacing the actors, assisted by the music of Nigel Dunn, managed to make these props appear.

The set was also much changed, but still ambitious for a touring production. Malcolm Sutherland's original productions (although I only saw the West Yorkshire Playhouse one) used video screens to augment the on stage action with recorded images. Ed Robson has designed his own new set for this production with the same small area needing to represent the island and the house and other locations.

The front portion of the stage was split diagonally in two with to the front/right, an area of water, an inch or so in depth where Frank could splash around, and did so quite often, and within this a sacrifice pole. The other triangle was wooden planks, and the back portion of the stage used the same material to build a façade that had various doors, windows and other openings that actors would pop through (or partly through) making for a very dynamic production. The right hand end of this section was an obscured area where the audience could see actors but not entirely make out what they were doing which was mainly used as Father's study. At

the climax of the production the set split into two, as Frank's world comes tumbling down, and by the end of the show the stage was strewn the detritus of the performance.

The main twist in the book is probably known to all those who go to see the play so there is less of a shock value to the dénouement than there used to be. Perhaps to compensate for this the male actors appeared in various states of undress at times, although, according to local newspaper, apparently not when the show was performed on Lewis.



The three actors on set

As the production was partially funded by the Scottish Arts Council there are a couple of evaluation forms available on its website. The evaluators both rated the production as good, and one gave a number of excellent ratings for some of the aspects of the show. "Visually arresting and confident production that had a strong and distinctive performance style" was one summary. The ending of the play came in for some criticism, although the responsibility for this was pointed at, "a weakness in the script which failed to convey the full dramatic impact of the story's end." Audience reaction was also described as positive, although one report noted that four people left and others were shocked by the nudity.

I saw one of the last performances of the whole tour, and it was certainly a well executed and powerful interpretation of the book, smaller and more intimate than the original stage show.

Interview with Director - Ed Robson

Ed is the Artistic Director of the Cumbernauld Theatre, and the revival of the stage production of *The Wasp Factory* was his project. He took some time to answer a few questions I emailed to him last summer.

> I was wondering why you decided to revive the production last year?

I wanted to revive *The Wasp Factory* because it has been over 15 years since the production had been seen in Scotland. As a result, although the book has maintained its cult status, and had gained new readers, few people remembered seeing Malcolm Sutherland's original production at The Citizens. It seemed an ideal time to re-discover something about the novel in the 21st century for a new audience who hadn't been around in the early 90's. At the same time, and in equal measure, I'd always been a fan of Iain and Iain M.'s work - and to a certain degree the opportunity to work on *The Wasp Factory* allowed me something of a personal fulfilment.

> Why did you use just one actress for Frank when the Sutherland productions used multiple actors?

I chose to cast one actress, Nicola Jo Cully, as Frank because it seemed to me that the split-character device was very much a theatrical device of its era. Malcolm Sutherland, who both created the original adaptation, was very generous in enabling our creative team to develop his text in such a way as to throw the accent upon Frank. Above all else, the premise of the production rests upon a simple statement: Frank is a girl who thinks she is a boy. I wanted to focus upon this theme in the production. The 'second' or 'boy' Frank was backgrounded in our production, but not entirely removed. Instead we, to a certain extent, tied the second Frank into the character of Eric...who often appears in her dreams, or peering in through little windows on the set, and Frank frequently holds imaginary conversations with him. So, although we expressly only had one Frank, we did have an alter-ego Frank/Eric but one

significantly less visible than in previous productions...for those who didn't see Malcolm's original at The Citizens he also had a trapeze artist, which we didn't have either!

> Looking back how do you feel the production went?

It is always had to evaluate your own work. I guess the truth is there are always bits you love and bits you'd do differently but overall I am very very pleased with the production which was one of the touring successes of Scottish Theatre last year. Good critical acclaim and excellent audiences in venues as far apart as The Outer Hebrides to The Lake District had the chance to see this powerful production and to debate at length about whether the macabre style of the show was too macabre or not macabre enough...I still think that we could have gone further with the revelation at the end of the production...It is very difficult to stage the final discovery / destruction / redemption scene without becoming too literal. If I could change one thing, I'd find a way of capturing the fury of the Brother's return in an even more visceral manner (for those who didn't see the show, we staged it with the actor playing Eric, Robbie Jack, entering the scene stripped naked - a process of revelation that had been going on throughout the show, and pouring petrol on himself...at the same time operatic music played, the walls of the set moved apart to reveal a 20ft high picture of the naked actress Nicola Jo Cully, Frank is confronted with this picture of 'true self' and The father sang a drunken "Danny Boy"...it was one of those things you'd need to see to believe...).

Finally, I'd love to do it gain. Hopefully, when the time is right, I will. We had lots of interest from venues in England about touring the production there and although we've no firm plans at the moment, it is something that might happen. As always, it depends on Iain and Malcolm agreeing to allow us the rights!

Ed would like to take this opportunity to publically thank Malcolm Sutherland, Iain Banks and the actors - Nicola Jo Cully, Robbie Jack and Ian Sexon.

My Planet Rocks

Iain was the first celebrity on the new series of *My Planet Rocks*, a show on the UK based digital radio station Planet Rock where people choose their favourite music and discuss it, their work and their overlap. Iain's show was broadcast on October 10th 2009.

The interviewer was David Jensen, who gave the impression that he had not actually read any of Iain's books, but perhaps he was playing the role of naïve interviewer. The show kicked off with some Led Zeppelin, *Immigrant Song* from their third album, and Iain described the band as the "prime purveyors" of epic rock.

Next up was *Sad Mary* from Stone the Crows. Iain talked about hearing this originally on vinyl where the loud bits from the next groove could just about be heard in preceding quiet bits. The conversation then turned to whisky and the research he did for *Raw Spirit*, and why missing it with coke is "just wrong".

Ravenscroft's 13 Bar Boogie from Tractor was Iain's way of paying homage to John Peel and the influence that the DJ had on his, and many other's, musical education. Tractor were signed to Peel's label, Dandelion, and Ravenscroft was Peel's real surname.

Iain's ambition to write a symphony was Jensen's next line of enquiry. Banks talked about how software had progressed (he uses Logic 7 on his Mac) to a point where if you hear something in your head you can, without any great skill, as long as you have the patience, make it real. Banks is working towards a symphony as it is the equivalent of the novel, the peek of the creator's art, the one that provides for the epic. Iain also revealed that he had started taking piano lessons, although this was nothing to do with the symphony project. [Asked how the lessons were going in February 2010, Iain said he had stopped whilst writing the new novel, "one keyboard at a time"].

A breath of fresh air was how Iain described The Pixies, praising them for "re-energising rock" their general attitude and tackling non-rock issues summing up by saying, "I like the

cut of their job, quite frankly". The track he chose of theirs was *Velouria*.

After being asked about his latest book Iain described his career as a Y, with the books up to *The Bridge* being the tail and after then his books diverging, "with the science fiction became very science fiction, space opera in fact, with large aliens, laser cannons and spaceships and so on, and the mainstream becoming more conventionally mainstream."

David then asked about getting into the science fiction and whether the books should be read chronologically. Iain said that might work best, but that *The Player of Games* might be a better way into the Culture and *Transition* a way into his general science fiction.

Jimmy Hendrix, *Castles Made of Sand* was the next track. The title was used as a section title in *Against a Dark Background*, followed by one called *Fall into the Sea*. He liked it for the epic feeling, and the anti-heroic nature in a rock styling being impressive.

Asked about influences Iain said that he is probably influenced by everyone he has read including unfortunately the bad. It is not just authors that inspire him, and he cited non-literary influences citing the Marx Brothers, the Goon Show and Monty Python, before moving onto music. Here he mentioned the "old Stones stuff and definitely Led Zeppelin" where there was a story being told. Robin Trower's *Bridge of Sighs* was something he had considered for the show but didn't quite make it in, but it did inspire a scene in *The Bridge*.

Canada's Arcade Fire was described as perhaps coming from a different planet and Iain said he, "just loved the start" of his chosen track, *Intervention*, "that's how to use an organ, let me tell you!"

A suggested point of entry to Iain's mainstream books was obviously *Espedair Street*, given the radio station's audience, with Iain saying that it had quite a conventional narrative and, "doesn't play any tricks on the reader." Iain then got talking about the album project – see next page – after being asked if he had ever be approached to write lyrics for a band.

Warren Zevon was put next, with Iain saying he had been a fan for thirty years or so and describing him as, “a fabulous guy” and that the self-titled album had no weak track on it at all and was genius from beginning to end. *I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead* was the chosen track.

Iain put down his becoming an author partly to being an only child and therefore wanting to be in control. Maybe if he hadn’t he would have been more amenable to being in a band as he would have liked to been a musician if he hadn’t been an author.

Cream’s *What A Bringdown*, was next up, as it has the feeling of getting towards the end of things, “a valedictory feel”. After which Jensen asked Iain about his politics and the author described himself as a “pragmatic nationalist, rather than a romantic one”. Expounding that the country he was born into does not exist anymore, the Britain of the NHS, GPO and BBC. He sees a way forward for a vaguely leftwing Scotland within the EU without a rightwing England. Pressed as to whether he would ever enter the world of politics Iain said he would “flounce off at the first possible doctrinal difference. I do a good flounce – it’s an only child thing again.”

Thoughts of a Dying Atheist from Muse from the final selection and Iain admires the band for being so unafraid, and “never finding a top they don’t want to go over”.

The chosen tracks are different to the ones that he picked for his appearance on the BBC radio programme, Desert Island Discs a few years ago, and also from the compilation album, *Personal Effects*, that he did for EMI in 1999. The latter does include a track from Warren Zevon, but not the same one. Evidently Iain’s favourites change over time. He is known to have a large collection of music, in a 2007 interview he admitted he had two 60 GB iPods that totalled 26,165 songs. In a 2005 interview that total had only been 19,682.

Transition in Translation

The German rights to *Transition* have been sold to Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, and *Welten*, is listed for publication on May 10th 2010. ISBN: 978-3453527102

Espedair Street – Album

Gary Lloyd, Iain’s composer friend and collaborator on the Frozen Gold tribute album was at the 2009 Eastercon in Bradford appearing on several panels on the newly-founded music strand. He was buzzing, happy to be at his first proper convention rather than ghosting, and also that he had pretty much completed what he needed to do to take the *Espedair Street* album project to the next stage. He was using his iPod to play extracts of his music to those happy to listen and eagerly studying their faces for reaction.

Gary explained that the pair had used three rules when arranging Iain’s original tunes and lyrics into the songs. Most of these, it must be remembered, were originally whistled and hummed into a cassette tape recorder by Iain during his University days in the early/mid Seventies (roughly when the book is set) and had their lyrics revisited when he wrote the book in the Eighties.

Three Rules of the *Espedair Street* Album

- 1) The melody has to work on its own and drive everything, completing the harmonic picture.
- 2) The chord structures must not divulge the melody too easily. The chords should be rich harmonically.
- 3) There must be some interesting sonic and textual detail. The instrumentation should not be standard rock and pop.

Iain and Gary finished their work in May 2009 and are in the process of finding singers. Iain mentioned the project on his **My Planet Rocks** interview (page #8), saying that they had high quality demo tracks without recorded lyrics, although the lyrics were available, and were approaching people and asking, “Please will you sing on my record, please?”

French reach State of the Art

March 2010 sees the publication of *L’essence de l’art*, by Du Belial in a translation by Sonia Quemener with an extra discussion of The Culture and a bibliography, as well as a gorgeous cover by the artist Manchu.

Cover at <http://i46.tinypic.com/rkofhe.jpg>
ISBN: 978-2843440977

Banks on Tour 2009

Iain spoke at Trinity College Literary Society in **Cambridge** on Wednesday, March 4, 2009. He read from *Transition* and took questions from the small gathering in the Master's Lodge. He described the new book as an effort to write a book that would stand as strongly in literary terms as the favourite book of his own, *The Bridge*.

In the question and answer session he commented that his non-M make more than his M books, although the gap is closing. He also described it as "almost unfilmable", and revealed that the film rights to *The Wasp Factory* have reverted to him (see also page #1). Asked about the future of technology he downplayed the ability of science fiction authors to predict anything, but did speculate on the possibility that being able to re-grow limbs and extend life were likely, but would just allow the rich to take further control of society as they would be the only people who could afford it.

The prologue from *Transition* was given another public airing at **Middlesex University Literary Festival** on Wednesday, April 1, 2009, where Banks was the speaker at the climax of the two-day event. Scheduled for two hours after the reading he was interviewed by a knowledgeable host, and also had time for twenty or so questions from the mainly academic audience. The programme also had an interview with Iain.

As he was reading the prologue he said he wouldn't have to set the scene, but also commented that we had not seen the blurb. He then had a little digression about blurbs that give the book away, and that he had seen the blurb for *Transition* and thought it pretty good. The digression extended into a little rant about opera programmes giving the plot away, and that was fine if you had seen the opera many times, but not for first-timers. He then made it clear that he was not a frequent opera goer, the last (and possibly only) time being in Buxton when he was there for a book festival, and they had the *Barber of Seville*, but not the famous one, the other one, "the second best" as he called it. He then returned to the subject of book blurbs and said he was

happy that the word compelling was not used, and he wanted to write a review that said, "This book is compelling. It compelled me to throw it across the room".

The interview took us through how Iain got started as a writer, initially got published, moved into writing science fiction, left adaptor to do their job. He said he found watching/listening to material he had originated embarrassing. The interviewer described *The Business* as a different kind of romance novel and Iain agreed calling it a kind of "fairy tale romance". He then said he was running out of sub-genres to use, and that he would like to write a historical novel but was put off by the thought of the research. Jane Austen didn't do any research he claimed. She didn't mention the wars that were going on during the times in which she set her novels, but if you tried to set a novel in that period now you would be expected to do so. His most researched novel he said was, *Canal Dreams*, and he thought too much of the research had made it into the book.

The audience questions started with Iain being asked what made him a successful writer to which he replied, "luck", before expounding that he though he had a good imagination, was not that great with character, liked a good plot and was a sucker for a surprise ending, making the reader's journey an interesting one.

He was asked if he had ever thought about giving it all up, and said that he would when he ran out of ideas. Adding that now *Transition* was pretty much out of the way his goals for 2009 were 1) to complete the Fife Coastal Path and 2) write a symphony - with a big structure, big narrative and big themes. The grisly ends of many of his characters were asked about and he agreed it was a lot of fun, and was probably kicked off by a comment that his father made when he was a child and they were watching *Tomorrow's World* and saw a machine that shock things to destruction. His father said he thought something like that would probably turn up in the next James Bond film.

Iain was pretty much stopped in his tracks by being asked about his favourite science fiction concept, to which his initial response was

"Bloody Hell", before thinking a bit and then talking about Bob Shaw's Slow Glass and saying how elegant it was.

When asked about his next book he said it was 99.9% certain to be a Culture one, and probably shorter than *Matter*, and more "in" the Culture. Oddest question was what Coronation Street character did he identify with? Iain admitted he didn't watch soaps, but various women of a certain age in the audience seemed to come to the conclusion he was like Ken Barlow!

The whole thing was filmed, using two cameras, so there are shots of the audience reaction to Iain's performance and the DVD should be placed in the library so Banks scholars should be able to find it in the future.

Iain was due to be a guest at the 2009 **Prague Writer's Festival** but had to pull out at short notice. He is planning to go to the 2010 instead which is in June.

Iain did make his Guest of Honour appearance at **Satellite2** a convention celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the first moon landing. Iain appeared on a variety of programme items.

In an item based on the TV show **Room 101** Iain got to rant about the things he hates, and consign them, well, some of them, to a black hole, well, a wastepaper basket with a black bin liner. The list was: the chairman of Ryanair (customers, contempt of), modern hiking gear (waterproofness, lack of), television news (lily-livered nature of), comedians who pick on their audiences (laziness of), American cultural imperialism (ubiquitousness of), Privatization (inappropriateness of) and Reality TV (participant embarrassment of).

In his Guest of Honour slot he read from *Transition* and took the usual suite of questions. **Culturally Challenged**, was a panel discussed whether they would like to like in the Culture. Iain's answer was, of course, "Hell, yes!". Whilst some of the panel and audience had the odd misgiving. "What do you do for vice?" was one question that mentioned drug gland, genitalia manipulation and so on. Iain's answer was, "Be imaginative!"

Iain was an enthusiastic amateur on the **Future of Spaceflight** panel with some professional from the Scottish space industry. He commented that the current generation seemed to need convincing of the need for space exploration, they seem to take green issue more seriously, but that "as a bit of a greeny" he could still see that having all our eggs in one basket was a risk.

A couple of video extracts from Iain's discussion with Alan Taylor at a **City Reads** event in Edinburgh on December 16, 2009 are available on Youtube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bK3Hy19AKgQ>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch#!v=7rDpGoy3NM>

Banks – The Great Fifer

A piece of news that we missed last issue, but was too good to ignore. The **Fife Today** newspaper listed their "100 Greatest Fifers ever" back in early 2009. Iain was #54 in the list, quite a way behind follow authors Ian Rankin (#27), and Val McDermid (#36), but ahead of Jocky Wilson (#56). Prime Minister Gordon Brown was #2 (behind Adam Smith) which meant Iain wasn't the Greatest Fifer in his own street.

Contemporary Dance with Iain Banks

Not strictly an Iain appearance but Gary Lloyd who created an audio version of *The Bridge* and is working with Iain on a tribute album for Frozen Gold has used a recording of Iain reading a poem by Luke Pell in the music that Gary has written for the dance group, Marc Brew Company. Iain said it took 18 takes to record his reading but blamed the wind direction as the planes from Edinburgh airport were heading over North Queensferry.

The twenty minute piece that takes both inspiration and name from Whistler's famous series of paintings was performed at the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival and at a number of other dance festivals throughout the UK over the summer of 2009.

Gary promises more details about the music for Nocturne at his website soon:

<http://www.myspace.com/garyhlloyd>

Also see: <http://www.marcbrew.com> and

MarcBrewCompany on Youtube has extracts.

Banksoniain Calendar

2010

Friday - Monday, 2-5 April

Eastercon - Odyssey 2010, the 61st British National Science Fiction Convention, where Iain is one of the Guests of Honour. This year it is being held at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London.

<http://www.odyssey2010.org/>

Friday - Sunday, 7-9 May

Ullapool Book Festival. Guests, including Iain, have been announced, and the full programme will be available on March 20th.

<http://www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk/>

Sunday, 30 May

University of Stirling - English Studies Postgraduate Conference. Iain is doing a reading and QA on the Sunday of the weekend conference that has “transgressive literature” as its theme.

<http://www.transgression.stir.ac.uk/>

Sunday - Thursday, 6-10 June

Prague Writers' Festival. For personal reasons Iain had to pull out at short notice last year, but intends to try again in 2010.

<http://www.pwf.cz/>

Thursday - Sunday, 24-27, June

Dundee Literary Festival

<http://www.literarydundee.co.uk/>

Thursday, 1 July

UK Paperback edition of *Transition*.

Saturday - Monday, 14-30 August

Edinburgh International Book Festival.

Iain will make his usual appearance with the programme being announced in June.

<http://www.edbookfest.co.uk/>

Friday - Sunday, 12-14 November

Novacon 40 which is at the Park Inn, Nottingham has Iain as Guest of Honour.

<http://www.novacon.org.uk/>

N.B. Other Iain M Banks events may be available. Any calendar updates will appear in our publically available Google Calendar:

<http://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=banksoniain%40gmail.com>

Do confirm event details and Iain's attendance with organisers before travelling.

Banks's Backlist

Excession has been reprinted in the US by Bantam USA. ISBN: 978-0553575378.

Orbit US continue through Banks backlist with *Against a Dark Background* released on July 1, 2009. ISBN: 978-0316036375.

Spanish publisher, La Factoría de Ideas, released *El uso de las armas*, a new translation of *Use of Weapons* by David Cruz. ISBN: 978-8498004489.

Andreas Brandhorst has translated *Matter* for German publisher Heyne, and it was published in February under the name, *Die Sphären*. ISBN: 978-3453525009. Heyne also issued Irene Holicki's translation of *The Algebraist*, *Der Algebraist*, in paperback in March. ISBN: 978-3453525375.

A traditional Chinese translation, by Li Xin, of *The Wasp Factory* was issued by the Taiwanese company Yuan-Liou in July 2009. ISBN: 978-957-32-6475-0. Cover below.



A Korean edition of *The Business* was published by Open Books. ISBN: 978-89-329-0871-7.

The Banksoniain is available as a PDF from <http://efanzines.com>

If you have any corrections, comments, contributions, or want a paper copy then email: banksoniain@gmail.com

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