

The Banksoniain #19

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2013

Editorial

This edition looks back at 2012 but also forward into 2013 and beyond. Last year was a busy one for Banks as two novels were published, and so there was more than the usual publicity activity.

2013 should see a new Iain Banks work published, and there is also a cover makeover for the all the UK non M paperbacks. A quirk of the publishing industry sees two UK editions of *The Wasp Factory* being issued and there is a musical theatre version of the book being premièred at the Bregenzer Festspiele in Austria.

2014 will be an Iain M. Banks year with the author being one of the guests of honour at Loncon 3, that year's World Science Fiction Convention, taking place in London, and there is also the expectation of a science fiction novel later that year.

The Media Scanner column on pages #2 & #3 highlights interesting pieces of Iain's press coverage since the last issue. Some particular events have been picked out for their own sections on pages #4 & #5. The cover makeover gets this issue's centrespread, alongside the regular Backlist feature. The Bregenz Festival announcement is examined on page #8. After that we look back at the publicity tour for *The Hydrogen Sonata*, and also the reaction to the book. New this issue, on the back page with the calendar and some Worldcon news, is a cartoon from Conscious Bob, the *Culture Citizens*, that is planned to be a regular feature.

February 2013 marks 9 years of this fanzine, with 19 irregularly spaced issues. In the 2012 Nova awards three months ago we managed to be placed #5 with 13 votes in the Best Fanzine category. Thanks for the support.

Banks's Next Book(s)

Iain should have begun writing *The Quarry* at the start of the year. In December he said that January 7th was his planned start date, and the book would be set in Northumbria, so perhaps after finishing the Fife Coastal Path he is walking further afield now. The title, ISBN and a release date have been confirmed on book selling websites. To be published by Little, Brown on 3 October, 2013, the hardback ISBN is: 978-1-4087-0394-6.

In the meantime we can expect a piece of non-fiction writing explain why he supports the cultural boycott of Israel in a chapter of the book *Generation Palestine* called *Our People*. The book's editor is Rich Wiles, and it is published by Pluto Press on 20 March 2013. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3243-7

Since the last **Banksoniain** a piece of non-fiction has been published in the online reincarnation of **New Worlds** magazine. Iain's article is called *A Rand-t!* It explores the similarities between authors Lafayette Ron Hubbard and Ayn Rand, and how both of them have spawned cults.

See www.newworlds.co.uk/nonfiction.php

The *Stonemouth* UK paperback, ISBN: 978-0-349-00020-6, was published at the beginning of January. The cover is the first of a series produced by Mark Ecob which will see all the Abacus paperback re-designed. More details on page #6

The 2014 M book, i.e. the one after next, was mentioned by Iain in an interview on the **GeekChocolate** website. He said that he had had ideas in the universes of *The Algebraist* and *Against A Dark Background*, as well as having a Culture story ready to go. More details of this interview are on page #3, along with some next Culture book references in an interview on the **Orbit** website.

Media Scanner

Tom Adair's review of *New Writing Scotland 30* in **The Scotsman** (22 Sep 2012) took the opportunity to list some of the authors who were first published in previous editions. Iain Banks was mentioned, and indeed it was the 1983 edition in which a poem by Iain called *041* was included five or six months before *The Wasp Factory* was published.

The Bookseller's featured *The Wasp Factory* in one of their Book of the Week items (28 Sep 2012). Philip Stone's article noted that "just 10 editions of novels have sold more than 10,000 copies every year since the turn of the century", and that the Abacus paperback of Banks's first published novel was one of them. The sales figures since January 2000 show that the yearly totals ranged between 18,600 in 2004 to 10,600 in 2011, for a total of 172,000 copies, and that this meant £1.2m passing through the tills.

On **BBC Radio Scotland's** The Book Café (8 Oct 2012)¹ Iain talked about his new book and its musical motif, revealing that he had thought of the title for *Canal Dreams*, but only when it was too late to change, so he sort of had the phrase on the shelf for quite a few years. He was also asked to define his life in three books one for childhood, another for adolescence and one for a desert Island. Iain's picks were: *Kemlo and the Zones of Silence*, the first book that got him into science fiction, although he described it as a terrible but it opened up the possibilities of what could be done. The book that made the biggest impression on him during his adolescence was *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* for the energy and the "you can do that with prose" feeling. For the desert island he chose Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which he got about halfway through some years ago. Iain did say that he was tempted by *Lanark*, which he described as the "greatest work of twentieth-century Scottish literature".

The Bookseller noted that Iain M Banks's latest was the highest new entry in the Original Fiction chart (12 Oct 2012). The article also said that *Surface Detail* sold 42,000 copies in hardback. It also gave the

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n62f6>

"proportion of Iain Banks' book sales as 'Iain M Banks' / 'Iain Banks' since records began in 1998" as 47%/53%.

Stephen. Kelmany in an piece headed, 'Five Of the best...: Children in peril.' in **The Sunday Telegraph** (14 Oct 2012) put *The Wasp Factory* with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Jamrach's Menagerie*, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* and *Mister Pip* as his selection.

Iain was in the company of film director Ken Loach, former MP Tony Benn, and various current MPs in being amongst the signatories to a letter to **The Guardian** (18 Oct 2012) headed "People's petition against austerity". The letter described the policy as "an economic catastrophe" and asked those who wanted to "save the welfare state and resist spending cuts" to sign at:

www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk

In Emma Seith's article in the **Times Educational Supplement**² (19 Oct 2012) Iain was asked about inspiration teachers. He mentioned Mr Hare at Gourrock, but concentrated on Joan Woods who was his English teacher at Greenock High, she "also ran the creative writing club that my friend Ken MacLeod, another science fiction writer, and I went along to for a couple of years." He described her as a "cultural lighthouse", and "a big fan of T.S. Eliot", she also supported his sixth-year dissertation on science fiction. *Excession* is dedicated to her memory.

In a second appearance of the year on **BBC Radio 5's** Richard Bacon show (25 Oct 2012)³ Iain was introduced with the Guardian quote that he is the writer "against which all other sci-fi writers should be measured". Invited to set the scene for the Culture novels, Iain summarised it along the line of an advanced humanoid society where AIs do the moral algebra for any interference they carry out. Richard talked about the metaphoric aspects of science fiction allowing the writer to tackle real world issues. Iain agreed, emphasising the ability to design a society in order to stress a particular facet to concentrate on. Iain said that "in theory" it should be

² <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6296462>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ngqtd>

possible, “if I am doing my job correctly”, to read his latest book as a standalone without knowing anything about the Culture, but suggested that *Consider Phlebas* or *The Player of Games* were better places to start the whole series.

Asked about the political content of *The Hydrogen Sonata*, Iain explained that although writing about aliens the frailties that he explored are very much traits that we share with his characters. The author’s support for Scottish independence was raised, and he again stressed it was to do with the fact that he expected an independent Scotland to be more left wing, and that the country never really fell for Thatcherism like England did. The conversation then carried on about Scotland leaving the UK and possibly or possibly not joining the European Union, for longer than the discussion of science fiction. Finally, Richard turned to Iain’s support, as a patron of the Safe Space⁴ charity which supports survivors of sexual abuse in the light of the then developing Jimmy Saville story. The pair talked about the importance of helping the abused to communicate their experiences.

Iain was interviewed on the **BBC News** strand ‘Five Minutes With’ (3 Nov 2012)⁵ which was a fun little exchange with Matthew Stadlen.

To mark the sixtieth anniversary of the hit parade **The Independent on Sunday** (11 Nov 2012) asked 60 of Britain’s leading personalities to name their perfect record, and explain why. Iain chose *Give Ireland Back to the Irish*, saying, “despite being banned by the BBC, still reached number 16 and proves popularity transcends censorship!” The article did not mention that this was the debut single of what was then, February 1972, Paul McCartney’s new band Wings.

In **The Scotsman**’s preview of the Radical Independence Conference (14 Nov 2012) Iain explained his support was based on his observation that, “without resorting to crude we’re-so-brilliant nationalism or outright

⁴ <http://www.safe-space.co.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-20181130>

racism”, there is a basic “cultural difference” between the Scots and the English. “The Scots... just seem to be more communitarian than the consensus expressed by the UK population as a whole”.

SF Signal⁶ (28 Nov 2012) held a ‘Mind Meld’ trying to establish the secret behind the success of the Culture novels, asking that question of a variety of other authors. John Scalzi admitted he just enjoyed being a tourist, “gawking at all the cool shit that’s in the Culture”, and he really wanted an “encyclopedia of The Culture”. It was Banks’s resume rather than anything structural that set them apart for Robert Buettner. Neal Asher said he always looked for a sensawunda in books and “Banks delivers it in spades”, along with something rare in SF, humour. Compassion was the one word opening sentence of Damien G. Walter, who then explained that the books “are meditations on ideas of altruism, utopia and values of good and evil.” He also pointed to the humour and how Banks manages to write “anti-genre” offending the prevailing values. David Brin said an author should “contrive ways to keep your hero and heroine in pulse-pounding jeopardy”. Most do this simply, but one of Banks’s “unique accomplishments is to see past what I call the ‘idiot plot.’”

In an article called ‘In praise of ... great first lines’ in **The Herald** (06 Dec 2012), Teddy Jamieson said that “First lines are show-off lines. Lines where the author often reveals what kind of writer he is.” He then cited the opening of *The Crow Road*, claiming, “All the darkness and the teenage ghoulish glee that animates its middle-aged author is on display.”

On the **GeekChocolate**⁷ website an interview with Iain was posted (27 Dec 2012) that although focused on *The Hydrogen Sonata* also covered the history of the Culture books and the possible future. Iain revealed that the general idea had come from watching an edition of **QI** that had covered The Great

⁶ <http://www.sfsignal.com/archives/2012/11/mind-meld-the-secret-to-the-success-of-iain-m-banks-culture-novels/>

⁷ http://www.geekchocolate.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=296

Disappointment. [This was when William Miller prophesied that Jesus would return in 1844 for what the book of Daniel said would be the “cleansing of the sanctuary”.] Extrapolating from that starting point Iain “liked the idea of not just a prophecy that came true, but an entire holy book that was proved to be absolutely correct” and “it kind of blossomed from there”.

An ‘Extreme Reading’ competition run by the Plymouth City Council’s library service was reported on in the local **Evening Herald** (29 Dec 2012). One of the commended entries was a picture of Keira Jones hanging upside down from a trapeze reading *Dead Air*. She was quoted in the article as saying, “The subject of this book is the survival of the individual in the face of a chaotic world, which is a subject close to my heart.”⁸

The announcement that the Royal Opera House would be staging *The Wasp Factory* in their 2013-14 season (see also page #8) was in a press release that covered 2013-2020. Despite this, much of the coverage did pick out the Banks work. The **Evening Standard** (20 Jan 2013) even headline this piece, “Psychopaths and human sacrifice as Opera House takes on ENO”, whilst the **Telegraph** (11 Jan 2013) mentioned in as part of what it saw as trying “to seduce a younger audience”.

The UK paperback of *Stonemouth* was published in January and made it into the **Sunday Times** (20 Jan 2013) at #9, with sales that week of 6,965. The same number put the book at #10 in the mass-market fiction chart in **The Bookseller** (18 Jan 2013) which noted that hardback sales had been over 10,000.

Iain was one of many signatories to a letter in the **Guardian** (5 Feb 2013) calling on the British public to attend a People’s Assembly Against Austerity at Central Hall, Westminster, on 22 June 2013 which would “provide a national forum for anti-austerity views which, while increasingly popular, are barely represented in parliament.”

Iain will be receiving the Burke Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Public Discourse

⁸ <http://www.thisisplymouth.co.uk/Extreme-Reading-caught-camera/story-17710094-detail/story.html> (Goto picture 4)

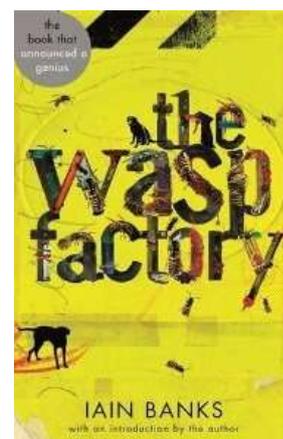
through the Arts. This award comes from the College Historical Society at Trinity College Dublin. Previous winners have been actor John Rhys Davies, comedian Joe Randazzo, and another writer, Roddy Doyle. The medal is named for Edmund Burke the eighteenth century politician who attended Trinity and founded a society that was a precursor of the current organisation.

Abacus 40th Anniversary

Abacus the UK paperback publishers of Iain Banks books are celebrating their fortieth anniversary with new editions of eighteen books selected from their history.

The company started off with non-fiction, issuing books like E.F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*, and the works of Primo Levi. They also published biography and economics books before moving into fiction. The books chosen for special editions are all published on 4 April, 2013 and include: Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*, Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom*, *Old Filth* by Jane Gardam, Tim Harford’s *The Undercover Economist*, and *Quite Ugly One Morning* by Christopher Brookmyre.

The new edition of *The Wasp Factory* has a cover by Michelle Thompson, and the illustration picks up various themes from the book, and has a caption in the top left saying, “the book that announced a genius”.



ISBN: 978-0-349-13890-9

The second 2013 edition of *The Wasp Factory* for is part of the general Iain Banks paperback cover makeover discussed on page #6.

Piece – Kickstarter

An attempt to raise money via the crowd-sourcing website Kickstarter to fund a short film of the Iain Banks story, *Piece*, but unfortunately it failed to meet its target of \$20,000.

Piece was first published in the magazine of **The Observer** newspaper on 13 August 1989. The tagline for the fundraising effort summarised the plot well as, “3 Journeys. 2 Coincidences. 1 Devastating climax. A searing examination of the price of faith.” The Kickstarter funding began on 19 October and ran for two months. The group that put it together, Piece Film Productions, consisted of four co-producers: Roger Gray (writer), Andy Edwards (director), Rob Leese Jones and Felix Jude West (sound).

Roger Gray⁹ is mentioned in Iain’s book *Raw Spirit* and Iain was backing the project by agreeing to sign copies of the script as one of the perks for those at the \$400 funding level. Roger had previously worked on the scripts of a couple of Iain’s books for the company Natural Nylon when they had the rights to them. One of the co-owners of that actor led production company was Sean Pertwee and he was listed as being cast in the film along with Lucy Clements. Further casting announcements were made during the course of the funding period with Paul Raymond coming on board as Mo, and Mark Armstrong as The Traveller. Another addition to the team was Gary Lloyd, no stranger to Banks related music¹⁰, to compose the score.

The stated aim of the non-profit project was to “create a high-end festival short” but they were realistic about it not being a guerrilla film acknowledging the need for period authenticity and the potential difficulties of filming on a plane, a train, and a coach. It was disappointing to see it fail to reach the funding objective, but the last update said that they had learnt a great deal in the process and would be looking to try again in the future. So look out for that by keeping an eye on Kickstarter or the Twitter feed @piecethefilm.

⁹ See Banksoniains #2, #3 and #5.

¹⁰ See Banksoniains #2, #6, #12 & #15.

The Hydrogen Sonata – Sales & Reviews

The Hydrogen Sonata was officially published on Thursday 4 October 2012. That night there was an event at Toppings & Co, a bookshop in Bath. The previous day there had been a press day in London and signing at the Piccadilly branch of Waterstone’s. The book was also available at Iain’s appearance at Marlborough LitFest on 29 September.

The book entered **The Bookseller’s** Original Fiction chart at #4, being the highest new entry on 12 Oct 2012, with sales of 6,663. It was behind books by JK Rowling, Bernard Cornwell and Martina Cole, which had kept the same order in the top three. The following week it was at #10, with another 3,039 copies sold, and the week after that at #14 (sales 2,131). The edition dated 16 November 2012 gave a four week summary up to November 3rd, during which *The Hydrogen Sonata* ranked nineteenth selling 8,024 copies.

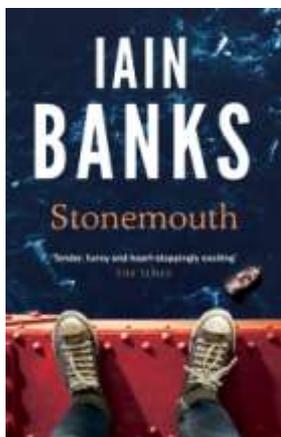
Stuart Kelly in the **Guardian** (10 Oct 2012) called the Culture a “post-scarcity, hedonistic, Machiavellian, libertarian, ass-kicking science fiction society”, and clearly a fan of the whole series postulated that it is “clear that the dual threat to the Culture is not just anomie, but religion.” About the book he said that it was “epic in scope and derangingly replete in detail”, and “Banks can riff like no other science-fiction writer”

On the Amazon UK website the book was dragged down by a series of one star reviews that just commented on the price of the Kindle edition in relation to the hardback rather than the contents of the book.

The **Independent on Sunday** (9 Dec 2012) made David Barnett’s Books of the Year list where it was described as, “epic in scope, ambitious in its ideas and absorbing in its execution, and more fun than you’d expect an ultra-liberal space utopia to be.” A similar accolade was accorded by Tim Martin in the **Telegraph** (20 Dec 2012) and where he commented that it was, “another deftly sarcastic saga of deep-space politics with welcome reappearances from his garrulous, heavily armed, philosophical warships.”

Iain Banks Makeover

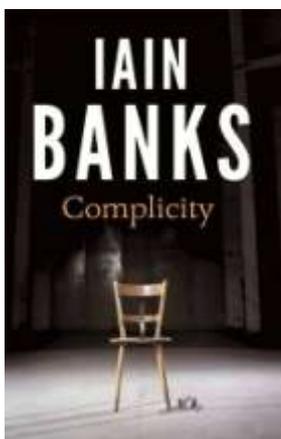
The UK paperbacks of Iain Banks are getting a makeover with a set of covers by the same designer, Mark Ecob. *Stonemouth* was the first of these to be issued on 3 January 2013.



ISBN: 978-0-349-00020-6

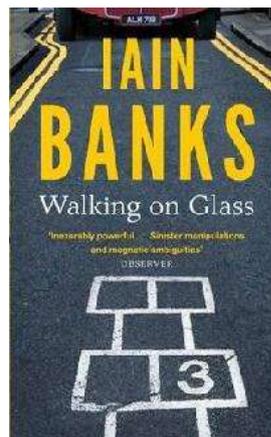
Inside the front cover it included the some of these new cover designs. Waterstone's have another exclusive edition that they did not tell anybody about. The first printings sold in that shop had a 'Reading Guide', with some questions for reading groups to consider, and background information about the inspiration for the book. The content of this is available on Waterstone's website¹¹, which is useful as they are already selling reprints without the extra content.

The consistency and simplicity of the design does make them stand out when viewed face on together, although not as much as the early black and white designs of Peter Brown.

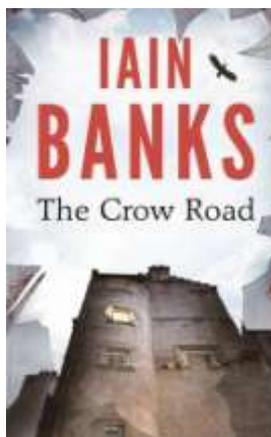


ISBN: 978-0-349-13913-5

¹¹http://www.waterstones.com/wat/images/special/pdf/Stonemouth_reading_guide.pdf

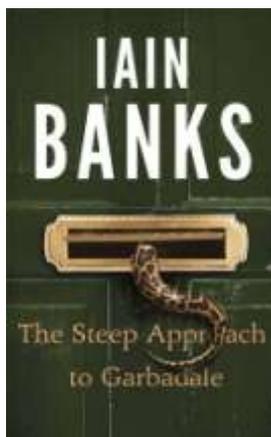


ISBN: 978-0-349-13920-3



ISBN: 978-0-349-13915-9

The three above were published on 7 February, 2013, with the rest of the reissues are scheduled for 6 June, although the cover of one of these releases has already been revealed, and was also in the paperback edition of *Stonemouth*.



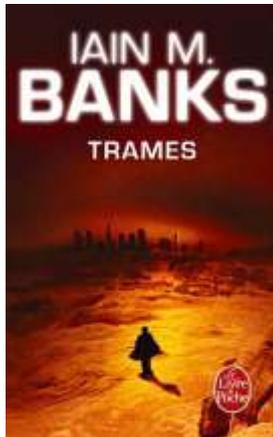
ISBN: 978-0-349-13914-2

In the meantime in April there is the Abacus 40th anniversary edition of *The Wasp Factory* the cover of this is illustrated on page #4.

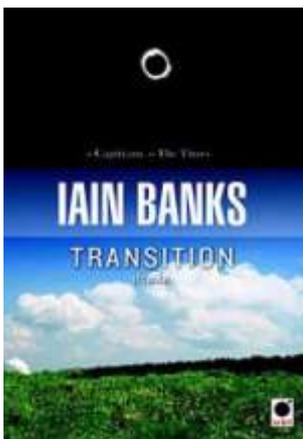
Banks Backlist

International and New Editions

The French paperback edition of *Trames* (Matter) has been published by Le Livre de Poche. ISBN: 978-2-253-16465-4.



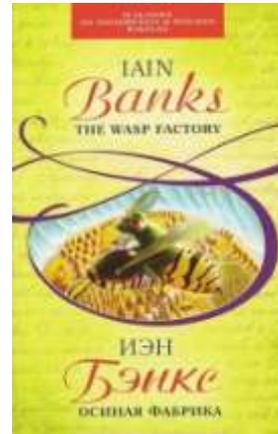
So has Transition. ISBN: 978-2-36051-066-5.



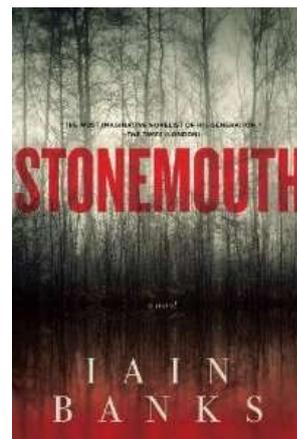
A new Italian edition of *La fabbrica delle vespe* (The Wasp Factory). Alessandra di Luzio has revised his original 1990 translation. It has been issued by Meridiano Zero. ISBN: 978-88-8237-243-X.



As usual Russian reprints have new covers and new ISBNs. As far as I can tell, this is their ninth edition of *Осиная Фабрика* (The Wasp Factory). ISBN: 978-5-699-48305-1. It is actually bilingual with English on the left hand page and Russian on the right.



The US edition of *Stonemouth* is being produced by Pegasus Crime. ISBN: 978-1-60598-382-0.



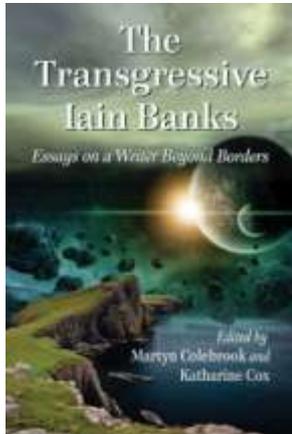
The French rights to *Stonemouth* have been sold to Calmann-Lévy.

In unabridged audiobooks Hachette Digital are working through the Banks backlist as downloads via Audible and Amazon, the January book was *Feersum Endjinn*, with *Excession*, *Complicity* and *The Crow Road* listed for the next few months. Physical editions are lagging behind but are available from ISIS Publishing¹² and they will be releasing *The Hydrogen Sonata*, *The Crow Road* and *Use of Weapons* in the next four months. ISIS's MP3 editions also include the Apple MB4 format as well.

¹² <https://www.isis-publishing.co.uk/>

Books About Banks

Back in 2006 there was a one day academic conference in London¹³. A forthcoming book, *The Transgressive Iain Banks*, is substantially the result of that event.



ISBN: 978-0-7864-4225-6

Edited by conference organisers Martyn Colebrook and Katherine Cox it is due for publication in June 2013 by MacFarland & Co. The subtitle of the book is *Essays on a Writer Beyond Borders*, and it is divided into four thematic areas: the Scottish context, the geographies of his writing, the impact of genre, and a combined focus on gender, games and play.

Your editor has a very small involvement with this book, having written a few paragraphs that were used in the introduction he was generously given a co-author credit by the editors.

Another academic study, this time with just a chapter on Banks is also coming out this year. *The Grotesque in Contemporary British Fiction* by Robert Duggan is being published by the University of Manchester Press, ISBN: 9780719078910. The publicity says it “offers detailed critical readings of key works of modern fiction” and “outlines the aesthetic trajectories of” a variety of authors, and lists Iain Banks’s *The Wasp Factory* as a topic in a chapter called *Iain Banks: Improbable possibilities*. Duggan was at the conference mentioned above, and a version of his paper, *Postmodernism, Iain (M.) Banks and the Gulf War*, is in **Extrapolation**, vol.48, no.3.

¹³ A report is in Banksoniain #11

Bregenz Festival

The Wasp Factory as Musical Theatre

The Bregenz Festival that is held every summer in the town on the shore of Lake Constance in Austria this year has a couple of performances of *The Wasp Factory*. The Bregenzer Festspiele as it is called in German is famous for the fact that the operas take place on the Seebühne, a stage floating in the lake. One of the other strands to the festival is called ‘Kunst aus der Zeit’ which translates into English as ‘Art Of Our Times’.

The artistic director of the festival is a British librettist and opera director David Pountney, and he has been involved in the production of *The Wasp Factory* which is described as “A work of music theatre by Ben Frost, text by David Pountney, after the novel by Iain Banks”¹⁴. The production is described as, “For three performers, string quintet and electronic instruments. In English with German surtitles”.

Ben Frost is an Australian composer, currently based in Iceland. The musicians are being provided by the Reykjavik Sinfonia, and the performers are: Jördis Richter, Mariam Wallentin and Lieselot de Wilde.

Costume design is by the avant-garde German fashion designer Boris Bidjan Saberi. Set design is by Mirella Weingarten, with lighting by Lucy Carter

The premiere is at 20:00 on Thursday 1st August, 2013, at the Werkstattbühne “Workshop Theatre”, with a second performance on the Saturday. Before each performance there will be a talk in German about the work.

It is usual for the 'Art Of Our Times' shows to be performed elsewhere after Bregenz. Indeed it is described as a co-production with Holland Festival and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in association with the Cork Midsummer Festival and Mercat de les Flors / Graner, Barcelona. The Royal Opera House have announced it as part of their 2013/14 season where it will be performed at the Linbury Studio Theatre.

¹⁴ <http://www.bregenzerfestspiele.com/en/node/3092>

Banks on Tour 2012

Iain's autumn tour was ostensibly to promote *The Hydrogen Sonata*, but a couple of the events did not have that focus.

At the First Story 5x15 event in Oxford (28 Sep 2012), five speakers gave unscripted 15 minute talks. Iain used the opportunity to expound on the answer he gives at Q&As when asked where he gets his ideas from.

Iain's appearance at Marlborough LitFest (29 Sep 2012) was just five days before the publication of the new M book, but concentrated on *Stonemouth* even though *The Hydrogen Sonata* was available on the sales table. The interview was conducted by Daniel Hahn who began by asking Iain how much of the book he has had before starting. The author replied that it was "pretty much all". He viewed the idea of starting with a single scene or idea and seeing where it went as very much a romantic ideal of how a writer works. It does not work for him. He tried it once and ended up with something over 400,000 words long. So he likes to plan extensively which he suggested was akin to editing in his head before he writes. He appreciates that other writers work in different ways. Having recently done a Google Hangout that included Alistair Reynolds, Iain had discovered that Alistair writes a great deal and then whittles it down, keeping the deleted text in case he can find a home for it later, although this rarely happens.

Asked about the voice for *Stonemouth* Iain said that for this book it was a decision made early, along with the plan to have pretty much the whole book focus on a single weekend. Every character, even Ellie, is seen through the eyes of Stewart. The protagonist's occupation came from seeing a feature in an architectural magazine a few years ago and it coming back to him when he wanted Stewart to be vaguely artistic, having had pretentious ambitions. Other than what is in the book Iain does not know much about his characters, even the main ones. In general his planning is done in note form, whilst he assumes that "proper writers" have files on each character. He puts this down to being a science fiction writer which precludes such research, so he tends not to bother with the mainstream as

well. Daniel continued on this theme asking if the character of Stewart had ever surprised him. "He better bloody not" was Banks's retort, before admitting that it had happened once, with Sharrow [from *Against a Dark Background*] and the scene in the transit lounge with the two baddies. The fact that she turns the tables on them was not how that was originally planned.

Iain said that he had had an idea for the next book [*The Quarry*] at 07:20 that morning which was good as he was in the thinking about thinking phase for the next book. The fact that *Stonemouth* had had its publication delayed meant that he had been talking about it whilst writing *The Hydrogen Sonata*, and completely forgot the name of Stewart's girlfriend at one point.

Questions from the audience covered a variety of subjects. Asked if he had ever thought of Special Circumstances doing bad things, he said no, but thanks for the idea. When it was pointed out his mainstream characters tended to be left-leaning but rich he said he was a Champagne Socialist and now a Vintage one.

The official book launch for *The Hydrogen Sonata* was at Topping & Co. in Bath (4 Oct 2012). The bookshop is quite long and thin, and the chairs for the audience were arranged in short rows, but long columns pointing towards the centre of the shop by the till. There was a third arm of the audience in the alcove opposite this, so with Iain standing by the till he had to look left, right and ahead to engage with everyone. An incident on the line meant that Iain's train had been delayed and so the event did not get going until after 20:30.

As this event was in conjunction with the magazine **SFX**, I had expected someone from the publication which is based in the city to interview Iain, however, he was left to his own devices and after a short introduction took questions. First up was someone who noted that Iain is now much older than most of his protagonists. He agreed and said it was about time they probably should be a bit more grownup. The research issue for his science fiction work was brought up, and he said that he didn't have a scientific background but had

read **New Scientist** for over thirty years and also took **Scientific American**. He further explained that as he didn't do near future stuff he could get away with the advances of the Culture just being his own wish fulfilment: drug glands, changing sex, 300/400 year lifespans, and death optional anyway as you could be backed up.

Asked if he approached the two strands of his work in different ways Iain said that as the producer he didn't really see a difference but appreciated that the consumer did. It was all just plots, characters and dialogue to him, although mainstream didn't have sarcastic drones or AIs, and there was more freedom when writing science fiction. This was followed by a query about why he kept returning to the Culture. His answer to this was that he had things to write in the setting. *The Hydrogen Sonata* came from what was initially a throwaway line about where the elder civilisations had gone. He keeps a colour coded file of ideas, science fiction in red/blue and mainstream in black/white. Whilst developing the latest Culture book he thinks he probably has enough materials already for the next one, and had also thought of ideas for sequels to *The Algebraist* and *Against a Dark Background*.

Another enquirer asked if he had a chart that showed the timescale of the Culture. He said that he did now, along with a file on his computer called Culture Facts that was extremely nerdy. Most things are located by their relation to the Idiran War. *The Hydrogen Sonata* was 800 years after this whereas *Surface Detail* was a further 700 years later. He also admitted that he had got it a bit wrong with *Excession*, and without admitting exactly what the mistake was said that it had been corrected in future editions.

Invited to start by explaining the premise of Stonemouth at the Cheltenham Literary Festival (6 Oct 2012) Iain soon digressed into how he had accidentally extended the Cairngorms in changing the geography of Scotland to fit in his fictional town. He got back on track to mention, "nostalgia, sex, friends betrayal, etc." The interviewer asked whether in having a twenty-something protagonist and a funeral, did the book have a

relationship to *The Crow Road*? Iain replied that the initial idea was for someone returning to somewhere they had not voluntarily left, and that the funeral was a good hook. He did think twice as it was similar to some extent, but had eventually consciously decided to pursue the idea.

The openings of his books was remarked upon and *The Wasp Factory* and *The Crow Road* cited. Iain said that they were usually in place at the planning stage and for the latter he had specifically tried to do something absurdist and Milliganesque. Asked about emotional attachments to his characters Iain did admit to this, "especially the ladies" and particularly Yalson in *Consider Phlebas*, "I didn't like writing her death scene." When talking about the Culture later he also said that he did change things when he got them wrong. The quote from the Koran had been changed when a scholar pointed out a better translation, and although it was "not quite as good, it was more truthful now".

Questions from the audience covered a wide spectrum of topics as usual. Did he hate atonal music?, "Yes, I love melody." Why did he write about bad politicians in *Stonemouth* and *The Hydrogen Sonata*? "There were good ones in *Surface Detail*." Why did Bascule speak the way he did in *Feersum Endjinn*? "To slow readers down by making it hard to read. This would make it more alien, even though it is my only SF novel set on Earth". He finally admitted, "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

A couple of Iain's events from this period can be found on the Internet. A video of his Google Hangout¹⁵ (27 Sep 2012) with fellow writers Alistair Reynolds and Peter Hamilton, and eight competition winning fans is available. Approaches to writing and the future of science fiction were amongst the topics discussed.

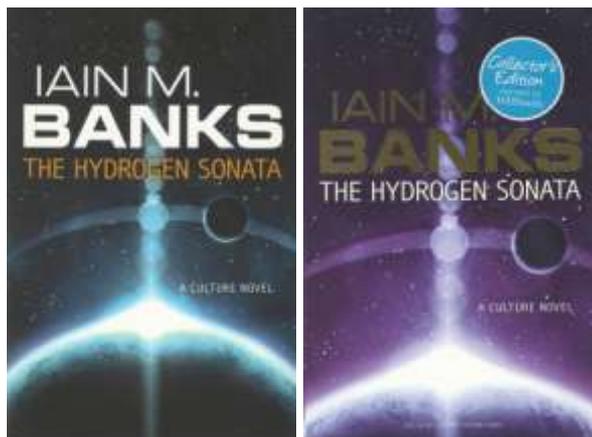
Twelve minutes of highlights from Iain's appearance at Manchester Literature Festival (11 Oct 2012) were released as a podcast¹⁶

¹⁵<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZnZnza8Kng>

¹⁶<http://manchesterliterature.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/seasonal-cheer.html>

The 3rd Hydrogen Sonata

There seem to have been three different versions of *The Hydrogen Sonata* hardback issued last year. Firstly the standard edition, and then two bookseller exclusives. W H Smith had the most obvious one with a limited edition cover, which was advertised before publication. Waterstone's had an edition with an interview with the author as an appendix and also a list of characters.



The cover of the WH Smith exclusive edition has different coloured lettering and the background in purple and continues the moon in space theme on the back which the original does not and is blue. The design is by Lauren Panepinto who is the creative director at Orbit Books, and blogs about covers on their website¹⁷, although she did not for this one. The image is a space background from shutterstock.com. There are many similar images but it is something like #92107577 or #69845713.

The third *Hydrogen Sonata* only came to The Banksonian's attention via a complaining post that was made in the Iain Banks Forum. Unfortunately it did not state where the edition was available and this was only confirmed by a forumite in Uruguay who had had a friend send an edition from London which happened to have been purchased in a branch of Waterstone's. When your editor went looking there was a large display of the books in the shop, but disappointingly no indication that there was any extra content, which sort of defeats the point of producing such an item.

¹⁷ <http://www.orbitbooks.net/author/lauren-panepinto/>

The interview from the Waterstone's exclusive edition turned up on the Orbit website in November under the heading, 'An Interview With Iain M. Banks on the 25th Anniversary of the Culture'. It was ostensibly to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first publication of a Culture novel. The date being celebrated was actually 23rd April 1987 but it made more commercial sense to mark it when a new Culture book was available.

The interview starts by discussing *The Hydrogen Sonata*, but then moves to the Culture in general. He admitted to some extent the drive to use Subliming as the focus of the story came from being asked at signings and interviews which prompted him to think properly about it. He said that this "is as close as I ever get, or want to get, to audience participation." He also located where he had been thinking about QI (See **GeekChocolate** interview on page #3) as being Archena in Spain.

An interesting point Iain made, that answers a question increasingly being posed at his Q&A appearances was, "I don't intend ever to complete it; I decided right from the start to resist the temptation to tear it all down at any point". The Culture is resisting the temptation to Sublime rather it wants to stick around to do good. He said that "new ideas keep on coming along at a slow but steady rate", and that he was currently had conflicting temptations to either write something "more oblique" or "tighter and more wildly kinetic".

When asked about the "ethically problematic" practices of Special Circumstances, Iain agreed but put it down to the readers' perception that "this action-adventure stuff is happening all the time all over the place". That is down to him as the writer needing to tell a story that includes some "rip-roaringness". The final question was about the large set-pieces in Culture books. Iain said that he would like to write something that had as many as *Consider Phlebas* again, but that book had swept up "a couple of decades-worth of such ideas". The "kinetic quality" of the Culture books is important to him, leaving the "characters just have to make their way through the stories and plots as best they can and frankly I pretty much leave them to it."

2014 Worldcon

As mentioned in our last issue Iain is one of the Guests of Honour at the 72nd World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) otherwise known as Loncon 3. It is being held at the ExCeL in London's Docklands between Thursday 14th and Monday 18th August 2014

All Worldcons produce Progress Reports, known as PRs. For Loncon 3, PR#0 was issued on the day that they won the right to hold the Worldcon. Before the convention happens we can expect four more PRs, and also that at least one of them will have an article about Iain in it. Initially just posted out to convention members, nowadays PRs are available on the Internet, so look out on www.loncon3.org where you can also find details on how to join the convention.

In the meantime if you are already signed up for Loncon 3, or are a member of the 2013 Worldcon, LoneStarCon 3, then you have the right to nominate for the 2013 World Science Fiction awards. These are known as Hugos, after Hugo Gernsback, the founder of science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*.

Iain's book *The Hydrogen Sonata* is eligible for nomination having been published in 2012. By accident or design Iain will not have a science fiction book out in 2013 for the 2014 awards, so you can probably expect him to be handing one out at the ceremony which is one of the main set pieces of the event.

Banksoniain Calendar

2013

Generation Palestine
Wednesday, 20th March.
ISBN: 978-0-7453-3243-7.

Edinburgh Reads, Central Library, Edinburgh
19:00 Thursday 18th April
<http://www.edinburghreads.eventbrite.co.uk/>

Iain Banks UK Paperback Makeovers
Thursday 6th June
See page # 6

The Hydrogen Sonata, UK paperback
Thursday, 5th September.
ISBN: 978-0-356-50149-9.

The Quarry, UK hardback
Thursday, 3rd October.
ISBN: 978-1-4087-0394-6.

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.

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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Culture Citizens

Created and drawn by Conscious Bob

