

**PERVERTSITY ON PAPER:  
TABOO, ABJECTION AND LITERATURE –  
IAIN BANKS“*THE WASP FACTORY*, IAN McEWAN“*STHE CEMENT  
GARDEN*, AND IRVINE WELSH“*SMARABOU STORK NIGHTMARES***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

at

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

**ALEXIS DE CONING**

February 2011

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the notion of perversity in literature, specifically with regard to representations of taboo and abjection in Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory*, Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, as well as her notion of revolt, constitute the central theoretical framework for my analysis. However, I also draw upon the concepts of monstrosity, grotesqueness and the uncanny in order to explicate the affect of abject fiction on the reader. I posit, then, that to engage with literary works that confront one with perversity, abjection and taboo entails exposing oneself to an ambiguous or liminal space in which culturally established values are both disrupted and affirmed. The subversive and revolutionary potential of the aforementioned novels is discussed with reference to the notion of the perverted *Bildungsroman* since, in their respective transgressions of taboos, the narrators of these novels disrupt social order, and their narratives end on a note of indeterminacy or the absolute finality of death, rather than self-actualisation. Moreover, in exposing the binaries of sex and gender as arbitrary and fluctuating, these narrators' perverse sexual and gender performativities gesture towards alternative modes of being (beyond social sanction), and invoke Kristeva's notion of individual revolt as a „condition necessary for the life of the mind and society“.

## Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 “Dark Revolts of Being”: An Introduction to Kristeva’s <i>Powers of Horror</i>	10
1.1 Abjection and Crisis	10
1.2 Abjection and Taboo	15
1.3 <i>Jouissance</i> and Art	17
1.4 Art and Revolt	21
Chapter 2 The Affect of Taboo: An Interdisciplinary Approach	24
2.1 Taboo: Key Definitions	25
2.2 Contact and Contagion	27
2.3 Horror, the Uncanny and the Grotesque	29
2.4 The Monstrous	34
2.5 Taboo, Embodiment and Sexual Difference	38
2.6 The Power of Literature and the Affect of Fiction	42
2.7 The Perverted <i>Bildungsroman</i>	46
Chapter 3 “Bogus Bits of Power”: Murder and the Subversion of Patriarchy in Iain Banks’ <i>The Wasp Factory</i>	53
3.1 Murder, the Phallus and the „Correct Father-Son Relationship“	55
3.2 Animal Symbolism and the Wasp Factory	59
3.3 The Prodigal Son	65
3.4 Ambiguous States and Amorphousness	69
Chapter 4 “Sometimes We Were Mummy and Daddy”: Incest and the Performance of Family in Ian McEwan’s <i>The Cement Garden</i>	75
4.1 Incest and the „Proper“ Family	76
4.2 Father’s Cement Garden	79
4.3 The Maternal, the Feminine and the Sisters’ Bodies	84
4.4 Death and Dreaming	89
4.5 Role-Play and Rooms	91
4.6 Consummation: Destroying the Cement	94
4.7 Dream and Flux	98
Chapter 5 “Such Horror and Evil”: Rape and Sympathising with a Monster in Irvine Welsh’s <i>Marabou Stork Nightmares</i>	101
5.1 Form and Narrative Vacillation	103

5.2 Power and Violence: Brutal Nature and Tribalism	106
5.3 Context and Culpability	113
5.4 Taboo or Not Taboo?	121
Conclusion	126
6.1 Disruption and Affirmation	127
6.2 The Perversion of the <i>Bildungsroman</i>	129
6.3 Irony	131
6.4 Subversion and Possibility	132
Bibliography	134

## **Acknowledgements**

To my parents, who taught me to think and feel.

To my supervisor, who taught me to write.

## Introduction

“There is something to be learned about sex from the fact that we possess a concept of sexual perversion.”

– Thomas Nagel (3)

“Is it [man’s barbaric nature] that makes men different from animals, and must it be corrected by progress and civilization? Is it the product of a bad education that has perverted the goodness of human nature? Or does it have to be understood as a sign that we have (inevitably) lost all our innocence? If that is the case, it is nothing more than the sensual expression of a great desire to let the body enjoy itself in accordance with the principle of a natural order that has at last regained its subversive power.”

– Élisabeth Roudinesco (27)

“Contemporary literature . . . acknowledges the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and Law – their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming. Like perversion, it takes advantage of them, gets round them, and makes sport of them.”

– Julia Kristeva (16)

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010), the term „pervert“ is derived from the Latin *pervertere*: *vertere* means “to turn”, whereas the prefix *per-* denotes “thoroughly, completely”. This etymology has resulted in a plethora of associations and interpretations. As a verb, to „pervert“ is to bring about a state of distortion – to “turn aside (a text, argument, concept, etc.) from the correct meaning, use, or purpose”, or “to turn aside (a person, the mind, etc.) from right opinion or action; to lead astray”. As a noun, however, the word „pervert“ takes on a particularly sexual significance, and refers to “a person whose sexual behaviour or inclinations are regarded as abnormal and unacceptable”. The adjective „perverse“ is also associated with deviant sexuality, and suggests a measure of intention: those who are perverse are “obstinate, stubborn, or persistent in what is unreasonable, foolish, or wrong; remaining set in a course of action in spite of the consequences” (“pervert”). These definitions reveal the variety of classifications for that which is, or those who are, perverted.

Significantly, however, they also reveal the established binaries of pure and impure, clean and unclean, and proper and improper. Perversity is that which persists in spite, and because, of „natural“, „normal“ or „acceptable“ modes of being; to embrace the perverse is to shun established social mores and to corrupt convention. In *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion* (2009), Élisabeth Roudinesco traces the variegated historical manifestations and definitions of perversion. She claims that

perversion is the defining characteristic of the human species: the animal world is excluded from it, just as it is excluded from crime . . . Perversion exists, in other words, only to the extent that being is wrenched away from the order of nature.  
(4 - 5)

Thus, although notions of perversion are prevalent in all societies, the perverse is regarded as „unnatural“ and eschewed from the normative scheme of hegemony.

It is necessary here to clarify the use of the word „hegemony“ in the context of this thesis. Robert Bocock asserts that the “notion of hegemony was first produced in the eighteen-eighties by the Russian Marxists” (25), and he traces the initial concept from the writings of Lenin and Marx to the arguments developed by Gramsci, which place more emphasis on the political aspects of hegemony than the Marxist focus on economy and class (35). The state – which consists of political and civil society – and its “manifestations of coercion” (Wolfreys, Robbin, and Womack 41) are central to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony:

The dominant social group maintains its hegemonic control over subordinate or subaltern [marginalised] social groups not only through non-coercive assertion of its cultural values and beliefs, but also through the coercive potential of its political institutions, such as education and the church. (41)

If they cannot be coerced and controlled, competing marginalised or subordinate groups may be framed within the hegemonic discourse and, as Dick Hebdige states, “contained within an

ideological space which does not seem at all „ideological“: which appears instead to be permanent and „natural“, to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests” (2455).

However, hegemony is always “inescapably historical and geographical”, and both organises its context, and is ordered by this context (Joseph 162). Hebdige identifies the symbolic as another means by which dominance may be established, since hegemony is a “site of struggle at the level of social language” (2447), and is thus constantly shifting in its attempts to maintain supremacy:

The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life. (2456)

The symbolic, however, also offers an intimation of resistance, as forms “can always be deconstructed, demystified” and “commodities can be symbolically „repossessed“” (2456) – although, according to Hebdige, this articulation of resistance is implicit rather than a direct opposition to political authority (2447). Nonetheless, symbolic resistance gestures toward the possibility that normalised signs, images and associations may be reclaimed, reinvented and subverted. It must be acknowledged that my use of hegemony refers primarily to Western, patriarchal discourse and, whilst the political and economic aspects of hegemony are inseparable from the social, my focus is the socio-cultural and symbolic norms and standards that become naturalised within this discourse.

The body emerges as a locus of this tension between the so-called natural and unnatural. Although Susan Bordo proposes that the body is “a medium of culture” and may operate as a “metaphor for culture”, she also maintains that the body is “not only a *text* of culture” but also a “*practical*, direct locus of social control” (2362). Furthermore, as a “locus of social control”, the body is often tabooed: it does not belong solely to the individual, but also to the society within which it is situated, and which regulates the “routines, rules, and

practices” (2362) that make up the cultural body. However, though the body is inscribed upon by culture, it also resists inscription due to its ambiguity and amorphousness. With regard to the tensions that surround the body as both a cultural palimpsest and a corporeal object that escapes signification, this thesis has particularly been influenced by Elizabeth Grosz’s *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (1995) and Rom Harré’s *Physical Being: A Theory for Corporeal Psychology* (1991), both of which explore embodiment, the cultural construction of sexual difference and the indeterminacy of the body. Daniel Punday’s *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003) and Peter Brooks’ *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (1993) – which focus on literary representations of the body and embodiment – are central to my understanding of the body as both text and object.

The ambiguity and unruliness of the body presupposes and engenders notions of abjection and defilement which taboo attempts to prohibit, eliminate and control. Abjection, taboo and perversity engender horror and disgust; however, they are also alluring and captivating by virtue of their marginal positions within society and, according to Roudinesco, the “accursed creatures” of perversity “have inspired plays, novels, stories and films because of our continued fascination with their strange, half-human, half-animal status” (2). Perversion is not, however, extraneous to us, but uncannily familiar and often seductive. Its ubiquity is established by Freud, who “gives the structure of perversion an essentially human dimension . . . rather than a defect, a sign of degeneracy or an anomaly”, and emphasises the “savage, barbarous, polymorphous and instinctual nature of perverse sexuality” (Roudinesco 72). When we confront perversion, we are faced with “its subterranean metamorphoses” as well as “our dark side” (Roudinesco 160). Thus, despite its various manifestations and classifications, the „unnaturalness“ of perversion gestures towards a „natural“ human impulse that may be tamed or sublimated, but not annihilated, by taboos and prohibitions.

My central thesis, then, is that engaging with representations of taboo, abjection and perversity in fiction entails exposing oneself to an ambiguous space in which culturally established values are both disrupted and affirmed. By reading works of abjection – particularly those that confront the reader with tabooed acts and the corruption of social mores – we may experience the ambivalence of simultaneous delight and terror, fascination and repulsion. The affect (as opposed to effect)<sup>i</sup> of such an experience is significant, as it confronts us with our own inherent perversity, reminds us of the instability and permeability of societal boundaries, and thus prompts us to question our assumptions of what is „normal“ and „natural“.

Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) explores the body as a site of rebellion, and the collapse of the socially-imposed borders between mind and body, self and Other, pure and impure engendered by abjection. It is within this theoretical framework that I shall discuss the affect of reading taboo in fiction. In Chapter One, “„Dark Revolts of Being“: An Introduction to Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*”, I examine Kristeva’s notions of the abject and *jouissance*, as well as her considerations of taboo. Although I draw primarily on *Powers of Horror*, Chapter One also includes a brief discussion of Kristeva’s concepts of revolt and revolution, as outlined in *Revolt, She Said* (2002). In both texts, she posits revolt as an essential component of the life of both individuals and societies, and emphasises the significance of art and literature as potentially revolutionary forms that provide necessary counters to hegemonic discourse. It is her notion of revolt, in particular, that I draw on in subsequent chapters in order to explore the significance of confronting taboo and perversity in fiction.

Chapter Two, “The Affect of Taboo: An Interdisciplinary Approach”, combines insights from a number of theoretical frameworks and disciplines in order to discuss the affect of reading acts of taboo in fiction. Given Kristeva’s specifically psychoanalytical

approach to abjection, this chapter attempts to gesture towards the existence of diverse and alternative literary, philosophical and anthropological interpretations of the (symbolic) manifestations and affects of perversity and taboo. Initially, I provide definitions of the notions of taboo and prohibition, before explicating the links between literary representations of taboo, horror, the uncanny, the grotesque and the monstrous since, whilst these categories are not identical, they produce similar affects in the reader. This is followed by a brief examination of embodiment and sexual difference, and the tabooed status of the atypically sexed and gendered body. I also examine the potentially subversive capacity of the novel, as outlined by David Carroll with regard to Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque. Finally, I discuss the notion of the „perverted *Bildungsroman*“, which provides a specific literary framework within which to examine the novels I have chosen to demonstrate the affect of taboo in fiction.

The transgression of the taboo of murder and the simultaneous subversion of sex and gender norms is the focus of Chapter Three, “„Bogus Bits of Power“: Murder and the Subversion of Patriarchy in Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory*”. In this chapter, I extend the theoretical considerations of the first two chapters, and examine the disruptive power of this novel and its murderous narrator. *The Wasp Factory* provides an apposite entry-point to my discussion of abjection, taboo and perversity: in its juxtaposition of familiar childhood pastimes and macabre murders, the novel exploits readers' gendered expectations, undermines patriarchal discourse, and reveals the tenuousness of what is considered „natural“.

The disturbance of normative gender roles is again the central concern of Chapter Four, “„Sometimes We Were Mummy and Daddy“: Incest and the Performance of Family in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*”. In this chapter, however, the deconstruction of conventional maternal and paternal roles is accompanied by the dissolution of the taboo against incest and the reconfiguring of the nuclear family. *The Cement Garden* also

juxtaposes innocent childhood games and familiar sibling relationships with the breakdown of social mores: the novel calls into question the „natural“ structure of the nuclear family and simultaneously subverts gender binaries.

Chapter Five, “„Such Horror and Evil“: Rape and Sympathising with a Monster in Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares*”, focuses on the need to address the complex issue of sexual violence and abuse, and examines the taboo against talking about rape. Akin to the other two novels, this text also subverts gender norms in its exploration of taboo and abjection. Although some critics regard *Marabou Stork Nightmares* as exploitative or sensationalist, I argue that Welsh’s complex and unsettling novel disrupts reader expectations and forces us to acknowledge not only the monstrosity, but also the humanity, of the rapist.

The three novels selected here render the taboo actions of their perverse narrators profoundly ambiguous. By confronting the reader with the fragility of socially constructed borders, the novels gesture toward our own possible monstrosity, and exemplify the simultaneous disgust and pleasure engendered by abjection in the reader. Of course, many other novels – such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955), or Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (1985) – explore related themes, and provoke similarly ambivalent responses, in the reader, to their explorations of the nexus of abandonment and control, or desire and restraint.<sup>ii</sup> Nevertheless, the three texts under discussion are representative of a growing trend in contemporary British fiction, a trend which reflects the reality that

both men and women dream of a new, pluralist and categorically disorderly gender order, despite the fact that every day they wake up to, and contend with, both extraneous and internalized structures of gender-specific self-formation that are not at all easily stripped off and cast aside. (Lea and Schoene 8)

Furthermore, James English describes this trend as “something radically new and decisively more important and vigorous than what had come before” (2), and Philip Tew as an

“evolving British aesthetic [which] is concerned variously with a familiarity of location, a disrupted conventionality, and a sense of otherworldliness” (Tew 29). Arguably, the novels I have selected epitomise this radical shift in contemporary British writing, since all three juxtapose familiar locations with “otherworldliness”, and are concerned with “disrupted conventionality” and “disorderly gender order” – the latter features are evident in the ways in which they make use of young, male first-person narrator-protagonists who ironically both enact *and* subvert gender stereotypes in the course of their perverse *bildungs*. Nevertheless, the definitions of „contemporary British fiction“ are varied and multiple, and “[a]ny selection of contemporary novelists is likely to be partial and in some ways arbitrary” (Childs 19). Thus, my selection of novels here is, to some extent, a reflection of personal preference.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that some rules, boundaries and structures are useful and necessary: indeed, without systems of prohibition and sanction, the very notions of subversion and ambiguity could not exist. Indeed, Kristeva’s conception of revolt recognises that authority is “indispensable” (*Revolt, She Said* 109). Thus, despite their disruption of social mores, an intimation of order is, however, restored at the end of each of the novels, and I conclude by examining the affirmation of some taboos concomitant on the dissolution of others. Finally, I suggest that the novels discussed in this thesis not only present a subversion of gender norms, but also gesture toward alternative possibilities for embodiment and social relations.

---

**Notes**

<sup>i</sup> In this thesis, my use of the word „affect“ – as opposed to „effect“ – refers to the emotional and psychological aspects of the term: to “have an effect on the mind or feelings of (a person); to impress or influence emotionally”, or a “feeling or subjective experience accompanying a thought or action or occurring in response to a stimulus” (“affect”).

<sup>ii</sup> Whether or not these kinds of novels constitute a genre or sub-genre of perverse or abject literature is not my concern here, since my focus lies more narrowly on the two primary taboos posited by Freud – murder and incest – together with rape. These, respectively, are foregrounded in the novels under discussion, and are especially pertinent to an examination of the nexus of perversity and sexuality.

## Chapter 1

### “Dark Revolts of Being”: An Introduction to Kristeva’s Powers of Horror

“There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated . . . Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.”

– Julia Kristeva (1)

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva explores the “dark revolts of being” (1) that occur when the culturally-constructed borders between subject and object, mind and body, self and Other break down. These revolts are inextricably linked both to childhood development and to notions of the socially unacceptable. In this introductory chapter, I investigate definitions of the abject and elucidate the psychoanalytic foundation of Kristeva’s theories of abjection, as well as the connections between abjection, the body and taboo. Furthermore, I discuss Kristeva’s notion of revolt, and its intimate relationship to art and literature.

#### 1.1 Abjection and Crisis

The word „abject” is derived from the Latin *abjectus* or *abicere*, meaning “to discard” or “to throw away” (“abject”), definitions which are directly related to Kristeva’s notion of “dark revolts of being” (1) in the opening passage of *Powers of Horror*. Her concept of revolt is pivotal, as it immediately indicates the central facets of abjection: in her terms, revolt refers both to a revolution and a sense of physical revulsion – in other words, a visceral ejection accompanied by a rejection of hegemonic values. Kristeva also insists upon the “private

aspect” in which one experiences oneself as “ab-ject”, that is, in a state of crisis in which the “borders between the object and subject cannot be maintained” and the “autonomy or substance of the subject is called into question” (“Of Word and Flesh” 22). This undermining of the so-called „autonomous subject“ is both threatening and exhilarating. The abject collapses the supposed limits between „I“ and Other; it is uncertain, ambiguous and liminal, and it does not comply with our neat systems of order and identity. As Kristeva explains, “[w]hen you have a coherent system, an element which escapes from this system is dirty” and “endangers a structure” (24). Hence, abjection is associated with filth, taboo and degradation because it undermines the structures that map the clean, acceptable and „whole“ body.

But how do we first arrive at these notions of what is „tolerable“ or „intolerable“? Building on the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Kristeva claims that abjection first occurs when the child is separated from the mother and enters the “symbolic realm” (*Powers* 3) of the father by acquiring “the autonomy of language” (13). As Bert Olivier clarifies:

Kristeva posits the process of „abjection“ to account for the infant“s indispensable separation from its mother“s body . . . „Abjection“ here means more or less the same as „rejection“, as a prerequisite for the infant subject“s assumption of a position in the imaginary register via the mirror phase, and subsequently in the symbolic via language. (12 – 13)

Lacan“s mirror phase refers to the period in which the child has not yet entered language, but learns to identify itself as an entity separate from its parents. In Freudian terms, this rejection or separation occurs after the oral and anal stages. Subsequently, the child begins to enter the phallic stage of psychosexual development, and concurrently acquires language and culture. The infant“s dependence on, and attachment to, the mother is related to the pre-linguistic phases, whereas its entry into language, identity and society is associated with the paternal, and the development of the „subject“ – the supposedly autonomous „I“ – is seemingly a

function of the simultaneous acquisition of language and culture associated with the paternal law. Kelly Oliver, however, maintains that Kristeva resists Freud and Lacan's "identification of the maternal body as the infant's first object" – rather, it is between object and non-object – and posits that subjectivity is a process that precedes Lacan's mirror stage (*Portable Kristeva* 226). Nonetheless, individual identity is "constructed against the exclusion of the abject maternal body" (226), and this patriarchal system serves to organise, sanitise and present life in a manner that is „clean“ and „tolerable“. Thus, the structural and institutional agents of socialisation – religion, media, law, education and language itself – present us with ideas of the acceptable and unacceptable. The binary opposition of mind-body is instilled, in which the „mind“ is associated with the „cleanliness“ of the paternal and symbolic; whereas the body is relegated to the realm of the „unclean“, together with the maternal and pre-linguistic. Kristeva, however, reinstates the importance of the maternal divested by this binary with her notion of the semiotic and its essential role in the signifying process: "the semiotic captures the significance of all those signifying gestures, sounds and movements not easily accommodated by the symbolic" and "prepares the child for entry into the symbolic" (Olivier 19 - 20). Oliver describes the semiotic as the "organization of drives in language", and explains that, according to Kristeva, the rhythms and tones of the semiotic "do not *represent* bodily drives; rather bodily drives are *discharged* through rhythms and tones" (*Portable Kristeva* xiv). The symbolic is "the domain of position and judgement" and is associated with "the grammar or structure of language that enables it to signify something", whereas the semiotic is meaningful, yet does not "represent or signify something" (xiv). These two elements of language are not separate and exclusive, but rather the "dialectical oscillation" between them "makes signification possible" (xiv). The semiotic, it seems, is a necessary precursor to the symbolic and remains an essential ingredient in the signifying process.

By recovering the significance of the semiotic, Kristeva challenges the conventional binary of feminine/corporeal and masculine/symbolic. It is, however, upon this oppositional structure that identity is shaped. Abjection, then, is “a kind of *narcissistic crisis*” (Kristeva, *Powers* 14) which “takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away” (15). In other words, abjection recoups the realm of pre-lingual, semiotic materiality. Through the resultant crisis of self and identity, abjection can further destabilise and subvert the oppositional structures, constructed in language, of inside-outside, feminine-masculine, and subject-object.

How does this crisis occur, and what is so threatening about the abject that warrants perpetual attempts to exclude, banish or manage it? From the banal (tears, nail-clippings, hair) to the extremely visceral or even putrid (excrement, blood, urine, vomit, anything decomposing or rotting), any constituent can be considered „dirty“ or abject if it escapes the limits of the body (Kristeva, “Of Word and Flesh” 24) and, as a result, undermines the social scheme that projects the image of the individual as a cohesive, manageable, self-contained agent. Furthermore, these „renegade elements“ occasion prohibition from our society, not only because they are „unhygienic“, but because of their symbolic power to subvert. Kristeva states that:

refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. (*Powers* 3)

Hence, anything that escapes the borders of the body is a reminder of our base materiality (as opposed to the image of human sentience and intellectuality we attempt to propagate and sustain) and the inevitable end this corporeality signifies. To reiterate, Kristeva claims that it is not “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection”, but rather that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*Powers* 4). Indeed, many of the bodily functions and excretions regarded as abject are entirely necessary to our physical health and well-being.

What is really at stake, then, is not hygiene but the *cultural* demarcations and constructions of „pure“ versus „impure“. By extension, the individual who does not comply with the conventions of his/her society – and consequently the body of such an individual – is not permitted and often marked as „Other“. Death, disease and decay are sterilised, contained or obliterated. The obscene body must be exiled or reintegrated: science aims to rationalise the abject anomaly by producing a corpus of knowledge surrounding the supposed „irregularity“, whereas religion attempts to sanctify or exorcise perversion and obscenity with prescribed taboos, customs or rites of passage. In both cases, that which is Other must either be incorporated into the social structure or annihilated. However, as Kristeva postulates, “it cannot be assimilated” (1) and, more often than not, we do not consciously *choose* to engage with Otherness or abjection: these are threats to our coherence which take us by surprise, impress themselves upon us, and arrive „unannounced“. Rules and rituals thus attempt to create a sanitary space for sanitary confrontation. According to Kristeva, however, “what is repressed cannot really be held down, and . . . what represses always already borrows its strength and authority from what is apparently very secondary: language” (13 - 14). Herein lies the “instability of the symbolic function” (14). The abject, therefore, is “perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them” (15).

In short, abjection immediately signals the arbitrary and tenuous nature of social convention, and filth and bodily defilement have the power to disarm and alarm us, pointing to our own mortality and signalling our vulnerability as well as the fragility of our societal structures. Abjection – the state of crisis in which boundaries collapse – is thus a potentially revolutionary, and revolting, experience, as it may disrupt the norms, values and prohibitions that serve as the foundation of hegemony.

## 1.2 Abjection and Taboo

The body, acting as a site of psychological and social turbulence, can be both abject and taboo. Abjection is intricately linked to taboo, as both threaten the laws or boundaries of a society. The word „taboo“ is used, broadly, to describe prohibited people, acts and objects, as well as the restrictions against them, and I provide a more detailed discussion of the definitions of the term in Chapter Two. Taboos are all-pervasive, and even the most secular of individuals or communities rely on some system of exclusion. However, the importance of taboo in the development of the symbolic realm extends beyond simple exclusion. As mentioned above, the true horrors of abjection are not reliant on filth or defilement, but rather are located in the refusal of established authority. Nonetheless, the objects of taboo are signified by their prohibition – a case of presence invoked by absence. Freud acknowledges the ambivalent status of taboo, claiming that:

For us the meaning of taboo branches off in two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean. (*Totem and Taboo* 31)

Kristeva draws on Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which he posits that morality begins with the two taboos of totemism, namely murder and incest (*Powers* 57). The transgressions of these prohibitions may have practical consequences for society, and these primary taboos also maintain a symbolic status quo, since murder is not only affiliated with death but also, according to Freud, the murder of the father-figure. This “mythical” (Kristeva, *Powers* 57) motif is directly related to the Oedipal stage of development. Thus, the taboo against murder is not only concerned with the destruction of human life, but also the destruction of the order and coherence upheld by patriarchal rule. The incest taboo, too, is figured in terms of the Oedipal complex, since a suggested “idyllic dual relationship (mother-child) . . . to the extent

that the father prevents it, changes into an ulterior aversion to incest” (*Powers* 59). Thus, due to the pre-verbal subject’s “soothing dual relationship” (59) with the mother, incest challenges the symbolic order and paternal law.

To recapitulate, then, the phallic stage of development not only requires the acquisition of language and law, but also the separation of the subject from the mother, and incest is seen as a symbolic threat to the autonomous „I“. Kristeva argues that the “paranoid side of religions” assumes the task of preventing the subject from being “swamped by the dual relationship, thereby risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being” (64). She claims, therefore, that “[t]he function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject’s fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother” (64). However, all taboos – from murder and incest to social customs regarding dress, food and etiquette – signify the inherently tenuous structures of all social orders. All forms of defilement and transgressions of taboos are “what is jettisoned from the „*symbolic system*“” – they are what “escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which the social aggregate is based” (65). Kristeva, for example, states that:

Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (4)

Whilst this statement may seem excessive or exaggerated, it highlights the notion that that which is unclean or inappropriate – and which therefore requires prohibition – is not only a corruption of order, but also points to the innate corruptibility of that order. This corruptibility, in turn, indicates the constructed nature of the social systems we may take for granted as „natural“. As Kristeva clarifies, “Religion. Morality. Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so” (16). This fragility and instability does not necessarily mean that we

should abandon all social mores and conventions – as previously indicated, prohibition often serves a practical role in communities, as our symbolic, social interactions form the “molecular cement of society” (Nisbet 50). We should, nonetheless, acknowledge that the arbitrary and vulnerable nature of social conventions signals their human construction and provisionality. In Kristeva’s terms, such an acknowledgement is desirable, as it is “precisely by putting things into question that „values“ stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life” (*Revolt, She Said* 12). Recognising the contingency of social norms is both exciting and frightening, and may engender the ambiguous experience of *jouissance*.

### **1.3 *Jouissance* and Art**

To acknowledge that one’s social codes are contextual – not absolute or immutable, but rather provisional, arbitrary and fluid – opens one to the possibility of a suspension of the very structures that create identity and order. This experience, as suggested above, is both enticing and terrifying, and places the subject in a liminal position of fear and desire which relates directly to abjection. Kristeva refers to a “vortex of summons and repulsion” (*Powers* 1), an image which exemplifies the ambivalence of abjection. The abject is “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*Powers* 4), and it “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject” (5). It is in this sense that the mutinous body can experience the sublime: abjection expels the subject from the system of supposed autonomy, and places the individual in an ambiguous space; it “harries me as radically separate” and “draws me to the place where meaning collapses” (2). Kristeva claims that the abject skirts “the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other” (11), where the symptom refers to the “non-

assimilable” and sublimation is “the possibility of naming the pre-nominal” (11). She continues:

In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime . . . For the sublime has no object either. (11 – 12)

If the sublime is that which cannot be known, cannot be totalised, reasoned or represented by language, then perhaps intimations of the sublime can be granted through the abject body, which suggests a reversion to a mode of existence beyond the paternal law of language and signification.

Moreover, Kristeva describes the “time of abjection” as the “moment when revelation bursts forth” (*Powers* 9), and one aspect of the abject that may be experienced is *jouissance*: an experience of pleasure or ecstasy which Kristeva describes as a “repulsive gift” of “sublime alienation” (9). The notion of *ekstasis* is introduced in the opening paragraph of *Powers of Horror*, where Kristeva claims that the ambiguous “vortex” of abjection “places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (1). As she elaborates, “[o]ne thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not submissive and willing ones” (9). However, when one experiences *jouissance*, there is an unease that stems from its uncertainty: the individual experiences the surrender of the “jettisoned” subject, and thus the “perpetual danger” that threatens this subject (9). Abjection is ambiguous, and *jouissance* is the joy that erupts both “[v]iolently and painfully” (9).

Whilst abjection is inherently connected to revolt and rebellion, it is also paradoxically still within the bounds of paternal law and thus language (the symbolic realm). An abject experience may be extremely visceral and immediate, but once the experience itself is over, it can only be figured in terms of language and discourse. As Kristeva states, the “subject of abjection” (45) – the one who experiences abjection – produces language and

culture. With regard to art and literature, she then claims that the “aesthetic task . . . amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn” (18). Abjection, however, inexorably undermines or destabilises language and the structures of the symbolic order. Thus the abject subject occupies a site in which traditional authority and representation are momentarily subverted. Accordingly, Kristeva suggests that the author, in attempting to „retrace“ the abject through language, intimates a location between the symbolic and semiotic, coherence and chaos, the body and the structures that attempt to contain it – a location poised amid the permeable relationships between these seemingly opposite positions. She then claims that contemporary literature “acknowledges the impossibility of Religion, Morality and Law – their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming” (16), and explicates further:

The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content . . . One might thus say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality. (16)

Importantly, then, a state of abjection does not signal a straightforward shift from one condition to another – from clean to dirty, from order to disorder – but rather the ambiguity that exists between supposed contradictions. To write the abject is not simply to write „about“ the abject body, but rather to explore the systems that impose order upon the body, the abject’s „perversion“ of these systems, and the inability of language to fully represent corporeal experience. In literature, especially, attention must be paid – by both writers and readers – to how the body and its visceral experiences are mapped in language, and the uncertainty attendant on this process.

The above accounts, at least in part, for the experience of the writer, but what about that of the reader? Kristeva argues that “one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity” (28).

Representation cannot reproduce, but only intimate and gesture towards the experience of abjection. Thus art and literature constitute a reconfiguration of the abject, and Kristeva posits that one means of “*purifying* the abject” is through that “catharsis par excellence called art” (17). Reading abject literature – in this thesis, understood as those literary texts which not only confront the reader with representations of experiences of abjection, but also induce similarly abject responses *in* the reader – is a means of confronting the inherent permeability of societal boundaries, and possibly experiencing an intimation of catharsis. However, this act of “poetic purification” is “in itself an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it” (28). The reader is immersed in abjection and, consequently, becomes him/herself ab-ject, amorphous, and may experience a cathartic purge of emotion. The liminality engendered by the abject reading experience allows “one”s *own and clean self*” (65) to be temporarily disintegrated or suspended, but also in turn affirmed once the „clean“ self is re-established. With regard to confrontations with abject art in general, Kristeva argues that “the public can react in two ways”:

There are those who repress this state of crisis, who refuse to acknowledge it . . . they find the works disgusting, stupid, insipid, insignificant . . . Others may be looking for a form of catharsis . . . they see their own transgressions, their own abjection, and at that moment what occurs is a veritable state of communion.  
(“Of Word and Flesh” 23)

Nevertheless, she also acknowledges that contemporary society has “reached a point of extreme personal solitude, so if communion does occur then it is fragmented, solitary” (23). Arguably, this paradoxical notion of „solitary communion“ is indicative of the experience of reading fiction, since “self-communion” is akin to the “individual interrogation” (*Revolt, She Said* 113). Solitary communion may then be understood as an internal dialectic in which we are confronted with our “state of crisis” as well as our own transgressions and abjection (“Of Word and Flesh” 23). It is the necessary accompaniment to, or precursor of, the individual

revolt that is “indispensable, both to psychic life, and to the bonds that make society hang together, as long as it remains a live force” (*Revolt, She Said* 38) and does not become static or stagnant. Kristeva’s use of the term „revolt“, however, is not restricted to revolt in the colloquial political sense – that is, to repel and to rebel. Instead, she understands revolt as a necessary aspect of both social and personal life, as it prompts us to scrutinise normative systems we take for granted and view as „natural“.

#### 1.4 Art and Revolt

In *Revolt, She Said*, Kristeva discusses the contemporary importance of revolt to both the individual and the community. She traces her understanding of the term to its etymology, “meaning return, returning, discovering, uncovering, and renovating” (85), and emphasises revolt’s “potential for making gaps, rupturing, renewing” (85). She also undermines the notion of „revolt“ as “purely political” (99), and insists that “to think is to revolt” (39). Thus, within a Kristevan framework, revolt may be as much a personal and private experience as it is a public and political one. However, she acknowledges the role of authority and law: “There is no revolt without prohibition of some sort. If there weren’t, whom would you revolt against?” (31). Whilst, for Kristeva, the “issue of power and authority is indispensable” (109), she proposes that revolt is necessary as a constant questioning of established values: “The telling moment in an individual’s psychic life, as in the life of societies at large, is when you call into question laws, norms and values” and this is because, as previously cited, it is “precisely by putting things into question that “values” stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life” (12). Thus revolt, in the Kristevan paradigm, constitutes an examination and exploration of social norms and codes. Furthermore, in order for revolt to avoid becoming dogma, we must continue to question,

investigate and critique. Yet Kristeva remains sceptical of „mass revolt“, and opts instead for revolt on the personal level:

It is true that everything moves from system to system. But one cannot revolt against systems. I think the possibility for individual revolt still exists. This could appear as too minimal, but I think that it is the only possibility that remains: individual interrogation. This does not necessarily mean egoism. It means placing a greater demand on oneself, and treating others with more generosity. Indeed, I think the only space of honesty possible is the individual space. (113)

One means of achieving such “individual interrogation” (113) is the “psychoanalytical self-interrogation that people practise with themselves” (107); however, the “esthetic framework (in literary or pictorial creation)” (107) also provides a space for individual revolt and engagement. Artistic representations – from visual arts to literature and performance – offer a liminal space which may convey a sense of alterity associated with an encounter with the Other, and one may experience the fleeting dissolution of one’s “clean and proper body” (*Powers* 72): one is confronted with the ambiguity and fragility of one’s inculcated borders, and therefore prompted to question societal norms. Although this may seem a “minimal variant of revolt” (*Intimate Revolt* 5), Kristeva proposes that “we may have reached a point of no return, from which we will have to re-turn to the little things, tiny revolts, in order to preserve the life of the mind and of the species” (5). Revolt is not, however, an entirely destructive act: to Kristeva, revolt also suggests creation. The value of these „tiny revolts“ is crucial, because they foreground “an element of renewal and regeneration” (*Revolt, She Said* 123), and present the opportunity to engage with figures of difference or alterity, as well as alternative social systems.

In her conclusion to *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva proposes that “literature is [abjection’s] privileged signifier” and that,

far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as general consensus seems to have it, [the literature of abjection] . . . represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. (208)

Furthermore, she claims that “novel writing can be a vigilant and tireless source of critique” (*Revolt, She Said* 39), and that the “role of the writer is precisely to complicate the notion of belonging: one has to belong and not belong” (131). Thus the novel has the potential to confront the reader with indeterminacy and ambiguity: we are suspended between „belonging“ and „not belonging“, and are given intimations of alternative points of view. This affect – which is compounded by an engagement with figures of Otherness, taboo and abjection – is what makes fiction a potentially disruptive and revolutionary form.

## Chapter 2

### The Affect of Taboo: An Interdisciplinary Approach

“Taboo differs from other earlier institutions of society in that it relates largely to everyday conduct. It is obvious that a universally accepted system of prohibitions in a community must have some effect on men’s [sic] idea of what constitutes right and wrong.”

– Crawford Toy (151)

“[N]o perversion is thinkable without the establishment of the basic taboos.”

– Élisabeth Roudinesco (5)

The study of taboo is dominated by the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, and thus focuses on social practices and cultural manifestations of prohibition. Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913), however, offers a psychological evaluation of taboo, relating it to obsession and neurosis. Nevertheless, his analysis concentrates on “people whom we still consider more closely related to primitive man than to ourselves” (1), and on “those tribes which have been described by ethnographers as being the most backward and wretched” (2). Despite admitting that “the moral and customary prohibitions which we ourselves obey may have some essential relation to this [notion of] primitive taboo” (38), Freud manages to keep a convenient distance between his own, Western culture and that of the „primitives“. More contemporary studies, such as Mary Douglas’s *Natural Symbols* (1970), investigate issues of taboo and prohibition in a less ethnocentric manner, but are still sociologically and anthropologically orientated. The affects of engagement with taboos or objects of taboo in the arts more specifically, however, have been largely unexplored. This may be a result of the varied manifestations of taboos (whether explicit or inferred), and the fact that artistic renditions of taboo are not exclusive to any genre or medium. Hence, this chapter aims to elucidate the connections between responses to taboo and the affects of abject literature.

Moreover, it also discusses the relationship between taboo and embodiment and sexuality, and posits the notion of the „perverted *Bildungsroman*“ as a useful literary framework for the textual analysis of taboo and abjection in the novels selected in subsequent chapters.

## 2.1 Taboo: Key Definitions

Part of the difficulty in any discussion of taboo is the variety of definitions and uses of the word. However, the term typically refers to prohibitions placed upon particular people, objects or deeds, and is used in the noun form. Nevertheless, „taboo“ may also be used in the “predicative and adjectival sense” to denote “persons, places, things, or conditions invested with a mysterious attribute *and* the prohibitions arising from the same attribute” (Levine 995). Despite marginalising the supposed „savages“ in his Eurocentric approach to taboo, Freud<sup>iii</sup> provides a useful entry-point to any discussion of the concept. His description, cited in Chapter One, reads as follows:

the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. (*Totem and Taboo* 30)

The dual associations of taboo here indicate its ambivalent status. In demarcating certain people, practices or events as „taboo“, we establish a system of values that relies on prohibition, authorisation and consecration. The ambiguity of taboo is exemplified by the way in which the acts and objects of both the holy and the unholy are alternatively prohibited and excluded, or sanctified: the utmost purity and the most abject filth are two extremes on the same spectrum. Whilst this may seem paradoxical, taboos and prohibitions are also obviously located within specific contexts and societies, and are thus subject to fluctuation and variation. Objects or acts considered unclean by one group may seem neutral and

acceptable to another and, conversely, that which is viewed as sacrosanct in one society may be commonplace in another culture.

The sacred may be untouchable due to its hallowed status, but the objects of unclean taboo imply moral degradation, physical vileness and the capacity to infect: the “[contravention of taboo] behaves like a contagion” (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 59). If transgression is deemed contagious because it acts as an example to others (55), then it is no wonder that such an infringement is considered threatening to society as a whole. Franz Steiner states that “taboo deals with the sociology of danger itself” (20 - 21), because it is not only concerned with the restriction of dangerous people or situations, but also “the protection of society from those endangered – and therefore dangerous – persons” (21). Again, the twofold status of taboo is revealed: those who disobey the prohibition are both themselves in peril and perilous to other members of society. Freud, for example, attributes the ambivalence of taboo to “its ability to lead man into temptation”, and thus “the prohibited desire becomes displacing in the unconscious” (*Totem and Taboo* 59). He also notes that “what nobody desires to do does not have to be forbidden” (117). This is significant, as it accounts for at least some of the fascination of taboo and transgression: the objects and acts that evoke horror and repulsion also hold our curiosity as possibly latent or suppressed drives and desires. This notion of (unconscious) repression is directly related to Freud’s concept of the uncanny – something that is both „known“ and yet „unknown“ simultaneously – a concept which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, that the forbidden remains desirable to us, whether consciously or unconsciously, is further evidence of taboo’s ambiguous status.

Michael Levine claims that taboos “derive their force precisely by virtue of their extreme familiarity” (977). Discussing the problematic nature of the word „taboo“, and the difficulties that arise when talking or writing about taboos, he suggests that

They are so strangely familiar and so self-evident that one need not and cannot ask “How come?” How to handle the subject of taboos inevitably turns into the problem of handling taboo subjects, and vice versa. And if “taboo” slides so easily between noun and adjective, between the subject of taboos and taboo subjects, how is one to approach it? (977)

David Spain is less tentative, and asserts that, in “nearly all anthropological sources, the term „taboo“ is used to refer to conscious, explicit prohibitions” (297). Within this framework, taboo refers to cultural invention with “conscious, culturally articulated rules” (297).

However, he also proposes an alternative definition, premised on the recognition of taboo as a “psychocultural thing”: it is “part of the largely unconscious psychic agency known as the superego” (297) – an explanation that may in part account for Levine’s assertion that taboos “are simply there, self-evident, neither of divine origin nor the products of a moral, legal or historical system” (979). Moreover, Spain also claims that certain taboos may be the “direct expression of what may well be a bioevolutionary imperative” (297) – in other words, prohibitions that impact upon a society’s genetic diversity and the survival of the human species. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I wish rather to focus on the social and psychological aspects of taboo. Certainly, the taboos I shall explore in my textual analysis – particularly the taboos against murder and incest – have „bioevolutionary“ purposes, as well as cultural and psychological consequences for any society. Nevertheless, it is their symbolic power to disrupt, unnerve and alarm that interests me here – and, more specifically, the impact on the reader when transgressions of these taboos are confronted in literary texts.

## **2.2 Contact and Contagion**

To reiterate, one of the threats posed by tabooed objects or activities is their “dangerous power” to be “transferred through contact, almost like an infection” (Levine 979).

Prohibitions arise in order to „protect“ both the individual and community from contamination

and, akin to the abject, the objects of taboo must be continuously expelled to maintain a society's definitions of „good“ and „bad“, or „appropriate“ and „inappropriate“. The processes of exclusion define the limits of what may be included, and thus the deeds, objects or people we prohibit are still symbolically present in their absence: they are continuously implied and revealed by their occlusion. As Levine notes, however, direct physical contact comes to include other kinds of contact:

the inaccessibility of „taboo“ depends not so much on a physical distance or barrier, but on an extension of the literal sense of „touching“ from immediate physical contact to the metaphorical use of the phrase „to come into contact with“. Extension implies here an expansion of the physical and literal sense of touch to include a linguistic and figurative sense. (982)

Hence, non-physical forms of contact with objects of taboo – for example, visual, literary or intellectual exposure – may be restricted, and even attempting to discuss or write about taboos might be viewed as discomfiting. Again, as Levine argues, “[w]riting about taboos is of necessity a scandalous project. To broach the question is to tread on forbidden ground” (977). If what is not desired does not require repression or exclusion, then taboo and representations of taboo create unease because they are “uncanny, strangely familiar, and atavistic” (Levine 979). Moreover, a discussion of the affect of taboo subjects (or the subjects of taboo) – and of the abject – within literature, calls to mind the genres of horror and the grotesque, which rely heavily on both taboo and abjection. The ambiguous tension between wanting to look, touch and approach and not being allowed to, the union of the alien and familiar, and the anxiety of „infection“, are all exemplified by horror, grotesqueness, the uncanny and the monstrous.

### 2.3 Horror, the Uncanny and the Grotesque

From the sinister castles and creatures of Gothic fiction to contemporary cinema's fascination with psychopaths and serial killers, the genre broadly known as „horror“ utilises various forms of taboo and transgression. Furthermore, such artistic representations broach the terrors of taboo in both literal and metaphorical form (the paedophile or murderer as opposed to the vampire or werewolf, for example), and provide insight into a society's notions of the motivations underlying certain prohibitions and the consequences of contravention.

Discussing the affect of the genre of horror, Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) explores the concept of the monstrous in art, film and fiction. Carroll claims that the genre produces two essential paradoxes: “how can anyone be frightened by what they know does not exist”, and “why would anyone ever be interested in horror, since being horrified is so unpleasant?” (8). My concern with readers' responses to fictions that represent the abject and taboo mimics the concerns of Carroll, especially with regard to the paradox of why we choose to read fictions that may instil in us a profound sense of fear, unease and repulsion. According to Carroll, “[i]n works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as *disturbances of the natural order*” (16, emphasis added). The creatures of horror “seem to be regarded not only as inconceivable but also as unclean and disgusting” (21). He elaborates:

some of the regularly recurring sensations, or felt-physical agitations, or automatic responses, or feelings are muscular contractions, tension, cringing, shrinking, shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, chilling (hence, “spine-chilling”), paralysis, trembling, nausea, a reflex apprehension or physically heightened alertness (a danger response), perhaps involuntary screaming, and so on. (24)

It is significant that artistic representations can elicit such powerful somatic responses, which indicate the psychological and emotional forces at play when the imagination engages with works of horror. Furthermore, the object of terror in horror fictions is “threatening *and* impure”, and is associated with “contamination” (28) as well as the composite (23) or that which is conglomerate:

They are un-natural relative to a culture’s conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge. (34)

This notion of a threat to the status quo is directly related to the abject and taboo: like the monstrous, they too are “cognitively threatening”, an attribute which correlates with the hazard of non-physical contact.

But what is the affect of engaging with representations of monstrosity and horror? With regard to film and literature, in particular, Carroll argues that audiences do not “identify with characters [confronted by the monstrous] but, rather, we assimilate their situation”, and that “having a sense of how the character assesses the situation” (95) is essential. In terms of the horror genre, he contends that this is relatively simple for audiences, as “we share the same culture as the protagonist” and can thus “easily catch-on to why the character finds the monster unnatural” (95 – 96). However, this cultural parallelism between audiences and protagonists is a generalisation, and cannot be taken for granted – an issue I shall explore later in this chapter in relation to the novels I have chosen to analyse. Carroll also claims, however, that, whilst we understand the character’s situation from their point of view, we simultaneously understand the situation “from the outside as well – [we see] it as a situation involving a protagonist who has the view point she has” (95). This proposition – that the reader can experience the literary or cinematic text from an „inside“ and an „outside“ perspective simultaneously – is significant, as it draws attention to the duality of the

reading/viewing experience. The narrative situation can be understood not only from the protagonist's point of view (or „inside“), but also from the perspective of a reader who understands the reasons for a protagonist's point of view („outside“). In typical horror narratives, according to Carroll, it is easy to „identify“ not only with the protagonist, but also with the values that induce the reaction of the protagonist. Nevertheless, the novels I shall examine later complicate this notion, because the protagonists inhabit the realm of the „monstrous“ by violating the laws and taboos of a society with which readers are likely to identify, and thereby engender a far more ambiguous response. These protagonists coalesce the familiar and the alien – they are „one of *us*“ and „one of *them*“ – and their marginality is alarmingly seductive.

As a psychological affect produced by certain artistic devices, the uncanny provides another means of discussing the strange amalgamation of the familiar and the unfamiliar in literature and art. Freud points to the ambivalence and psychological disturbance engendered by confrontations with the uncanny: it is something that unsettles us, and it renders us both fearful and fascinated. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, „uncanny“ is the antonym of „can“, derived from the Old English *cunnan*, which means to „know“ („uncanny“). The connotations of the uncanny, however, extend beyond the „unknown“ or the „mysterious“. Freud discusses the uncanny in relation to the German term *unheimlich*, which is the opposite of *heimlich*:

the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. („The Uncanny“ 933)

Thus Freud posits that the meaning of *heimlich* „develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*“ (934). Furthermore, he argues, in

reference to Schelling, that “everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (934). Hence the uncanny is that which is both strange and familiar, both clandestine and known. Freud cites “waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata” and “manifestations of insanity” as examples of the uncanny, because “these excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity” (935). Moreover, the notion of “doubling, dividing and interchanging the self” (940) is pertinent here:

[Doubles] are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons. (941)

This “harking-back” is significant as an equivalent to the pre-lingual position of abjection. Both the abject and the uncanny confront us with a state before the formation of the autonomous „I“; they signal the return of that which is repressed, a fluidity of binaries and identity, and evoke an ambiguous combination of dread and desire. Like representations of the abject, then, artistic evocations of the uncanny also evoke ambiguity and liminality.

Another genre or mode of representation that elicits contradictory emotions is the grotesque. Philip Thomson argues that “the extreme incongruity associated with the grotesque is itself ambivalent in that it is both comic and monstrous” (5), and that grotesqueness implies the “co-presence of the laughable and something which is incompatible with laughter” (3). Akin to the dual fascination and repulsion of the abject, the grotesque is both humorous and inappropriate, appealing and disgusting. Furthermore, as Thomson proposes, we may “feel that this mixture of horror and comedy is „impossible“, we cannot be reconciled to it, and we may even feel it is indecent and indicative of a warped mind” (8). However, he argues further that:

Certain problems are raised by this, the most important being the possibility that our laughter at some kinds of the grotesque and the opposite response – disgust, horror, etc. – mixed with it, are both reactions to the physically cruel, abnormal or obscene; the possibility, in other words, that alongside our civilized response something deep within us, some area of our consciousness, some hidden but very much alive sadistic impulse makes us react to such things with glee and barbaric delight. (9)

Thomson suggests that these seemingly contradictory responses cannot be either reconciled or negated, and therefore the “essential paradox of the grotesque” is that “it is both liberating and tension-producing at the same time” (61). With regards to literature, the paradox remains that “people shun what disgusts them” (158) and yet

many people – so many, in fact, that we must concede that they are normal, at least in a statistical sense – do seek out horror fictions for the purpose of deriving pleasure from sights and descriptions that customarily repulse them. (Carroll 158)

If engaging with taboo, abjection, horror, the uncanny and the grotesque evokes ambiguous responses, what is the possible value of such an experience? Carroll contends that the monstrous, as an expression of that which is outside society’s „natural“ order, is a manifestation of “what is repressed by the culture’s schematizations” (175). Thus, he continues, “[i]nsofar as the culture’s scheme of things is repressive, the presentation of things that defy that schematization lifts or releases repression, if only momentarily” (176).

Thomson also states that one of the psychological effects of the grotesque is to “bring the horrifying and disgusting aspects of existence to the surface, there to be rendered less harmful” (59). These concepts of release and „controlled“ exposure seem to correlate with Kristeva’s notion of art as a means of purging or confronting the abject. Thomson, however, offers another possible consequence:

The shock value of the grotesque may also be used to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him [sic] out of accustomed ways of perceiving the

world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective . . .  
 Many of the uses of the grotesque in contemporary fiction have this function.  
 (58 – 59)

Both of these effects – the purging of emotion, and the revolt against or challenging of quotidian perceptions – are equally valuable and relevant to an experience of reading the abject, taboo, horror, the uncanny and the grotesque.

## 2.4 The Monstrous

The word „monster“ originates from the Latin *monstrum* (a portent): “etymologically „that which reveals“, „that which warns“” (Cohen 4). Monsters serve as a warning, an omen of Otherness: they signify the threat of that which is outside social bounds, as well as the dangers of transgressing cultural mores and, in turn, becoming monstrous. The persistence of monsters in literature and the arts indicates the centrality of the monstrous as a social and cultural trope. From archaic fairytales of witches, ghouls and hybrid creatures, through the Gothic and the uncanny, to the modern obsession with aliens, the monster endures as an image of fear and disgust, exposing underlying societal anxieties. Monsters are culturally-situated figures, and they evolve and are reinvented as societies change. The monstrous is, however, also inherently ambiguous.

The conventional monsters of horror fiction “are feared [because they threaten] the individual or community from outside established physical and psychological boundaries” (Heard 29); hence the monster constitutes a hazard to a society’s values. In *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (2002), Magrit Shildrick associates monstrosity with vulnerability, as both “[open] the self to potential harm” and are “largely projected on to the other and held at bay lest [they] undermine the security of closure and self-sufficiency” (1). She argues that “what is at issue is the permeability of the boundaries

that guarantee the normatively embodied self”, and thus “we are always and everywhere vulnerable precisely because the monstrous is not only an exteriority” (1), but also a facet of our interiority. The corollary suggests that all monsters are, to some extent, human, although, in the conventional horror genre, the monstrosity of the creatures is typically exaggerated or made physically apparent. However, the protagonists of many fictions of taboo – for example, the murderer, rapist or paedophile – are „human monsters“, somewhere between the limits of what is conventionally considered „normal“ and „abnormal“. Not only do they appear human, they *are* human, and can infiltrate our most private and intimate social spaces. Catherine Heard comments that from “the 1950s onwards the notion of the monstrous expanded to include the invisibly deformed – the Communist, the serial killer, the pedophile [sic], the psychopath and the sociopath” (33). This shift from external to internal monstrosity articulates a societal fear of the monsters within, a concept which is not, however, a novelty. Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), for example, demonstrates a similar anxiety. Nonetheless – unlike the physically monstrous Mr Hyde and his „normal“ counterpart, Dr Jekyll – human monsters’ grotesqueness is disguised, concealed or unapparent. They are humans-made-monstrous, but also monsters-made-human:

Human monsters, then, both fulfil the necessary function of the binary opposite that confirms the normality and centrality of the accultured self, and at the same time threaten to disrupt that binary by being all too human. (Shildrick 55)

As a result, human monsters signal the fragility of social mores not only because they transgress established codes, but also because they “constitute an undecidable absent presence at the heart of [the] human being” (54). The human monster, then, reminds us that we are all capable of transgressions, and may also arouse our sympathy because we may, at least in part, see our own desires and depravity reflected in this figure.

The ambiguous nature of the taboo content of certain fiction places the reader in a position where multiple responses – from agitation and terror to humour and pleasure – intersect simultaneously. This ambiguity is exemplified by the novels I have chosen to explore, and thus Carroll's notion of similitude between the protagonist(s) and the audience is rendered tenuous in these fictions. In Carroll's scheme, the human protagonist serves as a safeguard between the audience and the monster, and the audience is at a remove from the creature of horror. The central characters of *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, however, are poised on multiple thresholds: they are between the marginal and the hegemonic, between the human and the monstrous, and, as the protagonists *and* narrators of their respective stories, they confront readers with their monstrosity directly. By transgressing taboos, they call into question the borders and binaries through which the supposedly autonomous and self-contained subject is constructed and maintained. In this regard, Jeffrey Cohen argues that:

By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individuals of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed. (12)

If monsters are "our children" (Cohen 20) – the symbolic product of cultural anxieties and prohibitions – then they warrant critical attention as a means of discussing attitudes to difference and Otherness. To understand them as a „warning“ provides insight into social phobia and the prohibition of certain forms of desire and embodiment, as well as the institutionalised coercion or violence that underpins the social construction of „normality“.

Despite the variety of taboos explored by *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (murder, incest and rape, respectively), all three texts link the monstrous perversion of their protagonists to issues of sex and gender construction. Whilst nationality, class and physical location also contribute to the social marginalisation of these

narrators, gender becomes the locus of their abjection and monstrosity, and each, to varying degrees, experiences the indeterminacy of gender roles. This may suggest that the „warning“ associated with these figures is that monstrosity is the consequence of disturbing society’s sexual mores and transgressing taboos of sex and gender; as Cohen postulates, the “monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster” (14). The monster’s capacity to subvert and disrupt heteronormative hegemony, however, indicates another prospect: the monster signals the possibility of alternative embodiment and perceptions of the body. In her discussion of the “abhuman subject” (3) in Gothic literature, Kelly Hurley argues that

The prefix „ab-“ signals a movement away from a site or condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away from is also a movement towards – towards a site or condition as yet unspecified – and thus entails both a threat and a promise. (4)

Again, the dual „threat and promise“ engendered by the (ab)human monster is equivocal, and yet this ambiguity indicates the subversive capacity of the “not-quite-human subject” (3). On the one hand, the human monster is a disruptive force that deconstructs established societal borders and mores. On the other, however, it gestures towards other modes of being: alternative bodies, experiences and perceptions peripheral to hegemonic discourse.

Cohen describes the “monstrous body” as “pure culture” and “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment” (4), and thus, by examining the monstrous in art and literature, we may gain insight into socio-cultural anxieties and prohibitions. Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1993), for example, explores manifestations of monstrous feminine sexuality in the tropes deployed by horror films – namely the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire, the possessed woman, the *femme castratrice*, and the *vagina dentata*. The horror that surrounds these figures is not due to their malignity or abjection alone, but also their symbolic power as

transgressors of the social codes of „appropriate“ sexual behaviour and „natural“ sexual reproduction. The „naturalness“ of the sexed body, and the rules and prohibitions that regulate the sexed body, are thus called into question. In the next section, I discuss further the relations between taboo, the body, and the binaries of sex and gender.

## 2.5 Taboo, Embodiment and Sexual Difference

Bordo, as cited earlier, asserts that the body is “not only a *text* of culture” but also the “direct locus of social control” (2362). It is thus often an object of taboo: constructed by social and cultural convention, it does not belong exclusively to the individual, but also to the society from which the individual body emerges. The body must be tamed and disciplined, cleaned and sterilised, in order for the subject to take his or her place in the world of language, structure and symbol. Rom Harré describes the human being as the

nexus of a complicated web of social obligations and interpersonal meanings from which each and every one of us draws the significance we assign our bodies and their parts, each according to his or her own tribal customs. (12)

Furthermore, he argues that

our bodies, their states, functions and uses, [are] complex clusters of cultural constructions. Body concepts are given meaning, and so made relatively determinate, in a variety of ways in different environments of thought and action. (3)

Between two seeming opposites, the body is positioned as liminal: it is both subject and object, private and public, natural and cultural, „determinate“ and yet always in the process of formation and adaptation. Within varying socio-cultural contexts, certain corporeal acts, excretions and body parts are tabooed; yet these taboo elements resurface symbolically, as the

very act of exclusion gestures towards them. The monstrous or abject body further amplifies these tensions by signalling the fragility of social binaries, which are always reliant on the structures of language. Sexual monstrosity, then, indicates a particular grotesqueness that collapses the binaries of masculine and feminine, as well as male and female.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva identifies the “three major categories of [biblical] abomination”, namely “food taboos”, “corporeal alteration and its climax, death”, and “the feminine body and incest” (93). It is interesting to note, however, that the values associated with many other taboos have covert implications for sexual conduct. For example, Kristeva considers the Judaic injunction against cooking meat with milk, outlined in *Exodus*, as a “metaphor for incest” in terms of milk’s symbolic value as a „maternal“ substance (105).<sup>iv</sup> Likewise, coming-of-age rituals – such as circumcision or practices surrounding menstruation, child-birth and marriage – entail certain values that govern sexual identity and relationships between the sexes. Despite Kristeva’s “ambivalent, sometimes hostile, relation to feminism” (Oliver, *Companion to Continental Philosophy* 603), the predominant focus in *Powers of Horror* is the politics of sexual difference. For example, she claims that “[s]ymbolic identity presupposes the violent difference of the sexes” (100), and that “phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex” (70). Simultaneously, however, this feminine power must hold some attraction in order to endanger the patriarchal structures that maintain the supposedly autonomous identity of the subject. According to Kristeva, it is the potential desire to return to the pre-lingual “passivity status” (62) associated with the maternal – the ambiguous authority between the semiotic and symbolic – that marks the feminine as dangerous, uncanny and taboo. However, she does not reproduce the binary structures of gender, but rather suggests that they are always already unstable and under threat. Abjection, with its concomitant associations with both repugnance

and *jouissance*, is that state of being in which borders are not only deconstructed, but revealed as constructed.

The notion that gendered binaries are not inherent but inculcated is, by now, well-established in academic discourse. Ann Cahill outlines the approach adopted by early feminist theory with regard to gender performance and construction:

Ostensibly, and traditionally, it is the body that determines who is male and who is female. The sex/gender distinction prevalent in 1970s liberal feminism allowed feminists to declare much of what constituted femininity „unnatural“, that is, cultural, and not biologically determined. What was of culture could be changed, and there the revolution lay. What was of nature – the sheer existence of different reproductive organs, for example, and the various biological truths concerning them – was fact, and beyond the tainting influence of a patriarchal culture. (5)

Thus, the gendered binaries of masculine versus feminine and their auxiliary associations – for example, aggressive versus passive, or mind versus body – are exposed as arbitrary and fluctuating. Nonetheless, according to Cahill, the “innocence of biology . . . did not persist for long” (5), and the assumed „naturalness“ of the biological, sexed components of the body was also to be called into question, particularly by theorists such as Judith Butler. Firstly, understanding biology as an immutable „truth“ outside of culture is problematic. This approach suggests that corporeal experience may be neatly divided along the lines of sex – *female* embodiment versus *male* embodiment – and risks homogenising embodied experience in the same way that gender binaries construct generic social or cultural roles for the sexes. To assume that all women are necessarily passive, for example, is as disputable as to assume that all women experience menstruation or childbirth in the same manner. Furthermore, bodies are not only gendered by culture, but also sexed, insofar as bodily features (genitals, facial hair, or muscular tone, for instance) are ascribed particular meanings within the biological binary of male or female. In “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” (1993), Anne Fausto-Sterling discusses the ambiguous position of intersex

individuals within a sexually dichotomous society. She argues that, with the additional inclusion of three broad categories of hermaphroditism, there are at least five sexes. However, she acknowledges that this scheme, too, is limited: “sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories” (para. 6).<sup>v</sup> Whilst biological sexual features certainly exist, they are rendered meaningful within a social paradigm which privileges heteronormativity. This paradigm is, however, open to flexibility and change (as are the features or roles of gender). As Cahill clarifies:

[A]ll men and all women, insofar as they are sexed and therefore not universal, represent and experience only a limited portion of the possibilities of being human. An ethics of sexual difference thus demands a humility that a belief in universalism or unity cannot include . . . (100)

This „ethical humility“ with regard to sex and gender can be extrapolated further and applied to all structures of differentiation: just as there is no unified experience of sex and gender, there is no universal experience of „race“, nationality, culture or age, for example.

Embodiment may be generic insofar as all people have common bodily functions and experiences: we all eat, breathe, defecate, urinate, vomit, bleed; and we experience both pleasure and pain. However, a plethora of personal, cultural and biological factors may mould identities and influence our experiences and perceptions of the body.

As mentioned earlier, the narrators of *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* transgress cultural codes by committing the acts of murder, incest and rape respectively. Moreover, the protagonists also disrupt the binaries of sex and gender, become sexually monstrous, and reveal the tenuousness of gendered distinctions. Their abject bodies become the palimpsests upon which cultural codes and taboos are subverted and reconfigured. Concerned with representations of the body, these novels provide compelling evidence of the ways in which literature may produce an apposite space in which to explore a

subversion of sex and gender norms: literature engages our intellects and imaginations, and can intimate alternatives without having fully to realise them.

## 2.6 The Power of Literature and the Affect of Fiction

The powerful affect of the imagination is exemplified by the myriad of physiological responses elicited by literature, film and art. We laugh and cry; we blush and frown; we bite our nails and become short of breath. Horror and grotesqueness, as discussed earlier, induce a range of emotional, psychological and physical reactions. The Latin root of the word „horror“ – *horrere* – means „shudder“, but also „bristle“: the latter referring to “the way in which the hair on the nape of the neck stands on end during moments of shivering terror” (Twitchell 42). This etymology signals the very corporeal nature of our engagement with fictions of horror, and the capacity of fiction in general to affect us intensely.

Reading is not a neutral activity. Whether consciously or subconsciously, it requires the reader to engage with ideas, images, thematic content, and ethical considerations. Colin McGinn, in *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (1997), posits that, when we read fiction, “we are brought to enter into someone’s character as it is expressed in feeling and action, and we react to this with various evaluative attitudes – affective as well as cognitive” (3). Reading thus constitutes a complex interaction between the text and its audience. Our responses to literature and art are both general and subjective; we may experience the text as many other readers do, and simultaneously we create meanings that are particular to our personal beliefs, ideologies and perspectives. The complexity of the experience of reading is further illustrated by the “fundamental paradox of corporeal narratology”: the elision of individual bodily experience and “some general experience of corporeality that reading engenders” (Punday viii). On the one hand, when we read, we are situated in a particular locale with the physical

text before us; our eyes move across the printed letters and words, and our fingers feel the texture of the paper as we turn the page.<sup>vi</sup> On the other hand, however, this sense of embodiment is paradoxically accompanied by one of disembodiment:

[The] commonplace image of reading a story as being caught up within a wholly private experience depends in part on our having left the body behind. Not only do we escape from the body while reading, but the experience of that escape, the suspension of corporeality, is part of what makes reading pleasurable.

(Punday viii)

Hence reading engenders liminality: the experience is one between the corporeal and the meta-physical, the private and the public, the general response and particular, individual reactions.

In *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (1993), Brooks discusses the implications of the body in literature and the affect of reading, and states that “[r]eading to oneself, silently, implies a certain value attached to privacy, a practice of self-communion” (29). This is reminiscent of Kristeva’s concept of the solitary communion entailed by the act of engaging with the abject in art or literature. Walter Benjamin states that “the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual” (1171), but that “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual” (1172). Certainly, the mass production of the literary text prompts a radically different experience to what Benjamin views as a prehistoric engagement with cave paintings and carvings as “instrument[s] of magic” (1172). However, fiction’s ability to evoke a complex response from the reader speaks to the ways in which we may still be „enchanted“ or „haunted“ by works of the imagination. Brooks, for example, argues that:

solitude and isolation make the reading of a novel the most intimate of literary experiences, a transaction without the mediation of actors or speakers, in which one typically feels an empathetic closeness to characters and events. (29)

Similarly, Martha Nussbaum explores literature's capacity to elicit empathy. She states that the novel, in particular, "focuses on the possible" and invites "readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences" (5). Empathy, in Nussbaum's terms, is evoked by the way in which novels "convey the sense that there are links of possibility . . . between the characters and the reader" (5).

The intimation of alternative possibilities produced by the novel form is further exemplified by the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque. David Carroll discusses the potential political value of the novel with regard to Bakhtin's theories. He comments that, for Bakhtin, the novel is a non-canonical form (82) that is open to a plurality of voices, and thus

keeps open and unresolved the conflicts or disputes of voices and languages constituting it, only as it resists the temptation to reduce the alterity of the other to the identity of the same. (84)

Thus the polymorphic form of the novel is one of multiplicity and fluidity. The Bakhtinian carnivalesque, understood as "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (90), offers a suspension of dominant discourse and, in doing so, indicates other modes of being and living: "The carnival reveals that all relations are arbitrary, that alternative structures permitting other kinds of relations are always possible" (88). However, the carnivalesque is always transient, and occurs within an allotted time and space *sanctioned* by authority. This may seem contradictory, as licensed rebellion may not seem to be rebellious or revolutionary at all. Nonetheless, the subversive power of the carnivalesque (and the novel which epitomises its pluralism) lies not simply in the disruption of normative values, but in the way in which the disruption signals the fragility of these established values. Thus the "privileged figures of the carnival" – the fool, the clown and the rogue – complicate the foundations of the status quo, and "symbolize the struggle against convention and truth which is the motor force of history for Bakhtin" (93).

In similar vein, Michael Bernstein suggests that the „Abject Hero“ may be viewed as a literary trope of social and political subversion. Upon engaging with the abject hero – who has evolved from the medieval figure of the fool or clown – the “reader is no longer at liberty to rely on a prior code . . . since it is the validity of that very code that is the bone of contention” (23). Hence, these figures represent a disturbance that occurs from *within* hegemony: they disrupt social order by calling into question its normative status. Akin to the human monster, the abject hero and the characters of the carnivalesque undermine social order whilst they simultaneously gesture towards other possibilities for social existence. Literature provides a „safe“ and „sanitary“ space in which to engage with the objects of cultural exclusion, deviancy and abjection. It “feels safe to explore our own condition in this way because we can tell ourselves that it is all happening to someone else” (McGinn 168); however, fiction is also a form that engenders possibility and plurality, and thus allows the reader to empathise (or sympathise) with a fictional “someone else” (168).

In their discussion of the ranking of literary texts, Stallybrass and White use the terms „high“ and „low“ to discuss the constructed binary hierarchies that are imposed upon the “human body, psychic forms, geographical space” and “social formation” (2). Whilst the „low“ and “representations of the lower strata” (4) are considered socially peripheral, they inform and produce that which is considered „high“. According to Stallybrass and White, the result is “a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity” and a “psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level” (5). Hence, “what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central” (5), and, by approaching the „socially peripheral“ in a fictional context, the reader is granted an ambiguous position from which to engage with an Other that is uncannily familiar, and experience an amalgamation of disgust, fascination and empathy.

## 2.7 The Perverted *Bildungsroman*

In this section I discuss definitions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, as well as the ways in which the form may be perverted in order to resist the ideological trajectories associated with the genre, specifically the notion of the development of the autonomous, rational subject.

Whilst the *Bildungsroman* emerged as a genre particular to Germany in the late 1700s, it is not a static category, and provides a useful framework from within which to investigate *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, all of which trace the unconventional development of their protagonists. The term was coined in 1817 – although it was not commonly applied to novels until roughly 1870 (Galens 9) – and is composed of the German words *bildung* and *roman*, which mean „formation“ and „novel“ respectively. Some critics position the *Bildungsroman* as a specifically German form, whilst others insist on its centrality within a European Enlightenment tradition. According to Abrams’ *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999),

The subject of [the *Bildungsroman*] is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world. (193)

The various crises, challenges and obstacles faced by the protagonist “assist in clarifying the character’s mature values”, which involve “the search for universal truths” (Galens 6). Lois

Kerschen suggests that the genre has “universal appeal because it deals with the universal experience of growing up”, and hence the term may be applied to numerous novels (11).

Furthermore, the *Bildungsroman* “involves the reader in the same processes of education and development as the main character”, and aims to “affect the reader’s personal growth as well” (Galens 6). However, Marianne Hirsch Gottfried argues that so many novels “portray some

kind of education, and most educate someone – the author, the reader, or the protagonist” that the definition of the *Bildungsroman* requires the identification of more specific characteristics (Hirsch Gottfried and Miles 122). She maintains that the *Bildungsroman* is a category situated between the picaresque and confessional genres:

While the picaresque novel is turned outward toward society, and the confessional novel is turned inward toward consciousness, the *Bildungsroman* [sic] maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal and explores their interaction. (122)

This description is comparable to that of Abrams, since both place emphasis on the private growth of the protagonist’s identity, as well as the character’s induction into a larger social milieu. A focus on the character’s personal development is essential, but in the traditional *Bildungsroman* the “hero reaches maturity when the character assumes a responsible role in society” (Kerschen 11). Similarly, Martin Swales argues that the protagonist’s psychology is characterised by

a tension between a concern for the sheer complexity of individual potentiality on the one hand and, on the other, a recognition that practical reality – marriage, family, career – is a necessary dimension of the hero’s self-realization, albeit one that by definition implies a limitation, indeed constriction, of the self. (15)

These sentiments are echoed in Stefan Helgesson’s identification of “two ideological narratives typical of the *Bildungsroman*”, namely the “narrative of individuation” and the “narrative of socialisation” (82). The interplay between these two facets – self and society, private and public – therefore seems essential to the form of the *Bildungsroman*. However, Helgesson also problematises the notion of the “emergence of the individual in society”, and maintains that certain texts focus on the “difficulty for such an emergence to occur” (81). In other words, the trajectory of the typical *Bildungsroman* is disrupted or interrupted. Indeed, if

the characters of the traditional *Bildungsroman* attain individuation and social integration at the closure of their narratives, then *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* may be read as a perversion or corruption of this convention. Whilst the protagonists do „progress“ in various ways, their narratives conclude on a note of ambiguity, and the characters remain marginal and social misfits. The anti-*Bildungsroman* may follow the trajectory of the anti-hero, and thwart the dual individuation and socialisation of the protagonist, but the three novels explored here do feature the individual growth of their narrators. However, they give no evidence of their integration into larger society, and, even more significantly, the protagonists are not only social outcasts, but also perverse: they transgress established taboos and remain “set in a course of action in spite of the consequences” (“pervert”).

Susan Fraiman discusses the origins of the *Bildungsroman* in relation to the notion of „development“, which she claims “emerged as a dominant idea in relation to Enlightenment confidence in human perfectibility” (ix), and Swales situates the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* as “coincid[ing] with the rise of the novel as a European phenomenon” (21) and the perpetuation of Enlightenment principles of rationality and universal progress. The claim to a „universal“ representation of growth and self-hood is, of course, problematic. Keja Valens, for example, notes that the so-called „universal“ protagonist usually refers to a Caucasian male (123). Significantly, in this regard, the education of the female protagonist in nineteenth-century *Bildungsromans* often “occurs through an older and wiser husband” and “the mature female sees marriage as her fulfilment” (Kerschen 8), trends which comply with patriarchal gender stereotypes. However, the female *Bildungsroman* may also have the potential to challenge feminine stereotypes, and in the 1970s the “form was used to defend the right of feminist and women authors to describe their own reality and to legitimize these experiences” (Lazzaro-Weis 21). Kerschen, too, emphasises the socio-political value of the

*Bildungsroman* as a “work of social protest because it privileges the experience of the outsider” and “tends to examine dominant culture from the point of view of one who is excluded or oppressed” (12). The text invites the reader to engage with this marginalised perspective and, according to Kerschen, the reader “has the opportunity to reevaluate [sic] the tacit assumptions of the majority” (12). Thus, “the novel of protest locates the reader on the outside of the context the reader actually inhabits and this new location clarifies questions about social belief and assumption” (12 – 13). Carol Lazzaro-Weis, however, maintains that the “classical *Bildungsroman* includes a tendency to make people feel at home with their prejudices and less likely to change. Its characters cannot grow as they claim to desire”, since they “are constantly setting up limits for themselves” (24).

Hence the *Bildungsroman* inhabits an ambiguous literary position. On the one hand, its form promotes teleological notions of progress and autonomous self-realisation (ideals which seem unrealistic when one considers identity as a continuum and not an end-product). On the other hand, the *Bildungsroman* also grants intimate access to the psychology of the protagonist and may expose readers to previously unfamiliar perspectives, perceptions and opinions. With regards to *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the latter approach seems apposite, as these novels confront readers with characters who are perversely transgressive. Despite their abjection, however, we may be inclined to sympathise and identify with these marginal figures. Nonetheless, this inclination is complicated by the fact that the protagonists are also monstrous: access to their perspectives and motivations does not diminish the horror they elicit, and readers are not necessarily encouraged to endorse their grotesque actions. Rather, the ambiguity of the protagonists subverts our expectations of the *Bildungsroman*: the characters are not the typically “sensitive, intelligent” heroes on a “quest for the meaning of life”, nor are they strictly a “vehicle for the author’s social and moral opinions as demonstrated through the

protagonist[s]” (Galens 1). The novels I examine constitute a remodelling of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, to the effect that the provisionality and ateleology of the perverted *Bildungsroman* format further amplifies the ambiguity of their first-person narrators. Furthermore, if the *Bildungsroman* typically values the concept of progress, and implies that the subject can acquire social integration through individuation, the novels I examine undermine these Enlightenment ideals. Rather, they suggest that the subject is a continuous „work-in-progress”: the novels deny an apex to the personal progress of the characters, and refute the relationship between personal development and social inclusion.

The three novels do, however, share a feature of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: the use of irony. Swales describes the “modern novel” as “born under the astrological sign of irony” (21). He regards this irony as a “structural principle” which engenders a “kind of self-reflexivity” (21). For Swales, the *Bildungsroman* “does not suffer from *epistemological* naiveté [sic]”; the tensions between individuation and socialisation are “essentially a debate about the co-ordinates of human cognition, and the issues raised are epistemological rather than moral, are embedded in the narrator’s (and reader’s) capacity for reflectivity” (22). The three novels analysed in this thesis arguably epitomise this aspect of the *Bildungsroman*’s epistemological exploration through their use of irony to subvert and challenge conventional gendered expectations, since this irony – and the epistemological uncertainty it induces – may prompt a reflexivity in the reader akin to Kristeva’s individual revolt. Swales moreover maintains, contrary to other critics, that, in the *Bildungsroman*, the “happy ending, that epistemologically simple foreclosure of the process of human growth, is consistently undermined by the narrator’s irony” (17). Similarly, *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* conclude with ambiguity and uncertainty, and thus resist the simplicity and teleology of the „happy ending”.

I shall return to the use of irony in more detail in my concluding chapter. In the second part of this dissertation, however, I demonstrate the subversive capacity of these novels with regard to my central proposition that reading acts of taboo in fiction is an ambivalent experience in which hegemonic values are both temporarily disintegrated and reaffirmed. Furthermore, I argue that the novels also display a subversive capacity to resist sex and gender norms, and to signal an alternative, fluid paradigm for understanding gender identity. In the process, they interrogate the notions of perfectibility and progress, as well as the dual process of individuation and social integration epitomised by the traditional *Bildungsroman*.

---

## Notes

<sup>iii</sup> The psychoanalytic discussion of perversity owes much to Freud, whose “theory and practice of psychoanalysis have changed the way people think about themselves today, whether they are aware of it or not” (Leitch et al. 913). As a pervasive force in psychology, literary theory and „pop culture“, Freud “gave us a new and powerful way to think about and investigate human thought, action, and interaction”, and “made sense of ranges of experience generally neglected or misunderstood” (Neu 1). However, the credibility and universal validity of Freud’s theories have also been critiqued, specifically by feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. This thesis focuses rather on the ways in which Kristeva’s writings address perversity and taboo. Though her theories of abjection are heavily indebted to Freud, this thesis focuses on the former, since Kristeva discusses not only the socio-political and cultural aspects of perversity and taboo, but also the revolutionary potential of these notions.

<sup>iv</sup> Kristeva explains that milk is a “medium that is common to mother and child”, and that “[a]bomination does not reside in nourishing but in seething, that is, *cooking* the young goat in its mother’s milk; in other words, it amounts to using milk not in terms of a need for survival but according to cultural culinary fancy, which sets up an abnormal bond between mother and child” (105).

<sup>v</sup> In “The Five Sexes, Revisited” (2000), Fausto-Sterling revises her notion of sexual difference and identity as a continuum: “male and female, masculine and feminine, cannot be parsed as some kind of continuum. Rather, sex and gender are best conceptualized as points in a multidimensional space” (para. 23).

<sup>vi</sup> This textual materiality is of course not uniform, especially considering the increasing prevalence of texts in digital formats such as audiobooks, electronic books, website pages and PDFs. Technological advancements may alter the nature of the reading experience; however, the reader’s body is still implicated in the reading of these texts, as we must use a mouse or „touchpad“ to „scroll“ through pages instead of turning them.

### Chapter 3:

#### **“Bogus Bits of Power”: Murder and Undermining Patriarchy**

##### **in Iain Banks’ *The Wasp Factory***

“Climactic moments of coming-to-consciousness about one’s identity, about the very order of the moral universe, are played out on the body.”

– Peter Brooks (22)

*The Wasp Factory* was first published in 1984, and marked the debut of Iain Banks’ prolific literary career. The novel met with varied responses, illustrated in the Abacus reprint (1990) by three pages of reviewers’ criticisms and commentary. For some, the novel is sick, cruel, repellent, disagreeable and even silly, yet it is also described as brilliant, poetic, and a masterpiece:

As a piece of writing, *The Wasp Factory* soars to the level of mediocrity. Maybe the crassly explicit language, the obscenity of the plot, were thought to strike an agreeably avante-garde note. Perhaps it is all a joke, meant to fool literary London into respect for rubbish. (*The Times*)

Iain Banks has written one of the most brilliant novels I have come across for some time. His study of an obsessive personality is extraordinary, written with a clarity and attention to detail that is most impressive. One can only admire a truly remarkable novel. (*Daily Telegraph*)

A silly, gloatingly sadistic and grisly yarn of a family of Scot lunatics, one of whom tortures small creatures – a bit better written than most horror hokum but really just the lurid literary equivalent of a video nasty. (*Sunday Express*)

A novel of such curdling power and originality that whether you like it or not – and you may hate it – the arrival of its author Iain Banks must mark the literary debut of the year. It’s astonishing, unsettling and brilliantly written.

(*Cosmopolitan*)

The ambivalence of reviewers' responses to the novel is occasioned by the ways in which the narrative simultaneously amuses and disgusts, presenting a "pyrotechnic display of humorous sadism and over-the-top bad taste" (MacGillivray para. 7). The first-person narrator is homicidal sixteen-year-old Frank, whom Banks describes as "a normality-challenged teenager with severe violence issues" ("Out" para. 7). As the narrative progresses, the reader is drawn into Frank's twisted tale, and is both entertained and repulsed by his gruesome acts. This ambiguous response is enhanced by the novel's subversion of traditional gender expectations, a subversion which signals the inherent fragility of the binary oppositions of heteronormativity.

Frank Cauldhame is an outsider to society in many ways. Banks admits that, whilst he initially wished to write science fiction, *The Wasp Factory* allowed him to treat a more „mundane“ and all-too-earthly subject as "something resembling SF": "The island could be envisaged as a planet, and Frank, the protagonist, almost as an alien" (para. 7). Alienation is a predominant theme in the text, and Frank is depicted as both socially and physically isolated, as well as abject. He is restricted to the small island on which he lives, and is limited by the home-schooling he receives from his eccentric father, Angus. Frank is further rendered „other“ by an "unfortunate disability", to which he often refers, which forces him to "sit down in the toilet all the time" like a "bloody woman" (Banks 14). On the one hand, Frank complies with social norms: he is a „typical“ boy, playing with toy soldiers, building miniature forts and dams, and terrorising the island's small creatures. Banks states that he "gave in to the write-what-you-know school but with a dose of skiffy hyperbole" ("Out" para. 7), which may account for the fact that Frank seems so „normal“ at times, acting out the familiar pastimes of British boyhood. On the other hand, however, Frank also defies hegemonic rules and prohibitions by murdering three family members during his childhood – his cousin Blyth is bitten by an adder Frank has inserted into his prosthetic leg; his younger

brother, Paul, is disposed of by a bomb; and his cousin Esmerelda is swept away by an enormous kite which he builds for this very purpose. In all of these cases, Frank finds inventive ways of accomplishing the murders, whilst appearing to be an innocent bystander. He refers to them dismissively as “just a stage [he] was going through” (49). It is therefore not only Frank’s violence that sets him apart as alien or monstrous, but also his apparent callousness and cynical humour regarding his behaviour.

### 3.1 Murder, the Phallus and the „Correct Father-Son Relationship“

In Kristevan terms, murder is abject not only because of its association with death, but also the symbolic murder of the father-figure, which in turn “draws attention to the fragility of the law” (Powers 4). *The Wasp Factory* is fraught with the tension between patriarchal rule and deviant criminality. Frank is doubly associated with the criminal by virtue of his killings as well as „not officially existing“: “I represent a crime . . . I was never registered. I have no birth certificate, no National Insurance number, nothing to say I’m alive or have ever existed” (10). Although the crimes of murder and official nonexistence are not commensurate, their combination enhances Frank’s monstrosity: he is all the more threatening because there is no record of his existence, let alone his assassinations. Despite his expertise in brutality, however, Frank is also characterised by a naïveté for which his father is largely responsible:

I probably know more about conventional school subjects than most people of my age. I could complain about the truth of *some* of bits of information my father passed on to me, mind you . . . For years I believed 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. (11)

Whilst this kind of misleading information may seem petty or harmless, access to knowledge is the arena in which Angus Cauldhame exerts his control over Frank. From having his son

“believe that the earth was a Möbius strip, not a sphere” (8) to prohibiting entry to his private study (the inside of which Frank has never seen), Angus is the final arbiter of knowledge in the ways in which he reveals and conceals, manipulates and disseminates information. In another instance, Frank recounts:

For as long as I can remember there have been little stickers of white paper with neat biro-black writing on them. Attached to the legs of chairs, the edges of rugs, the bottoms of jugs, the aerials of radios, the doors of drawers, the headboards of beds, the screens of television, the handles of pots and pans, they give the appropriate measurement of the part of the object they’re stuck to . . . When I was a child I once went around the house tearing all the stickers off; I was belted and sent to my room for two days. (7)

Frank acknowledges that “[o]nly these bits of bogus power enable [my father] to think he is in control of what he sees as the correct father-son relationship” (13), although the experiencing Frank through whom the story is focalised is at this point unaware of the full extent of his father’s manipulation of his perceptions of the world.

For most of the novel, Frank’s biological and socialised masculinity is taken for granted by other characters, by Frank himself and, no doubt, by the majority of readers. Paradoxically, however, he both fulfils the social expectations of „normal“ masculine behaviour, whilst disregarding them by over-compensating for his lack of an actual phallus. As Berthold Schoene-Harwood elucidates, “Frank’s ultraviolent behaviour ultimately poses no threat to the societal order but . . . seems to remain – almost – within the socially acceptable boundaries of what boys naturally tend to get up to” (136). However, what appears to be „natural“ masculine behaviour is revealed as a farce, premised on normative binaries of sex and gender. Frank’s supposed „disability“, which he believes is the result of an old family bulldog having castrated him when he was a toddler, is in fact a lie. If, as Elizabeth Grosz claims, “[f]emale characteristics are considered aberrations of the male norm” (37), it is appropriate that Frank considers his lack of a phallus as a „disability“. As indicated earlier, he

relates his condition to that of a “bloody woman” (14) – a fitting image because the expletive is associated not only with a wound or supposed „lack“, but also with menstruation. Punday argues that “[w]hat makes the body so important to narrative and to our ways of thinking about reading is how it seems to resist powerfully textual representation” (viii). Frank’s narration exemplifies such a resistance. As a protagonist naïve to her „true“ genital „nature“, she presents herself as „he“, despite her lack of male genitalia. Frank maintains, for example, that what men are “really *for*” is to “strike out, push through, thrust and take” (154), an urge „he“ feels in „his“ “uncastrated genes” (155). However, “[f]ar from natural or authentic, his assumption of masculinity turns out to be a monstrous impersonation synthesised by his Frankensteinian father” (Schoene-Harwood 133). Frank’s projection of himself and his body is distorted, and this in turn distorts the presumably heteronormative assumptions of the reader. Banks’ use of a “typical boy’s tale whose hero is *really* a girl” (132) renders the narrator even more ambiguous, since the novel challenges patriarchal discourse by undermining the binary oppositions of sexual and gender identity, exposing them as inculcated and arbitrary.

Unsurprisingly, then, in a story focalised by a narrator obsessed with displays of power and masculinity, images of phallic potency are recurrent. Angus, who has a leg “locked solid” (6), uses his walking stick to strike out “at some wild flowers growing by the path-side” (28); Frank mentions his father’s “stub” of “fat cigar” (3) in the opening pages of the novel; and Blyth’s “stump” of leg is described as “sticking out from his shorts like some monstrous erection” (46). In a discussion of the significance of the gaze in literature, Brooks posits that, “precisely because it is the norm, the male body is veiled from inquiry, taken as the agent and not the object of knowing: the gaze is „phallic“, its object is not” (15). However, considering his „abnormality“, it is appropriate that Frank sees the phallic as external to himself, an unattainable yet desired object, and tries to hide his „feminine“ corporeality; he

claims that the “shower is the only time in any twenty-four-hour period I take my underpants right off” (51). Grosz states that “clothing, jewellery, makeup, cars, living spaces, and work all function to mark the subject’s body . . . binding individuals to systems of significance in which they become signs to be read” (35). The novel only allows readers to „see“ what Frank is willing to show, thereby seemingly confirming his „maleness“ with details such as his shaving of his face or wearing of trousers, boots and a “combat jacket” (52). Whilst he avoids looking at his own body, Frank does however indulge in opportunistic voyeurism and thus adopts a „male gaze“, watching visitors to the island with his binoculars (2), or catching his father asleep:

Not that I had any particular reason for watching him; I just liked doing it. It made me feel good to know that I could see him and he couldn’t see me, and that I was aware and fully conscious and he wasn’t. (148)

If “vision is a typically male prerogative” (Brooks 88), then Frank strangely subverts the „male gaze“ by turning it upon his own father. In another instance, he watches the local policeman, Diggs, visiting his father, and claims that “[Diggs] didn’t see me, because I was too well hidden” (Banks 2), after which he scratches his crotch behind the dunes. Although both Frank and the novel’s readers are unaware of his „true nature“ at this point, this scene may suggest that Frank’s voyeurism is also an indication of his repressed feminine sexuality, rather than a manifestation of the voyeurism of the male gaze. In this reading, Frank is perhaps simply exploring the „natural“ sexual curiosity of the juvenile female.

Despite his performance of masculinity, however, he is still rendered marginal by his „disability“, and thus cannot assume typical heteronormative sexuality. In response to this lack, he plays out his fantasies of machismo by dominating the environment, and by engaging in his own personal rites and bizarre rituals.

### 3.2 Animal Symbolism and the Wasp Factory

Frank's narrative is a combination of public and private signifiers. Whilst he adopts the stereotypical and socially conventional image of masculinity, he also has his own idiosyncratic system of symbols, signs and rites by which he attempts to make meaning of past and present situations, as well as divine future events.

Animals feature significantly in *The Wasp Factory*, both symbolically and as the victims of Frank and his older brother Eric's respective destructive capacities. Frank's typical fatalities consist of mice, gerbils, rabbits and birds, whereas Eric directs his sadism at dogs. Schoene-Harwood queries whether, "in contrast to his brother's destructive excesses, Eric's violence is considered unacceptable because it targets man's best friend, unleashing itself amidst society, in the public sphere, rather than Frank's peninsular seclusion" (137). It may seem ironic that Frank claims that "[t]his dog burning stuff is just nonsense" (142), especially when his own violence against animals and his family members is taken into consideration. Dogs, however, have connotations which are peculiarly significant to Frank. He paints the head of a dog onto the kite which kills Esmerelda, yet retrospectively claims that he "had yet to learn that [he] was not a Canis" (115). Frank subsequently dismisses his identification with the symbol of the dog, perhaps most obviously because of a particular dog's association with his supposed castration and disenfranchisement. It is on the day of Paul's birth, whilst Frank is "getting into mischief the way any normal, healthy three year old boy does", that he is attacked by Saul, the "ancient white bulldog" (137). He recounts that

according to [my father], it was just as he choked the last struggling life out of the dog that he heard another scream, this time from above, and inside the house, and that was the boy they called Paul being born. What sort of twisted thoughts went through my father's brain at the time to make him choose such a name for the child I cannot start to imagine, but that was the name Angus chose for his new son. (139)

Frank then claims that “Paul, of course, was Saul. That enemy was – must have been – cunning enough to transfer to the boy”, and notes that he was lucky to have spotted the transformation in time and dispatched his younger brother, “or God knows what the child might have turned into” (140). This confluence of events seems to be Frank’s justification for much of his sadism: as he explains, Old Saul is “the root cause of it all” (133). Indeed, Frank sends “little animals” to their “muddy little ploppy deaths” in order to find and dig up the buried “Skull of Old Saul” (140) for his clandestine rites (in the process creating the area later known as the Skull Grounds). However, having exhumed and repossessed the skull, he surrounds it with “heavy magic, important things” (142), and believes that the “Year of the Skull ended with my old enemy in *my* power” (141). Thus dogs, in the novel, represent power and ferocity, and are pointedly contrasted with domesticated livestock, particularly sheep. If dogs signify cunning and control, sheep represent the gullible masses:

I remember I used to despise sheep for being so profoundly stupid. I’d see them eat and eat and eat, and I’d watched dogs outsmart whole flocks of them, I’d chased them and laughed at the way they ran, watched them get themselves into all sorts of stupid, tangled situations, and I’d thought they quite deserved to end up as mutton, and that being used as wool-making machines was too good for them. (192)

However, the associations he attaches to sheep are more complex than this: Frank subsequently reveals that he

eventually realised just what sheep really represented: not their own stupidity, but our power, avarice and egotism . . . *we* made them, we moulded them from the wild, smart survivors that were their ancestors so that they could become docile, frightened, stupid, tasty wool-producers. We didn’t want them to be smart, and somehow their aggression and their intelligence went together. (192 – 193)

Hence the contrast between dogs and sheep is one of intelligence, and the aggression that supposedly accompanies it (conventionally perceived as „male“ qualities), versus stupidity

and docility (supposedly stereotypical „female“ characteristics). Whilst Frank acknowledges that sheep have been selectively bred, he fails, however, to recognise the parallel selectivity of socialisation – for example, the ways in which masculine traits are suppressed in women, and conversely femininity is deplored in men.

Frank’s perception that women are somehow innately “stupid and weak and live in the shadow of men” (50) is thus ironic, given his genital „femaleness“ coupled with his self-styled sexual identity and his father’s socialisation. It is also ironic that, at this point in the novel, he does not consider that the ferocity and intelligence of dogs is also selectively trained, much like his masculinity. His comment that he “had yet to learn that [he] was not a *Canis*” (115) is therefore significant as a moment of self-reflexivity, as he tells his story retrospectively. Furthermore, as juxtaposed symbols, dogs and sheep connote two other extremes: the former signify fierce individuality whereas the latter embody unquestioning passivity and the maintenance of the status quo. In this respect, considering the abundance of biblical allusions in the novel and Banks’ “strong anti-religious attitude” (MacGillivray para. 24), sheep may be seen as representative of the „faithful flock“. Dogs and sheep, then, represent binary oppositions – male and female, leaders and followers – and the manner in which such binaries are culturally „bred“ and maintained.

Frank’s system of signifiers is not limited to animals, however, and he designates specific areas on the island as locales of symbolic meaning: the Sacrifice Poles which keep watch over the island; the Snake Park and Bomb Circle, where Blyth and Paul were respectively disposed of; the Skull Grounds, where he unearthed the skull of the bulldog Saul; and the Bunker, which holds home-made candles, the “severed heads of gulls, rabbits, crows, mice, owls, moles and small lizards”, as well as “phials of precious fluids” and the bulldog’s skull prominently displayed: “The yellow brain-bones of horses, dogs, birds, fish and horned sheep faced in towards Old Saul” (57).

Furthermore, Banks' capitalisation of certain words and terms – for example, “The Tale of Old Saul” (54), “The Truth About Frank” (10), “What Happened to Eric” (23), or Frank's catapult, the “Black Destroyer” (36) – illustrates the emphasis Frank places on the significance of particular objects and events. He is perpetually deriving meaning from the external world, looking for the “signs to be read in it all” (41). Whilst this in itself is not necessarily a bizarre practice – we are all always constructing and maintaining extrinsic meaning – Frank's obsession feeds his destructive tendencies:

„I hope you weren't out killing any of God's creatures.“  
 I shrugged at [Angus] again. Of course I was out killing things. How else am I supposed to get heads and bodies for the Poles and Bunker if I don't kill things? There just aren't enough natural deaths. You can't explain that sort of thing to people, though. (9)

By allocating his own meanings, Frank is creating his own private paradigm in which his „disability“, Eric's insanity, and the murders are explained, justified and rendered intelligible. The Wasp Factory, however, is the principal signifier in Frank's personal metanarrative, its centrality foregrounded by its selection as the title of the novel.

For most of the novel, the Wasp Factory itself remains an obscure and mysterious object, although it is present from the very beginning. Frank states in the opening passage that, “I already knew something was going to happen; the Factory told me” (1), an introduction which indicates the significance of the Wasp Factory as a clairvoyant device. It is a heavily symbolic object, made from the “face of an old clock which used to hang over the door of the Royal Bank of Scotland in Porteneil” (158), which Frank uses to divine future events and „make sense“ of current situations, and it resides in the attic – which Angus cannot access due to his handicapped leg. This allows Frank a secret space in which to conduct his private rituals:

I held my crotch, closed my eyes and repeated my secret catechisms. I could recite them automatically, but I tried to think of what they meant as I repeated them. 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. One tape recorder in the vicinity and the horrible truth about my three murders would be known. For that reason alone they are very dangerous. The catechisms also tell the truth about who I am, what I want and what I feel, and it can be unsettling to hear yourself described as you have thought of yourself in your most honest and abject moods, just as it is humbling to hear what you have thought about in your most hopeful and unrealistic moments. (157)

The Factory itself consists of twelve points of symbolic and literal death, one at each of the clock's numerals. Frank drops a wasp onto the clock face, sealed by a "wall of plywood two inches high, topped with a metric-circle of glass", after which "the wasp can enter one of the twelve corridors through little wasp-sized doors" (159). If "the Factory so chooses", the wasp will eventually select a path, at the end of which its "fate is sealed" (159). Each death is different – some are automatic, whereas others require Frank's intervention – but all have unique meanings which "the Factory might be trying to tell [him]" (160). Moreover, he associates specific numerals and deaths with his own murders:

Death by fire has always been at Twelve, and it is one of the Ends never replaced by one of the Alternatives. I have signified Fire as Paul's death; that happened near to midday, just as Blyth's exit by venom is represented by the Spider's Parlour at Four. Esmerelda probably died by drowning (the Gents), and I put her time of death arbitrarily at Eight, to keep things symmetrical. (160 – 161)

Also littering the altar on which the Factory stands are other symbolically powerful objects in Frank's life: photographs of various family members as well as the house, shavings from his father's stick, Eric's first teeth, and some of his father's hair. The Factory, however, is a particularly powerful instrument for Frank. He claims that it

is part of the pattern because it is part of life and – even more so – part of death . . . The reason 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. (153 – 154)

The Wasp Factory is thus essential to Frank's cosmology, as it provides „answers“ to his questions, justification for his macabre acts, and, perhaps, „explains“ the meaning of life and death.

Ex-communicated from the world of conventional symbols and public doctrines, Frank thus performs his own substitute for religion in an intensely private space. Banks comments that the novel was intended 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 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. (“Out” para. 8)

Whilst Frank's version of religion may seem bizarre, it is not necessarily any stranger than belief in mainstream religion, or the belief that gender differences are innate. The Wasp Factory, accompanied by Frank's rituals, is the means by which he attempts to make sense of his existence. If Frank's personal doctrine is reflective of the ways in which we are all misled by arbitrary ideals and ideologies, this implies that our social and cultural mores are maintained by the ritualistic performance of these established roles. However, Frank's notion that “every question is a start looking for an *end*” (154, emphasis added) is problematic, as it suggests that the structures and rituals of socialisation are final. What he fails to realise at this point in the novel is that the signifiers from which we make meaning – whether they are “entrails and sticks and dice” (154), or clothes, accessories and bodies – are open to change and multiple interpretations. The Wasp Factory, then, articulates both Frank and the reader's

tendency to produce or subscribe to frameworks of meaning and signification; whilst these may appear to produce the „answers“ we desire, ultimately they are arbitrary and open-ended.

Inhabiting the open space of the island are The Sacrifice Poles, which Frank describes as his “dead sentries” (19): poles around the island decorated with the desiccated heads of seagulls, mice and other small animals, which „watch over“ his territory. He views them as “extensions of me which came under my power through the simple but ultimate surrender of death” (19), and he urinates on them regularly in order to infect them with his scent and power (14). They are also his

early warning system and deterrent all rolled into one . . . infected potent things which looked out from the island, warding off. Those totems were my warning shot; anybody who set foot on the island after seeing them should know what to expect. But it looked like, instead of being a clenched and threatening fist, they would present a welcoming open hand. For Eric. (5)

Thus, whilst Frank has faith in the hostility of his defence system, he also acknowledges that the poles may have the opposite meaning for Eric, his „insane“ half-brother. Notorious for setting neighbourhood dogs alight, Eric has escaped from a mental hospital at the beginning of the novel but remains on the periphery of the narrative action, intercepting the text with crazed phone-calls to Frank. Eric thus contrasts with his brother, who is the central focus, but – as a parallel to Frank’s violence and brutality – is significant in providing another example of the monstrous effects of rigid socialisation.

### 3.3 The Prodigal Son

To the reader, it may seem strangely delusory that Frank considers Eric dangerously insane. However, as Schoene-Harwood points out, “Frank is able to think of his own madness as sanity because, unlike Eric’s, it appears to have patriarchal sanction” (136). Whilst playing an

arcade game of Space Invaders, Frank and his only friend, Jamie the „dwarf“, discuss the issue of Eric’s lunacy and position it as relatively normal or insignificant within a larger political context:

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

„Aye, I suppose . . . 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 to do what they want them to do, like die for them and work for them and get them into power and protect them and pay taxes and buy them toys, and they’re the ones who’ll survive another big war, in their bunkers and tunnels. So, given things being the way they are, who’s to say they’re the loonies because they don’t do things the way Joe Punter thinks they ought to be done? . . .

„Survival of the fittest.“

„Yeah.“

„Survival of the . . . nastiest. (146)

As Frank relates, Eric, by contrast, has been ostracised from „normal“ society because of his antisocial behaviour, which is due to an “unfortunate experience” (183) which sent him “flying back and out to something else: an amalgam of both his earlier self (but satanically reversed) and a more worldly wise man, an adult damaged and dangerous, confused and pathetic and manic all at once” (184). Eric’s „earlier self“ is presented as intelligent, but also feminised by his sensitivity and sentimentality. As a child, for example, Eric “cried like a girl” and was “inconsolable” when Blyth torched his pet rabbits with a home-made flamethrower, “desperate with grief because he had made the thing Blyth used to destroy our beloved pets” (43). As an adult, Eric “decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a doctor” (182). In his second year of medical school, he volunteered to help “down in the guts of the hospital with the human rejects”, in the ward “where they kept babies and young children so badly deformed they were sure to die outside [the] hospital” (184). In the middle

of the night, suffering one of his recurrent migraines, Eric tried to feed a child, “more or less a vegetable” (185), who did not respond at all:

Then he saw something, something like a movement, just a tiny little movement, barely visible on the shaved head of the slightly smiling child . . . He bent closer to the skull of the child, looking closer. He couldn’t see anything, but he looked round the edge of the metal skull-cap the child wore, thought he saw something under it, and lifted it easily from the head of the infant to see if there was anything wrong . . . Flies had got into the ward, presumably when the air-conditioning had been faulty earlier. They had got underneath the stainless steel of the child’s skull-cap and deposited their eggs there. What Eric saw when he lifted that plate up, what he saw with all that weight of human suffering above . . . what he saw with his own skull splitting, was a slowly writhing nest of fat maggots, swimming in their combined digestive juices as they consumed the brain of the child. (186 – 188)

This scene is noteworthy as a counter to Frank’s usual style of narration. Whilst he relates his own murders with a callous detachment, his account of Eric’s experience (at which he was not himself present) relays the abject horror of this incident. The contrast with his typically jocular tone suggests that Frank genuinely empathises with Eric and does not trivialise the latter’s subsequent mental collapse. Unlike Frank’s often humorous descriptions of dispatching his other family members, this episode elicits disgust and unease. It also, however, prompts sympathy for Eric from the reader.

Despite appearing initially to recover from this horrific trauma, Eric eventually leaves university after setting his books alight. He returns to the island, and takes to “frightening small boys from town by throwing worms at them” and “trying to force the kids to eat worms and handfuls of maggots” (189). He is “certified insane” (191) a few months later and sent to an asylum, by which time he has already acquired a penchant for burning dogs. As a foil to Frank, the feminised Eric represents the other extreme of gender performativity. He is unable to perform the expected masculine role, and “even as a medical student he appears drawn to

the nurturant and caring (traditionally feminine) rather than scientific (traditionally masculine)” (Schoene-Harwood 138). It is both ironic and tragic that, in an act of compassion, Eric’s „sensitive“ inclinations lead to his psychotic breakdown, which is “motivated by an overwhelming sense of his own inadequacy, failure and incompetence as a „real“ man” (Schoene-Harwood 139). Whilst Eric struggles to reconcile his masculine body with his feminine personality, Frank over-performs masculine identity because of, or despite, his feminised body. Thus, as Schoene-Harwood comments, Frank is “obsessively preoccupied with asserting what she believes to be her congenital masculinity”, whilst Eric is “a boy whose feminine disposition is crushed by the impact of inexorable patriarchal pressure” (135).

At the climax of the novel, however, Eric’s return coincides with Frank’s revelation about her „true“ sex. By the second last chapter of the novel, pertinently titled “The Prodigal”, Eric’s return to the island is imminent. As a result, Angus Cauldham proceeds to drink himself into a state of oblivion and passes out, leaving his keys in his jacket, and allowing Frank an opportunity to finally explore his father’s clandestine study. There he finds a jar of “clear liquid” holding “a tiny, torn set of male genitalia” (228), as well as a box of tampons and another labelled “Hormones – male” (229). In his confusion, Frank is reminded of his father’s “delicate face, those lightly haired arms” (230) and, convinced that his father is actually his „mother“, he begins to doubt more than merely his father’s home education: “Angus. Agnes. I only had his word for anything that had happened . . . But it *couldn’t* be! It was just so monstrous, so appalling!” (230). He storms to his father’s bedroom and, holding a knife to his throat, pulls Angus’ trousers down:

Something screamed outside, in the night beyond the window. I stood staring at my father’s dark-haired, large, rather greasy-looking cock and balls, and something animal, out there on the landscape of the island, screamed. (232)

In this climactic scene, the literal phallus of the father is revealed, only to confound what Frank thinks may be the truth. Significantly, in this respect, Brooks states that “[d]espite – or because of – the attention paid to viewing woman naked, the paternal phallus may be the ultimate taboo object of our culture” (15). It is thus appropriate that this moment coincides with the screams of an animal: a confluence which intimates Frank’s shock and horror. He is confronted with the very object that defines his supposed lack, but is offered no answers to his questions regarding his own „nature“ and identity. Simultaneously, the shrieking outside the confines of the house announces Eric’s physical eruption into, and disruption of, the scene:

It was a sheep, and it was followed by more. First another two, then half a dozen animals came charging over the grass and sand. In seconds the hillside was covered with burning sheep, their wool in flames, bleating wildly and running down the hill, lighting up the sandy grass and weeds and leaving them burning in their fiery wake. And then I saw Eric. (232 – 233)

Eric manages to burn down the shed in which Frank keeps his explosives, and attempts to destroy the house itself. Describing his brother’s face as “bearded, dirty, like an animal mask”, Frank reflects that he “was the boy, the man I had known, and it was another person entirely” (234). His use of the objectifying pronoun “it”, as well as the animal imagery here, implies that Eric’s psychological removal from social law has also rendered him inhuman. He is nonetheless still “the man [Frank] had known”, which signals his indeterminate position: he is between the human and the monstrous, neither fully one nor the other.

### **3.4 Ambiguous States and Amorphousness**

The abject engenders liminality and ambiguity, challenging the very distinctions by which we define and conceive of ourselves, as well as supposed „others“. The revelation of the truth

behind Frank's „disability“ occurs during a conversation between father and „son“ to which readers are not privy:

When Old Saul savaged me, my father saw it as an ideal opportunity for a little experiment, and a way of lessening – perhaps removing entirely – the influence of the female around him as I grew up. So he started dosing me with male hormones, and has been ever since. That's why he's always made the meals, that's why what I've always thought was the stump of a penis is actually an enlarged clitoris. (240)

Frank's mistaking of her female genitals for the remnants of male genitalia signals the arbitrary and flexible manner in which even physical, biological distinctions can be read. In a discussion of the representation of the body in literature, Brooks states that:

We have not so much a mark on the body as the mark of the body: the capacity of language to create a body, one that in turn calls into question the language we use to classify and control bodies. (220)

*The Wasp Factory* exemplifies such a resistance to conventional representations of the body.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, Brooks also claims that

solitude and isolation make the reading of a novel the most intimate of literary experiences, a transaction without the mediation of actors or speakers, in which one typically feels an empathetic closeness to characters and events. (29)

This empathy is amplified by Frank's first-person narration, because readers experience events through his eyes. Despite his macabre obsessions, Frank is an engaging and strangely humorous narrator, and his idiosyncratic „voice“ is the medium not only through which we receive the narrative, but also make assumptions about his gendered identity. He ultimately recognises the implicatedness of language in the formation of this identity, and states in the final chapter, “I'm not Francis Leslie Cauldhame. I'm Frances Lesley Cauldhame” (240). His

pursuit of “an extremist ideal of violent masculine perfection” (Schoene-Harwood 133) reveals the constructed nature of gender distinctions: “as Frank is to discover eventually, there is more to being human than either masculinity or femininity” (144).

Banks does not, however, either endorse or condemn the behaviour of his macabre protagonist. Frances’ casual violence remains ambiguous at the end of the novel, and is neither attributed fully to the hormones she has unknowingly been consuming in her food, nor to the socialisation of patriarchal hegemony. Similarly, the disjuncture between gender expectations and Frank’s/Frances’ biological sex further problematises her abject status. Her inclination towards murder, destruction and violence frustrate any stereotypical understanding of what „little boys“ and „little girls“ are „made of“. This textual uncertainty “draws [the reader] toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 2), destabilises binary systems of differentiation, and exposes “otherness [as] invariably a deliberate creation, a particular breed of being” (Schoene-Harwood 143).

The novel’s emphasis on the symbolic in the creation and development of the „I“ enables an awareness of the role of language, which in turn allows for the possibility of subversion. Frank’s world is a combination of internal, personal meanings and external, social signifiers. If, as Grosz explains, the body “can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold . . . placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more socio-political exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body’s outer surface” (33), the divisions between interior and exterior (and self-Other, mind-body, feminine-masculine) are amorphous and volatile. The categories permeate and influence each other, indicating the inherent “instability of the symbolic function” (Kristeva, *Powers* 14). Early in the novel, Frank states that his “greatest enemies are Women and the Sea” (50), and thus equates femininity with fluidity. However, he also realises that

you can never win against the water; it will always triumph in the end, seeping and soaking and building up and undermining and overflowing. All you can really do is construct something that will divert it or block its way for a while; persuade it to do something it doesn't really want to do. (25)

Significantly, in this respect, the novel ends with a description of Eric peacefully asleep in Frank's lap on the beach. This is an appropriate setting: between land and sea, the beach implies a liminal space in which both characters can discard the unyielding borders that are supposed to define them and instead explore the flexibility of identities created by language. As Frank affirms, "[a]ll our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern we have at least some say in" (153). Schoene-Harwood explains that "Banks's vision of subversive change is not apocalyptic but epiphanic, *deconstructive* rather than purely annihilative" (147), and the liminality of the beach epitomises this symbolic deconstruction and the potentialities afforded by „inbetweenness“. Indeed, whilst abjection is revolutionary in its destabilisation of the symbolic order, the abject is nonetheless a function of language and paradoxically created by the very boundaries that attempt to exclude it. *The Wasp Factory* produces a sense of a medial position between the symbolic and semiotic, coherence and chaos, "beyond the systemic inscription" (Schoene-Harwood 146) of the body. As Frank acknowledges in the final pages of the novel,

Each of us . . . may believe we have stumbled down one corridor, and that our fate is sealed and certain (dream or nightmare, humdrum or bizarre, good or bad), but a word, a glance, a slip – anything can alter it entirely, and our marble hall becomes a gutter, or our rat-maze a golden path. Our destination is the same in the end, but our journey – part chosen, part determined – is different for us all, and changes as we live and grow. (243 – 244)

If the binary differences by which we organise and systematise existence are arbitrary and fluctuating, then awareness of their innate fallibility and inability to fully represent any subject is liberating. Whether, at the end, we perceive Frank as male or female, or positioned

somewhere between this binary, is our choice. Hence, for the duration of this chapter, I have made use of gendered personal pronouns with a certain reluctance, since the novel ultimately challenges the reader not to impose any particular sexual or gender identity on Frank, and queries whether such categories are necessary or even valid. According to Fausto-Sterling, “Western culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two sexes. Even language refuses other possibilities” (“Five Sexes” para. 3), and thus I have avoided the use of „he/she“ and „his/her“, as this denotes and reinforces (even if unintentionally) the very binary which the novel undermines. In my opinion, we must recognise that these linguistic labels are arbitrary and open, as opposed to closed systems of signification. Language is not necessarily redemptive, but can allow manipulation and subversion of the signs that are supposed to define and contain, express and exclude.

The last line of the novel reads: “Poor Eric came home to see his brother, only to find (Zap! Pow! Dams burst! Bombs go off! Wasps fry: *ttssss!*) he’s got a sister” (244). There are two especially noteworthy images in this conclusion. Firstly, in “The Prodigal”, it is appropriate that Eric announces his return by burning sheep, a destructive act which symbolises the disintegration or „cremation“ of the status quo, and which coincides with Frank – and the reader’s – disconcerting discovery that he is not what he seems. In other words, the „world“ or status quo of the novel is itself exploded. Secondly, despite the militaristic register Frank invokes, the image of dams bursting – water running freely – implies that, at the end of *The Wasp Factory*, coherence will be restored to the island, but it will not be the order of patriarchal rule. The sovereignty of the father has been usurped: his fallibility and dishonesty revealed, both Frank and Eric can now begin to recreate their own identities with an awareness of the systems within which they are defined. The novel resists a decisive „end“ to the progress of the characters; instead, it intimates that alternative modes of gendered embodiment are possible, modes which begin where the novel concludes. The form

of the perverted *Bildungsroman* lends itself to this inconclusive conclusion, as *The Wasp Factory* points to the individual growth of both Frank and Eric, but does not signal their return to, or reintegration into, larger society. Thus, ultimately, the end of Frank's narration gestures toward new beginnings, whilst refusing to foreclose on the possible future trajectories the two siblings' lives will take.

## Chapter 4

### “Sometimes We Were Mummy and Daddy”:

#### Incest and the Performance of Family

#### in Ian McEwan’s *The Cement Garden*

“It is my contention that the unease we feel thinking about, let alone talking about, incest is to a considerable degree a *learned* behaviour, a cultural conduct, a habit. This does not mean that our anxiety is lessened, or that violations will not be fiercely treated. Just the opposite is true. As in the case of especially important habitual behaviour, incest avoidance is usually presented as instinctual and transgressions are punished as if they were *unnatural* acts. They are, rather, *uncultural* acts.”

– James Twitchell (xi)

Ian McEwan published two collections of short stories before publishing his first novel and, in keeping with the macabre nature of his earlier works, *The Cement Garden* (1978) “received a flurry of attention, both positive and negative” (Sgarlata 9). As his debut novel, *The Cement Garden* reflects much of the “violence and absurdity that characterize contemporary urban existence” (Cochran 389) – themes that were to recur in McEwan’s later fiction – and its unemotional treatment of incest and the breakdown of family norms is both unsettling and engaging. Critics expressed their “queasiness at the fiction’s frequent violence and perversity” (390) and it “immediately caused a scandal” (Williams 217), receiving ambiguous responses such as the following review:

A shocking book, morbid, full of repellent imagery – and irresistibly readable . . . The effect achieved by McEwan’s quiet, precise and sensuous touch is that of magic realism – a transfiguration of the ordinary that has far stronger retinal and visceral impact than the flabby surrealism of so many experimental novels.

(*New York Review of Books*)

A review in *The Times* refers to the novel as “[d]arkly impressive”, and another in *The Sunday Times* describes it as an “eerie fable”. Evident from these comments is the tension in the novel between its tabooed content and the dreamlike manner in which the story is told. The novel is narrated from the perspective of Jack, a teenage boy living with his family in a house isolated by its location in a decaying suburb. After their parents die, the children – Julie, Jack, Sue and Tom – begin to emulate and recreate the parental roles within the family. The unfurling of this “eerie fable” is uncanny: the familiarity of childhood pastimes, as well as sibling rivalry and camaraderie, is complicated by Jack’s growing sexuality and desire for his older sister, Julie. The surreal atmosphere that pervades the narrative, however, is created not so much by the events related, as by the tone and techniques employed by McEwan. In this chapter, I shall explore the ways in which the subversion of the family unit is concomitant on the collapse of codes of cleanliness, and examine the affect of the narrative in relation to its dreamlike construction.

#### **4.1 Incest and the „Proper“ Family**

“Incest”: the word itself elicits horror, revulsion and extreme unease, and is associated with exploitation, abuse and degradation. Why is this particular practice so stomach-turning, repellent and surrounded by such strong prohibition? Perhaps because, even more so than the psychopath or the murderer, who dominate our fears as dangerous Others disguised as „normal“ within our society, the perpetrators of incest inhabit the domestic sphere, and are, both literally and figuratively, „too close to home“. Incest occurs between members of the same family (whether immediate or extended): it therefore threatens the „logic“ of the cultural order from within the initial institution of socialisation, and violates the earliest and most intimate relationships through which we learn the norms that govern society.

As mentioned earlier, Kristeva posits that aversion to incest stems from “the subject’s fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother” (*Powers* 64). In this manner, incest poses a symbolic threat to the patriarchal order. It signals not only transgression of a cultural code, but also the undermining of paternal authority. In a discussion of different types of incest, Christopher Bagley points out that:

If there were no prohibition on sexual relations and on marriage between members of the same nuclear family, the whole system of roles within the family, and between families, would be radically different. (505)

If families are “held together by a matrix of rights, expectations, obligations and role relationships” (Twitchell ix), then incest destabilises these established roles. The notion of roles within the family is significant, as the concept of role-playing or „playing a role“ intimates the performativity and therefore the flexibility of these designated functions. In *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture* (1987), James Twitchell examines the prominence of incest in literature, from Romanticism to the nineteenth-century novel. He claims that our current concern with familial relationships is the “outworking of bourgeois family dynamics”, and that “the roles played out in families today are the direct result of romantic and Victorian concepts of father/mother, sister/brother, and, most especially, parent/child” (xii). Whilst the so-called „nuclear“ family and its affiliated values may not, in Victorian times, have been as secure as Twitchell suggests, they are certainly changing in contemporary society – as is evident in the emergence of single-parent families, same-sex parents, and households in which grandparents and children take on parental duties, for example. Nevertheless, our contemporary notions of the appropriate roles and relationships between the members of the family are still fairly well-entrenched, although family structures have not necessarily always followed the present model. As Twitchell notes, in “world history we have such blatant line-breeding „violations“ as the Incan empire, the native

Hawaiian royalty, the ancient Persian rulers, [and] the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt” (11).

Moreover, despite the connotations of grotesque inbreeding associated with incest, the latter does not necessarily result in genetic deformity – nor, indeed, in offspring.

The study of incest and its concomitant prohibitions is thus problematic, and varies in terms of its definitions and associations. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Spain contends that some taboos are the “direct expression of what may well be a bioevolutionary imperative” (297). Twitchell, however, argues that perhaps “incest aversion is biological”, but “not in the sense of an instinct, rather as a genetic message stored between the genes and human consciousness” (245). Furthermore, whilst the “existence of some sort of incest taboo is universal” (Twitchell 12), cases of incest vary in terms of social, cultural, psychological and even economic circumstances. Incest taboos may seem „natural“ and biological, and therefore our dread of incest normal and justified, but certain forms of incest have been sanctioned in certain cultures: the taboos that restrict incest are historically situated, adjusting as societies change. Accordingly, incest taboos are constructed and preserved by cultures and communities, and cannot be understood as wholly biological or evolutionary. Indeed, Twitchell notes that the “semiotics of incest – a social code – may be far more potent than the biology of in-breeding – a genetic code” (9). Furthermore, our abiding fascination with these apparently abhorrent acts and the taboos against them is evident from the fact that “popular culture has never tired of consuming either the myth or the reality of incest” (Twitchell 22). Despite our aversion to incestuous acts, then, their disruption of conventional family relations also intrigues us: “we are drawn to contemplate, for reasons ranging from titillation to revulsion, sexual acts in fiction that we would abhor, or at least avoid, in reality” (31). Thus, if incest prohibition demarcates familial boundaries, thereby “establishing social order and the symbolic” (Kristeva, *Powers* 63), confrontations with incest in literature may rearticulate as well as subvert these filial structures.

## 4.2 Father's Cement Garden

Despite its “overall tone” of “grim neutrality” (Williams 220), *The Cement Garden* delivers both titillation and revulsion in its uncanny unravelling of the traditional family unit. Jack's opening line, “I did not kill me father, but I sometimes felt I had helped him on his way” (9), is unabashed and “brings [readers] straight into Oedipal territory” (Williams 220). This Oedipal trope becomes even more prominent as Jack and Julie begin to imitate and assume the roles of their parents. Twitchell argues that incest in fiction typically concerns a father-daughter relationship (or at least father-figure and/or daughter-surrogate). *The Cement Garden*, however, presents the incest of teenage siblings. Sibling incest may not invoke “such horror or such penalty” as the father-daughter version, but it nonetheless “abruptly jars the sense of family role playing”, even if the sibling incest is only implied or contemplated (Twitchell 156). In McEwan's novel, however, Jack clearly articulates his desire for Julie and her body, regarding her not only as a sister, but also as a sexual being. Initially, his unrequited yearning is restricted to gazing without physical contact but, after the death of their parents, the children are no longer bound by social law: as the roles within the family are restructured, the possibility of incest becomes more prominent – until, inevitably, it does occur.

As suggested earlier, incestuous relationships may vary according to socio-cultural contexts. Bagley outlines five types of incest behaviour: functional, accidental or disorganised, pathological, object-fixation, and psychopathic. *The Cement Garden* features the functional type, which Bagley describes as “certain cases where it is functional for a family to disregard the incest taboo” and “the family itself becomes a society, giving internal moral approval to these actions” (507). Two of the essential characteristics of this kind of incest are isolation, remoteness or “withdraw[al] from the general community” (510), and one

or both parents being unable or unwilling to fulfil their roles (509, 511). This model of the incestuous family parallels that of the siblings in *The Cement Garden*. The family is isolated from larger society both literally and figuratively: aside from distant relatives in Ireland, the parents have no friends or extended family, there are no visitors to the house, and the children tend to keep to themselves. Their residence is situated in a crumbling wasteland between the urban and industrial areas of an unnamed city, presumably somewhere in Britain:

Our house had once stood in a street full of houses. Now it stood on empty land where stinging nettles were growing round torn corrugated tin. The other houses were knocked down for a motor way they had never built. Sometimes kids from the tower blocks came to play near our house, but usually they went further up the roads to the empty prefabs to kick the walls down and pick up what they could find. Once they set fire to one, and no one cared very much. (22)

Though characters outside of the family do appear in the novel, with the exception of Julie's boyfriend, Derek, they remain extraneous to the story. The majority of the novel's action occurs within the confines of the family's property. Twitchell notes that, in the gothic novel, "distress is almost always generated within the home" (147) and, similarly, Jack's narration focuses on unsettling events within the family abode. Furthermore, the family's isolation is amplified by a temporal dislocation and general exclusion from the external world:

*The Cement Garden* is devoid of place-names, fictional or real . . . books (apart from a trashy science fiction novel), songs (except „Greensleeves"), films, TV programmes, brand-names or any of the other familiar features of contemporary consumer society. . . (Williams 219)

Thus, even before the death of their parents, the children live on the periphery of the larger community.

Nevertheless, there exists a hierarchy of designated roles and expected behaviours within the family. The parents, for example, are aptly known only by their appellations „Mother" and „Father". Father is a "frail, irascible, obsessive man with yellowish hands and

face” (9); he is fixated with order and neatness and dominates the family, monopolising his patriarchal power. Jack recounts that

There were a few running jokes in the family, initiated and maintained by my father. Against Sue for having almost invisible eyebrows and lashes, against Julie for her ambitions to be a famous athlete, against Tom for pissing in his bed sometimes, against Mother for being poor at arithmetic, and against me for my pimples which were just starting up at that time . . . The laughter was instant and ritual. Because little jokes like this one were stage-managed by Father, none of them ever worked against him. (15)

Evidently, Father exerts his authority over the family by bullying the other members.

Moreover, if the house represents the domestic sphere conventionally associated with the maternal, then the garden is Father’s domain. As a perimeter around the house, it exemplifies his obsession with order and control:

He had constructed rather than cultivated his garden according to plans he sometimes spread out on the kitchen table in the evenings while we peered over his shoulder. There were narrow flagstone paths which made elaborate curves to visit flower beds that were only a few feet away . . . The paths were so narrow it was possible to lose your balance and fall into the flower beds. He chose flowers for their neatness and symmetry . . . He would have nothing that tangled.  
(14 – 15)

The narrow paths and structured flower beds are juxtaposed against the “vacant sites [that] grew lush with weeds and their flowers” (15) on either side of the property. Thus, despite the “plaster statue of a dancing Pan” (14), Father’s garden is anything but fertile and pastoral. Rather, it signifies an extreme manifestation of unyielding paternal law. After his first heart-attack, however, weeds “pushed up through the cracks in the paving stones” and the “dancing Pan fell on its side and broke in two and nothing was said” (16). Unable to work in the garden himself, and unwilling to witness its disintegration, Father resorts to cement to maintain its „tidiness“, and thus the oxymoronic „cement garden“ is introduced. The first chapter – the only chapter in which Father appears directly in the novel – establishes the motif of the

abundance of cement which he procures for this purpose. In the opening section, for example, Jack brazenly states that he only includes “the little story of [his father’s] death” to explain the “large quantity of cement” at the children’s disposal (9). As Jack comments, “but for the fact that it coincided with a landmark in my own physical growth, his death seemed insignificant compared with what followed” (9). It is thus appropriate that the novel opens with the „death of the father“, as what follows is not only the disintegration of the garden, but also the dismantling of the conventional patriarchal family framework.

Fourteen-year-old Jack’s position as a juvenile is established in the opening pages, in which there is a description of the delivery of the cement. Sitting on the front step rereading a comic book, he wishes he “had been reading the racing results of my father’s paper, or the football results” and could “say something terse and appropriate” to the delivery men (9). The men – “ghostly” (9) with the pale cement dust that covers them – stare past him at the front door, from whence Jack’s father appears, “biting his pipe and holding a clipboard against his hip” (10). This description is significant in two respects. Firstly, the delivery men may be regarded as an example of the extraneous nature of adult characters outside of the family: the men appear as apparitions, barely „visible“ to Jack but for the fact that they remind him of his own position as a younger and „inferior“ male. Secondly, the initial juxtaposition of Jack and his father highlights the discrepancy between them. Although Jack does not know what the cement is for, he does “not wish to be placed outside this intense community of work by showing ignorance” (10). Father is organised and in control, whereas Jack is situated awkwardly on the periphery of this adult male „community“. When he and his father begin work cementing the garden, however, Jack interprets the latter’s “infrequent, terse instructions” (17) and their lack of conversation as confirmation of an unspoken understanding: “I was pleased that we knew so exactly what we were doing and what the other was thinking that we did not need to speak” (17). Whilst Jack’s representation of his

father is generally unsympathetic, here he suggests an affinity between them in this task. However, he eventually becomes bored with the routine of moving the bags and mixing cement, and “familiar longings” slow his movements (18). He tells his father he needs to go to the toilet, and retreats to the bathroom to masturbate. He conjures up the “usual” image of “Julie”s hand between Sue”s legs” (18), and can hear his father mixing the cement when he reaches climax:

Then it happened, it appeared quite suddenly on the back of my wrist, and though I knew about it from jokes and school biology books, and had been waiting for many months, hoping I was no different from any other, now I was astonished and moved. Against the downy hairs, lying across the edge of a grey concrete stain, glistened a little patch of liquid, not quite as milky as I had thought, but colourless . . . I decided not to wash it away. (18)

The “stain” that accompanies Jack”s first ejaculation is significant. Although largely figured in terms of its different states of solidity, cement becomes a highly symbolic substance throughout the narrative, and it is appropriate here that a cement stain literally marks this moment of physical and sexual maturation. On the one hand, Jack is stained by the substance associated with patriarchal control; on the other, he is also marked by the bodily fluid signifying his transition into adulthood. This image of cement and semen encapsulates Jack”s position, caught between the oppression of his father and his own burgeoning independence. Furthermore, when he leaves the bathroom he finds his father “lying face down on the ground, his head resting on the newly spread concrete” (18). Thus the Oedipal trope is made explicit in the novel: the death of his father literally coincides with Jack”s sexual and corporeal awakening. Looking at his father”s body, he notes that the “smoothing plank was in his hand” (18). Instead of alarm, however, he is calm in this confrontation with death:

I approached slowly, knowing I had to run for help. For several seconds I could not move away. I stared wonderingly, just as I had a few minutes before . . . An ambulance came and my mother went off in it with my father, who was laid out on a stretcher and covered with a red blanket . . . I went back outside after the

ambulance had left to look at our path. I did not have a thought in my head as I picked up the plank and carefully smoothed away his impression in the soft, fresh concrete. (18 – 19)

Whilst cement initially represents Father's fixation with neatness, it takes on a new significance immediately after his death. No longer associated with rigid rules and order, it is pliable in its "soft, fresh" form, and is indicative of the malleability of social structures, including the family unit. Jack's ability to easily „smooth away“ his father's impression signifies the beginning of the erosion of patriarchal law and the disintegration of the traditional family framework.

#### **4.3 The Maternal, the Feminine and the Sisters' Bodies**

Although Jack's narration focuses on Father in the first chapter, after the latter's death the female characters become central to the narrative. Similarly, though incestuous undertones are present in the first chapter in the „game“ played by Jack, Julie and Sue, in the chapters that follow, Jack's incestuous desires become more pronounced. Kristeva aligns incest with the feminine, and argues that, akin to the prohibition of murder, the incest taboo "has the logical import of founding . . . social order and the symbolic" (*Powers* 63). As mentioned earlier, the establishment of the symbolic order is predicated upon the separation of the subject from the mother. Thus the abjection associated with incest is posited as a means to prevent the subject's return to the symbolic passivity of the semiotic maternal, and the consequent collapse of the borders that create and maintain identity. This abjection and fear, however, are also accompanied by latent desire, or at least curiosity. Hence, the preclusion of incest "cuts short the temptation to return, with abjection and jouissance, to that passivity status within the symbolic function" in which the subject oscillates "between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, word and deed" (*Powers* 63 – 64). Symbolically, incest poses a threat to paternal

authority as it exposes the subject to the incoherence and ambiguity typically affiliated with the „feminine“ and the pre-lingual.

It must be noted, however, that the „maternal“ and the „feminine“ present two different, yet related, „powers“. Because of the role of the mother in „potty-training“ during the anal stage of development, Kristeva argues that “maternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the first essentially oral frustrations, as sphincter training” (71). Furthermore, Oliver notes that it is the “maternal body that regulates the availability of the breast”, and that the “maternal body not only embodies a separation that is material but also harbors a regulation that is prior to the mirror stage” (*John Hopkins Guide* para. 5). Thus maternal authority is present from the oral stage of psychosexual development. As a precursor to paternal law,

[maternal] authority shapes the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted. (Kristeva, *Powers* 72)

In Kristevan terms, this “primal mapping of the body” is deemed semiotic, as it is a “precondition to language”: although it is “dependent upon meaning”, it does so without “*linguistic* signs” or “the *symbolic* order they found”, and is “distinguished from paternal laws” (72). As Oliver explains, “maternal regulation operates as a law before the Law. The maternal law prefigures and sets up the paternal Law” (*John Hopkins Guide* para. 5). Thus Kristeva describes maternal authority as “the trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body” (*Powers* 72). The feminine, on the other hand, “becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed” (70), and is demarcated as abject by virtue of its potential to disrupt the economy of signs that order, contain and exclude. “[P]recisely on account of its power”, Kristeva claims, this feminine capacity to disturb paternal law “threatens one’s *own and clean self*, which is the underpinning of any organization

constituted by exclusions and hierarchies” (65). Nonetheless, a “confrontation with the feminine” has the capacity to transcend abjection and terror, and is then “enunciated as ecstatic” (59). Hence, as a locus of abjection, the feminine can be experienced as both horrifying and alluring. The maternal, in turn, also occupies a dual position – as both a precondition for and a threat to patriarchy. In the figure of the mother, these seemingly contradictory attributes coalesce.

In *The Cement Garden*, however, Mother is not the figure associated with disruption, but rather (ineffectual) maternal authority. Jack, for example, claims that, in the year following his father’s death, he “abandoned all the rituals of personal hygiene” and was proudly beyond the control of his mother (21). One morning he awakens after a nightmare to find her sitting on the edge of the bed, „trapping“ him inside the bedclothes (28). He notes the smell of the “bright-pink soap she used” (28), which indicates her maternal position as trustee of the clean and proper body. Nevertheless, after the death of their father, however, Mother has become the sole adult authority in the household and therefore assumes some of the duties typically carried out by the father-figure:

„Your pupils are very large, did you know that?“ I shook my head. „And there are bags under your eyes even though you’ve just woken up.“ She paused. Downstairs I could hear the others eating breakfast. „And do you know why that is?“ Again I shook my head, and again she paused. She leaned forward and spoke urgently. „You know what I’m talking about, don’t you?“ My heart thudded in my ears.  
 „No,“ I said.  
 „Yes you do, my boy. You know what I’m talking about, I can see you do.“  
 I had no choice but to confirm this with my silence. This sternness did not suit her at all; there was a flat, play-acting tone in her voice, the only way she could deliver her difficult message.  
 „Don’t think I don’t know what’s going on. You’re growing into a young man now, and I’m very proud of you ... these are things your father would have been telling you . . .“ We looked away, we both knew this was not true . . .  
 „Every time . . .“ She trailed away, and rather than look at me stared down at her hands in her lap. „Every time . . . you do that, it takes two pints of blood to replace.“ She looked at me defiantly.  
 „Blood,“ I whispered. She leaned forward and kissed me lightly on the cheek.  
 (28 – 29)

Mother's claim that it takes two pints of blood to "replace it" (semen), although untrue, is implicitly threatening as an image of abjection, which may account for Jack's shock and horror as she leans forward to kiss him. However, Jack later recounts that he "knew from school she had got it wrong" and that, rather than fulfil his mother's request to stop masturbating, he continues, but every time he masturbated "there passed through [his] mind the image of two pint milk bottles filled with blood and capped with silver foil" (32). The latter image combines the abject and the domestic, which is appropriate given the predominant setting of the novel. Moreover, the image links both blood and semen to the maternal fluid of milk, in a possible foreshadowing of the incest to come, though it is not his mother, literally, who is the object of Jack's desire.

His mother's "play-acting" in the scene above also signals the role-play element of this episode: unequipped to fully confront the issue of Jack's compulsive masturbation, she adopts a stern demeanour in order to "deliver her difficult message" (29) – that is, by borrowing the characteristically rigid tone of Father, whereas the kiss re-establishes her maternal and nurturing role. Another significant detail, however, is that Mother's back, "like Julie's, was very straight" (28): the similitude between them foreshadows Julie's later adoption of the maternal role.

As Mother becomes increasingly ill, Julie begins to take on her maternal and domestic duties in the house, and Jack comments that, "[l]ike my mother, Julie made remarks to me about my hair or my clothes, not gently though, but with scorn" (30). He also describes his mother's face as mixing "Julie's features with Sue's, as though she were their child" (25), but later claims that he does not regard Sue as a "girl": "unlike Julie, [she was] merely a sister, a person" (33). In *Mother* the images of his two sisters (one "merely" a person and the other a sexual being) converge, which indicates the ambiguous position of the feminine. Jack characterises Julie as having a "disruptive, intimidating quietness" (21). Unlike Sue, who is

shy and „plain“, Julie has a “quiet strength and detachment” and lives “in the separate world of those who are, and secretly know they are, exceptionally beautiful” (23 – 24). She has “all kinds of secrets” (29) whereas, if Sue has any secrets, Jack is “not intimidated by them” (25). Sue is „unsexed“ and thus not threatening, whereas Julie, by contrast, is both seductive and authoritative by virtue of her sexuality.

Jack’s narrative is rife with descriptions of Julie, and he makes no attempt to hide his desire for her. As Emily Sgarlata argues, Jack “never views Julie as just a sister, but an Other, something more: sister, mother, woman, and sexual being. He often notices her physicality and is continually drawn to her” (28). From the beginning of the novel, readers are made aware of his incestuous desires. Julie’s responses, however, are far more ambiguous. When the three older siblings play a game in which Jack and Julie are “scientists examining a specimen from outer space” (11), they face each other across Sue’s naked body:

We rolled Sue on to her side and then on to her belly. We stroked her back and thighs with our fingernails. We looked into her mouth and between her legs with a torch and found the little flower made of flesh.  
 „Vot do you think of zis, Herr Doctor?“ Julie stroked it with a moistened finger and a small tremor ran along Sue’s bony spine. I watched closely. I moistened my finger and slid it over Julie’s.  
 „Nothing serious,“ she said at last, and closed the slit with her finger and thumb.  
 „But ve vill votch for further developments, ja?“ Sue begged us to go on. Julie and I looked at each other knowingly, knowing nothing.  
 „It’s Julie’s tum,“ I said.  
 „No,“ she said as always. „It’s your turn.“ Still on her back, Sue pleaded with us. I crossed the room, picked up Sue’s skirt and threw it at her.  
 „Out of the question,“ I said through an imaginary pipe. (12)

Initially, Julie seems to disregard Jack’s advances; although Jack longs to “examine [his] older sister”, the game “did not allow for that” (11). As the oldest sibling, Julie possesses the power to direct the game, and interrupts his attempt to explore her body by suggesting *he* become the object of investigation. If, as mentioned earlier, “vision is a typically male prerogative” (Brooks 88), then Jack’s refusal may be a consequence of his discomfort with

the vulnerability associated with the scrutiny of the girls' vision. The "imaginary pipe" and the phrase "Out of the question" are a reference to the way in which their father manipulatively uses his pipe to exasperate their mother, and Jack refuses Julie's proposal by adopting the gestures and expression of his father. Thus Jack and Julie's later usurping of their parents' roles is already foreshadowed in the first chapter. After the death of both parents, however, the line between „innocent“ childhood games and incest begins to disintegrate.

#### 4.4 Death and Dreaming

Mother, increasingly weakened by an unidentified illness, takes to bed, and "her bedroom [becomes] the centre of the house" (42). The family therefore becomes further insulated as the summer holiday begins, and it is Julie who finds the body of their mother on the last day of school:

I found Julie on the landing just outside Mother's bedroom and when she saw me she pulled the door shut and stooped to lock it. Trembling slightly, she stood facing me, the key clenched tightly in her fist.  
 „She's dead," Julie said evenly.  
 „What do you mean? How do you know?"  
 „She's been dying for months." Julie pushed past me on the stairs. „She didn't want you lot to know." I resented „you lot" immediately.  
 „I want to see," I said. „Give me that key." Julie shook her head.  
 „You'd better come down and talk before Tom and Sue get in." For a moment I thought of snatching the key, but I turned and, lightheaded, close to blasphemous laughter, I followed my sister down. (51 – 52)

As was the case with the death of his father, Jack is less distraught at the loss of a parent than concerned with his own involvement in the event; he resents being grouped with his younger siblings, and wants to see his mother's body for himself. His comment that he is "close to blasphemous laughter" (52) implies that he is simultaneously thrilled by the reality of her

death, or at least the prospect of seeing her corpse, and yet aware that this response is inappropriate. Williams refers to Jack's attitude as symptomatic of "his wall of egocentricity" (221), since it appears that he is disengaged not as a result of trauma but rather because he is self-involved. Williams argues, then, that "[f]or Jack the establishing of a personal identity as a mourner is more important than the mourning itself" (221). "For a moment", Jack recalls, "I perceived clearly the fact of her death, and my crying became dry and hard. But then I pictured myself as someone whose mother had just died and my crying was wet and easy again" (53). Although Jack's emotional detachment may be a result of his retrospective stance, or his uncertain position as a teenager unable to process his emotions, his distance (coupled with the images he employs) enhances the unreal or dreamlike quality of the narrative. Almost as an outsider looking in, he imagines how he and Julie appear as they cry in the kitchen:

Julie's hand was on my shoulder. As soon as I became aware of it I saw, as though through the kitchen window, the unmoving tableau we formed, sitter and stander, and I was unsure briefly which was me. (53)

Jack's vision of merging with Julie here evokes the flux affiliated with the feminine: he is engulfed by the imagined appearance of himself and his sister, and experiences, momentarily, the suspension of his own self-image. Moreover, as Jack, Julie and Sue later ascend the stairs to their mother's bedroom, he thinks of "Sue and [himself] as a married couple about to be shown a sinister hotel room" (54), an image which suggests the fluidity of familial roles and calls to mind the nuptial tradition of the „honeymoon“, threatened by malignant, possibly supernatural forces.

This atmosphere of unreality is maintained when Jack and Julie decide to bury their mother in a trunk in the cellar, and mix cement to fill the trunk; Jack remarks casually that "the whole process of what we were doing never crossed my mind. There was nothing odd

about mixing cement” (61). As they prepare to move the body, he describes the “greyish-blue light” that “gave everything in [Mother’s] room a flat, two-dimensional appearance” (62), and comments that he and Julie “seemed to be stepping into an old photograph of Mother’s bedroom” (62). When they spread out a sheet in which to carry the body, it “settled on the floor in such dreamy, slow motion” (63). The children’s isolation from society, their experience of the suspension of time and space, and the “dreamlike haze” (Kaplan para. 2) of the home provide a nebulous space in which the breakdown of social mores not only becomes possible, but also „natural“, unquestioned and functional. That there seems to Jack to be “nothing odd about mixing cement” (61) – and then burying their mother in it – exemplifies the fragility of social decorum and custom. Sgarlata argues, in this regard, that the children have “distorted concepts of right and wrong” (11), but the surreal atmosphere suggests not so much a lack of morality as a pragmatic enactment of an alternative to “traditionally inherited morals” (11).

#### **4.5 Role-Play and Rooms**

After their mother’s death, the children, orphaned and isolated, lapse into lethargy and, for the most part, idly spend the holiday in the house. Jack relinquishes all hygienic routines, and masturbates each morning and afternoon. Without parental supervision, he and his siblings are no longer obliged to abide by standard social practice. Once the centre of the family’s interaction, the kitchen becomes a “place of stench and a cloud of flies” (73), a room of filth and decay. Furthermore, although Tom is around six or seven years” old, he regresses to the behaviour of a toddler inside the house: he sleeps in a cot, sucks his thumb, speaks in a „baby voice“, and insists that Julie mother him. She, in turn, not only fulfils this role but also generally adopts a maternal authority in the home. As a foil to Jack, her boyfriend, Derek, is

appropriately clean and neat: he has a thick black moustache that “looked so perfect it could have been made of plastic” (92), and “hair all the same length, like a brush” (93). Juxtaposed against Jack’s filth and abjection, Derek epitomises masculine order and hygiene.

However, it is not only conventional practices of cleanliness that disintegrate in the weeks that follow Mother’s death, but also gendered binaries. Earlier in the novel, Tom is involved in a fight at school. He tells Sue that he is “tired of being a boy” (46) and wants to be a girl, because “you don’t get hit when you’re a girl” (47). Sue and Julie are delighted by the idea, whereas Jack is “horrified and fascinated”, since he believes that Tom would look “bloody idiotic” (47). Nevertheless, Julie defends Tom’s desire to „be a girl“:

„You think it’s humiliating to look like a girl, because you think it’s humiliating to *be* a girl.“

„It would be for Tom, to look like a girl.“ Julie took a deep breath and her voice dropped to a murmur.

„Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it’s okay to be a boy, for girls it’s like a promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly you believe that being a girl is degrading . . .“ (47 – 48)

Julie’s argument derives its force from the disparity between the performances of masculinity and femininity: for a girl to adopt a „masculine“ appearance is a „promotion“, because „maleness“ is taken for granted as normative within a patriarchal culture. Conversely, if „femaleness“ is negatively defined in relation to „maleness“, for a boy to assume a „feminine“ appearance is supposedly degrading, because it implies a loss of power and status. As Julie notes derisively, if Jack went to school in a skirt, he would be ridiculed, whereas she would look “*clever*” (48) in trousers. Jack’s defence against her argument about the double standards at work here reflects the normalisation of this disjuncture: he counters her logic by reaffirming the notion that it is humiliating for a boy to wear a dress with the inane non-sequitur, „because it is“ (48).

Tom remains a „boy“, in the meantime, presumably because conventional gender roles are reinforced and encouraged by Mother. After their mother's death, however, Jack returns home from a walk, and sees “a little girl” (76) with Julie and Sue in the living room:

Of course, as soon as the girl spoke I knew it was Tom . . . Tom was wearing an orange-coloured dress that looked familiar and somewhere they had found a wig. His hair was fair and thick with curls. How easy it was to be someone else. I crossed my arms and hugged myself. They are only clothes and a wig, I thought, it is Tom dressed up. But I was looking at another person, someone who could expect a life quite different from Tom's. I was excited and scared. (77)

Here Jack seems more open to, although apprehensive about, the notion of Tom's „becoming a girl“ than previously. He also recognises that, although cultural markers such as the appearance or performance of femininity through clothing, hair and gesture are arbitrary, they do intimate a “life quite different” (77) to that of a boy. In this scene, Jack no longer finds Tom's cross-dressing humiliating, but rather seems fascinated by the prospect that it is possible to be or become “someone else”. Moreover, he recounts how, following this episode, “Tom played in the street in Sue's skirt” quite often, and that “[n]one of the other children teased him like [he] thought they would. They did not even seem to notice” (86). This indicates not only the flexibility of gender performativity, but also the arbitrary nature of gender and sexual signifiers: the other children have not yet been socialised to believe that it is „inappropriate“ for Tom to wear a skirt, and thus do not take his dress as remiss.

In another conversation, the two brothers discuss Tom's games:

„We did dressing up and things.“  
 „You and Julie?“ Tom giggled.  
 „Me and Michael, stupid!“ Michael was Tom's friend from the tower blocks.  
 „You dressed up in Mum's clothes?“  
 „Sometimes we were Mummy and Daddy and sometimes we were Julie and you and sometimes we were Julie and Derek.“  
 „What did you do when you were me and Julie?“ Again my question meant nothing to Tom. „I mean, what did you *do*?“  
 „Just play,“ Tom said vaguely. (131)

Although Tom does not specify which of the roles each boy plays, it is safe to assume that he performs the roles of Julie and Mummy, as he has appropriated, and is comfortable with, feminine dress codes. Significantly too, here, the roles of Mummy and Julie, and Daddy, Derek and Jack, have become interchangeable to Tom and his friend.

In more general terms, the flexibility of roles and signifiers is further emphasised by Jack's observations regarding the rooms in the decaying prefabs in their neighbourhood, and one dwelling in particular which has been ravaged by fire:

Most houses were crammed with immovable objects in their proper places, and each object told you what to do – here you ate, here you slept, here you sat. But in this burned-out place there was no order, everything had gone . . . I was pleased by how irrelevant, how puny such objects appeared. (40)

He states that the people who had previously lived in the now dilapidated prefabs “took it for granted that [the organisation of their rooms] would always be so” (41), and then thinks “of [his] own room, of Julie's, [his] Mother's, all rooms that would one day collapse” (41). Here Jack realises that the functions of rooms are characterised by the objects assigned to them, and that this designation is essentially arbitrary. This is analogous to the ways in which both gender and familial roles are alterable. Just as there is no intrinsic value that defines a „bedroom“ or „living-room“, the supposedly “immovable objects” (40) that define our social roles and statuses are constructed and maintained by the symbolic, rather than manifested as innate characteristics. Just as all rooms and houses may one day disintegrate, the borders that delineate gender, „race“ and ethnicity, and family relationships are fragile and fluctuating.

#### **4.6 Consummation: Destroying the Cement**

By the end of the novel, after continuous criticism of his lack of hygiene from Sue, Julie and Derek, Jack has begun to bath again and has little desire to masturbate, claiming that he “did

not feel like it anyway” (109). With Julie as surrogate-mother, the children eventually clean the house and begin to imitate a more traditional family structure, though, aside from Derek’s visits, they are still isolated from larger society. Upon Jack’s change of appearance and behaviour, however, Julie no longer sides with her boyfriend: she mocks the latter’s aspiration to be their “big smart daddy” (133), as well as the fact that he still lives with his mother in what Angus Cochran terms a “protracted adolescent state” (393). Cochran cites, for example, Julie’s comment that Derek “still lives with his mum in this tiny house . . . She calls him Doodle and makes him wash his hands before tea” (134). Thus Derek, although ostensibly a figure of masculine authority, is treated as a juvenile by his mother and lacks power within his own household. This could also account for his wish to move into the children’s house and play the role of surrogate-father, thereby gaining the power and authority he desires.

In the final, climactic scene of the novel, Jack and Julie have assimilated and reconfigured the roles of their parents, and the consummation of their relationship seems inevitable. The surreal atmosphere of their domestic space allows for the culmination of their relationship: it provides a liminal space in which the stringent taboo against incest disintegrates entirely. John Perkins argues that incest is destructive, “because it results when one person seizes authoritative sexual dominance” (38). In *The Cement Garden*, however, Jack and Julie’s sexual union is entirely consensual and non-coercive. There is no hierarchy of dominance and submission: where Julie previously disregarded or, at least, deflected Jack’s sexual advances, she now invites and encourages him. On one particular evening, the two siblings begin “a long investigation of each other’s body” (136) which is reminiscent of the „scientist and specimen“ game played with Sue earlier in the novel. However, although this interlude may seem to represent Julie’s eventual compliance with Jack’s desires or fantasy – as articulated in the prior scene – he is not the „scientist“ examining Julie as object.

Rather, it is she who initiates their mutual exploration. And, despite being interrupted by a horrified Derek, they continue to explore and compare each other physically, measuring their “arms, legs, necks and tongues” (136). Jack notes that “none of these looked so alike as our belly buttons, the same fine slit in the whorl which was squashed to one side, the same pattern of creases in the hollow” (136). It is significant that their navels share a similitude, since this corporeal feature signals their common mother and the womb from which they both emerged. In a sense, then, both the Maternal and the Feminine are symbolically present as they consummate their desire. In the limbo of the bedroom, they are “weightless, tumbling through space with no sense of up or down” (135), and they are united:

She took a nipple between her fingers again and found my mouth. As I sucked and that same shudder ran through my sister’s body, I heard and felt a deep, regular pulse, a great, dull slow thudding which seemed to rise through the house and shake it. I fell back and Julie crouched forwards. We moved slowly in time to the sound till it seemed to be moving us, pushing us along. (137)

Twitchell claims that “the shock of consummated incest is so powerful that once the current has passed, only numb anticlimax can result” (175), and that “not once in English or American prose fiction in the nineteenth century does consummated incest ever extend beyond the act into a continuous story”, since the act is “so powerful that it stops protagonists . . . in their tracks” (174). It is thus appropriate that the dull thudding noise that coincides with Julie and Jack’s sexual climax is caused by Derek, who is destroying the cement that holds their mother’s corpse in the cellar. On the one hand, the sound indicates the imminent end of the reconfigured family: Derek is demolishing the literally and figuratively cemented secret that holds the family together. On the other hand, his uncovering of the corpse also signifies the return of the repressed and abject maternal body, which has accompanied Jack and Julie in their sexual union. The subversion and suspension of conventional family values reaches

its apex in their union, and the resultant anticlimax intimates the intrusion of „reality“ at the end of the novel.

In the dénouement, all four children are together in Julie's room, which then becomes another „centre“ to the house. Jack recounts how “we seemed to wake up and began to talk in whispers about Mum” (138). From outside, they hear “the sound of two or three cars pulling up”, and through a “chink in the curtain a revolving blue light made a spinning pattern on the wall” (138). It is fitting that their surreal limbo is disrupted by an outsider (Derek) and, upon „waking“, the children discover that the police are present: the latter are figures of law and order, and enforce the social boundaries of hegemony. However, Cochran notes that “Derek's attempt to usurp the role of the father and his eventual denunciation of the children to the police” are “acts heavy with irony”, as he is “merely playing the part of rebellious teenager and attempting to square this identity with conventional notions of patriarchy” (393).

Moreover, the reassertion of adult authority that occurs at the end of the novel suggests a “deeply ambiguous attitude toward the world of grown-ups” (393). Significantly, in this regard, McEwan disclosed in an interview that, in *The Cement Garden*, he wished to “write an urban *Lord of the Flies*” (qtd in Cochran 393). In both William Golding's novel and McEwan's, the intrusion of the “world of grown-ups” (Cochran 393) at the end is ambiguous because, while both groups of isolated children, left to their own devices, deviate from the paths of social convention and conformity, the peripheral/external world inhabited by adults is not necessarily any more ethical, organised or sympathetic than the children's reality. In *Lord of the Flies*, it is the „adult world“ that is responsible for the war and, therefore, the children's arrival on the island. In *The Cement Garden* it is the tabooed, incestuous impulses eschewed by adults that, ironically, unite the family as a functional unit.

As a perverted *Bildungsroman*, it is appropriate that no resolution is offered to *The Cement Garden*, as the novel concludes with Julie, Jack and Sue crowded round Tom's cot

before the police enter the confines of the house. Reminiscent of Mother kissing Jack's cheek earlier, the final line describes Julie bending down to kiss Tom: „There!“ she said, „wasn't that a lovely sleep“ (138), an expression which implies that, now that the children have „awoken“, the preceding events will seem to have passed as though in a dream. This „waking“ from the „dream“ of incest and familial subversion to the reality of social order may render the narrative obsolete, since it seemingly forecloses upon the children's behaviour as merely a temporary escape from the social aggregate and sanctioned behaviour: it suggests that „sanity“ will be restored. I believe, however, that the alternative configuration to conventional social and familial relationships which they have developed is here neither nullified nor endorsed, since what is thought of as permissible or impermissible has been dissolved and deconstructed within this reconfiguration.

In other words, *The Cement Garden* exemplifies the perverted *Bildungsroman* as, at the end of the novel, the protagonist's individual „growth“ is not accompanied by reintegration into a larger social milieu; rather, Jack's narrative of individuation is epitomised by isolation and the abandonment of socialised norms, concomitant on the reconfiguration of their family unit. Furthermore, the affect of this ending on the reader is similar to that of *Lord of the Flies*: due to the reader's immersion in the seclusion of *The Cement Garden*, the encroachment of the adult world is jarring in comparison to the dreamlike atmosphere of the home.

#### **4.7 Dream and Flux**

Like *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* reveals the tenuous nature of the traditional nuclear family, and exposes the provisionality of gender roles. The disintegration of familial and gendered divisions in both texts signals the ways in which social institutions may

establish and attempt to maintain rigid identities and relationships, but, ultimately, these notions of self and Other – and masculine and feminine, proper and improper – are as impermanent as the flux of a dream. This instability undermines the inculcated binaries and borders of dominant discourse. However, similar to the prohibition of murder, incest taboos exist to protect and preserve certain biological and social imperatives. The conflict between the necessity and the arbitrariness of tabooed acts or objects is echoed by the ambiguity of the children's games. The distinction between „normal“ or „healthy“ exploration of sexuality through play, and full-blown incest, is not always clearly demarcated, and may depend on various socially significant factors (the ages of and relationships between the participants, or the right to desire between consenting parties, for example). The contingency of the boundaries complicates any reading of the novel as „immoral“ or „perverse“, because it renders these latter labels moot. Williams argues that readers should not “imagine that McEwan's antithesis of the Romantic child is some kind of pathological monster”, and asserts that Jack is simply “an unexceptional teenager in a highly stressful situation for which he is in no way equipped to cope” (221). However, if anything characterises Jack and Julie's eventual transition to incest, it is not trauma or abuse and exploitation but mutual desire, underpinned by filial love.

Jack talks of dreams, daydreams and nightmares throughout the novel. Before his mother's death, he recounts a “bad dream” in which he sees a wooden box: it is “too dark to see inside”, yet he knows that there is a “small creature inside, kept captive against its will and stinking horribly” (27). This nightmare foreshadows the burial of their mother's corpse in the trunk and the consequent stench. After her death, he recalls another nightmare in which she chastises him for masturbating (95), as well as a dream-cum-memory of himself as a toddler on the beach with his parents and Julie (128 – 129). Significantly, he claims that, when he was four, he believed “it was [his] mother who devised the dreams [he] had at night”

(132) – an image which links unconscious oneiric desires to the figure of maternal authority.

The recurrence and prevalence of the dream motif, together with the descriptions of dreamlike atmosphere of limbo in the house, allow for an amorphous narrative landscape in which arbitrary distinctions (such as „normal“ versus „perverse“) can be deconstructed.

By exposing the contingency of established roles and boundaries, then, *The Cement Garden* calls into question the differences between sanctioned and unsanctioned familial relationships, as well as performances of sex and gender. Sgarlata comments that

While flouting social expectations, [McEwan] rarely offers answers or judgment explicitly, but rather presents the plots in such a way that one must closely examine the tension between personal expectations and responsibility. (11)

This tension extends beyond the taboo of incest, and pervades other relations and social bonds. The discrepancy between “expectations and responsibility” (11) – in particular public, socialised boundaries and private, personal responsibility – will be elucidated further in my analysis of Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, since the latter also presents a complex tension between the culpability of a „monstrous“ protagonist and the context from whence this monstrosity arises. As with *The Wasp Factory* and *The Cement Garden*, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* presents a subversion of gender binaries which renders these distinctions both ironic and arbitrary, but here through the macabre and perverted *Bildungsroman* of a rapist. The function of taboo in Welsh’s novel is, however, more complex, since further tension and ambiguity are created by the disjuncture between the prevalence of rape and violence in the text, and the taboo of talking or writing *about* this sexual violence.

## Chapter 5

### “Such Horror and Evil”: Rape and Sympathising with a Monster

#### in Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares*

“The possibility of rape shapes the space I inhabit, designating certain hours and places as dangerous to me while to men they remain open prospects. It makes me think twice as I walk to my car late in the night; it discouraged me from joining a male college friend as he spent two weeks of spring break living on the streets with homeless people. Because of the possibility of sexual violence, I did not invite a new male friend, later one of my best friends, to my room for coffee when I had only had one or two conversations with him. I was rapable, and therefore I had to be careful.”

– Ann Cahill (1)

When I first read Irvine Welsh’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995), I sobbed. A wave of nausea and fear passed through me at the climactic rape scene of the novel, and I had to put the book down. Embarrassed to have been so overwhelmed by print on paper, I repeated the mantra “It’s just a story” and resumed reading. Despite my desire to finish the novel, however, I realised that there is no such thing as *just* a story. This narrative, in particular, had interrupted my notion that I had control over my emotional responses to fiction, or that I could revoke my previous empathy for a fictional character – one in whom I had been invested for the duration of the reading experience – revealed to be a monster. Rereading the novel for this thesis, I believed that prior knowledge of this horrific scene would provide me with greater emotional and intellectual armour: an academic detachment to fortify me against the disturbing affective power of this story. Again, however, my assumptions were undermined, and I oscillated between terror and compassion as I continued to explore *Marabou Stork Nightmares*.

Welsh's fiction generally provokes controversy. Since his inception into the literary world with his explosive first novel, *Trainspotting* (1993), his work has prompted a range of both outraged and adulatory responses from critics and readers alike. *Marabou Stork Nightmares* is his second full-length novel, and presents the reader with a multi-layered narrative woven together by the unconventional typographical layout of the pages. Like *Trainspotting*, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* also features Welsh's trademark linguistic technique of writing in the Scottish vernacular, which forces unacquainted readers to assimilate the Scottish accent and dialect as they read. Though this strategy asserts the specifically Scottish working-class context of the protagonists, the cultural and geographical specificity of the novel, however, does not limit its themes to Scottish inner-city housing schemes. Welsh explains the creative impetus that led to the novel:

After the success of *Trainspotting* and *The Acid House*, I wrote a crap, pretentious novel because i'd [sic] become a big-headed arsehole who thought I could photocopy my gas bill two hundred times and it would sell millions to great acclaim. My publisher, Robin Robertson, sat me down and told me that I was writing a pile of shite – my words, not his, he was more diplomatic. He told me to 'write about what you care about' and I sat down and wrote *Marabou* in five weeks. ("Comments" para. 2)

Welsh acknowledges the influence of the Zero Tolerance campaign (a media-driven campaign tackling violence against women and children, launched in 1992 in Edinburgh) on his conception of the novel. Nevertheless, he has been accused of "naked commercial exploitation" (Whyte 283) due to the graphic descriptions of violence, abuse and rape *Marabou Stork Nightmares* contains, and I discuss the contentious nature of such explicit content later in this chapter. Initially, however, I examine the relationship between form and content in the novel, and discuss how its textual structure informs the reading experience. Following this, I focus on the animalistic imagery, and consider the controversial issue of the narrator's culpability for his crimes.

## 5.1 Form and Narrative Vacillation

The novel introduces three narrative „voices“, in each of which Roy Strang is both narrator and focaliser, but they reference different temporal periods and psychological states of mind. In the present, he lies comatose in a hospital bed after a failed suicide attempt, but can hear the voices of family, doctors and nurses around him. From within this state, Roy both recounts his life story – the second narrative strand – and mentally embarks upon a surreal, fantastical African safari in which he hunts marabou storks – the third. The convergence and disjuncture of these three narratives are rendered by Welsh’s unconventional use of punctuation and font:

DEEPER. Things get dis

up - - - - -We’re just  
coming going to take  
start your temperature,  
I Roy. Have you got the

I lose control when they interfere - - - - and bedpan, Nurse Norton? Number

Twos now Roy, time for Number Twos.

- Yes, he’s looking brighter this morning, isn’t he Nurse Devine? You’re brighter this morning, Roy lovey.

Aye right ye are, take your fuckin hand oot ma fuckin erse.

DEEPER

DEEPER - - - - -

(3)

This extract – from the opening passage of the novel – introduces Roy as a consciousness trapped within an inert body. The interspersed voice of Roy with the mundane medical register, as well as the belittling and infantile language adopted by the nurses, indicates that he has been rendered powerless and at the mercy of the hospital staff. His only escape is to go “DEEPER” (3) into his safari fantasy. The continuous textual fragmentation and assemblage

not only signals the oscillation between and suturing of narrative threads but, as Marina MacKay argues,

Welsh's graphic disruptions are used as a way of showing all the novel's seams, of illustrating its patchwork construction and, by extension, the patchwork identity of a Scottish self that is divided by tradition and by multiple linguistic identities. (279)

Roy indeed exemplifies this fragmented, mosaic existence in his identity as well as his mode of narration. As a working-class Scottish „schemie“, he is peripheral to the hegemony of the British middle-classes: he is one of “those who are economically unproductive . . . [and] situated geographically on the peripheries of a city dominated by Capitalist economics” (Borthwick para. 5). He is also, however, a white male who performs a violent masculine stereotype in a patriarchal culture: initially he attacks and harasses other children at school, and later he becomes a football hooligan and eventually a rapist. Furthermore, though Roy's present and retrospective narratives make use of Scottish dialect, his fantasy is narrated within a “distinctively English linguistic haven in a decidedly English Africa” (MacKay 278) – an upper-class, colonial one, at that. The story thus fluctuates between these extremes of class and culture, language and identity. Effectively, Roy is made liminal by his position *between* classifications: he is neither entirely complicit with the structures of power, nor fully removed from them.

Similarly, his narration is fraught with the tension between body and mind. The immediacy of his body in the present provides a constant interruption of his retrospective and fantasy narratives. For example, whilst discussing marabou storks with his imaginary safari companion, Sandy Jamieson, Roy struggles to escape the doctors' concurrent invasive scrutiny of his body:

– What's your opinion of Jonny Stork , Sandy old man? I asked him.

– They are evil incarnate, Roy. They have to be stamped out for the good of the game, Sandy replied, ashen-faced.

– You don't have any concerns about us not being up to the task do you, Sandy? I enquired.

– Time will tell, he said grimly, time will tell.

- - - - up up up - - - - time will tell.

What the fuck is this?

– But I think he's going to come out of it. There's definitely increased signs of brain activity. I wouldn't be surprised if he could hear us. Take a look at this, Dr Goss...

FUCK OFF!

The cunt wrenches open my eyelids and shines a torch into them. Its beam shoots right down into my darkened lair and I skip into the shadows to avoid its light.

Too quick for these cunts. (56 – 57)

These kinds of visceral interruptions situate Roy somewhere between body and mind.

Between the strata of his consciousness, he attempts to evade not only the doctors and his family, but the reality of both his past and current circumstances. However, as the narrative strands merge and intersect it becomes increasingly difficult for Roy to control the direction of his stories. Whilst he wishes to hunt the “despicable beasts” (12) in his fabricated version of southern Africa, he cannot help but slip into semi-consciousness, or „go deeper“ into the recesses of his memories. The “darkened lair” (57) of his mind is significant: images from his memories invade his fantasy safari, revealing the ways in which the separate narratives interfuse with one another. The textual vacillation between narrative strands thus signals not only Roy's fragmented identity and state of mind, but also the possibility that he is an unreliable or, at least, confused narrator, and the effect of this oscillation is to convey a sense of freneticism, indecision and instability. Moreover, the notion that he himself is like a cornered animal frantically attempting to evade his hunters, contributes to the lexicon of animal imagery which informs the themes and motifs of the novel.

## 5.2 Power and Violence: Brutal Nature and Tribalism

As a child, Roy is an avid nature and wildlife enthusiast, and he is particularly interested in birds, equating their ability to fly with freedom (155). MacKay refers to “the protagonist’s violent sink-estate world” as “zoological”, insofar as “human beings and animals are placed on the same moral level” (270). Roy comments, for example, that the neighbourhood children called him “Dumbo Strang” (35) because of his protuberant ears, and he describes the housing scheme in which he grew up as an “ugly rabbit hutch” (19). There he and the other children caught bees, and created “a concentration camp, a tiny Scottish housing scheme for bees” (22). The analogy between concentration camps and the housing schemes is highlighted by the description of the “little prison cells” (22) the children built for the bees, an image which juxtaposes the supposed innocence of childhood – for example, the ice-lolly sticks used as the prison doors – with the more sinister inclination to trap and torture small creatures (reminiscent of Frank’s exploits in *The Wasp Factory*). From the outset of the novel, then, Welsh complicates Roy’s position: he is an innocent child, but also displays a monstrous potential for violence and destruction, and this ambiguity is supported by the animalistic imagery. Although this analogy may seem ironic or inappropriate – the natural survival methods and behaviours of animals are not akin to humanity’s capacity for violence – Welsh’s use of animal imagery enhances Roy’s *self*-justification.

The similarity between humans and animals is further emphasised in his adult life, and particularly in his descriptions of football hooliganism. Roy claims that, on one occasion, “[he] was snarling like a demented animal, wanting only to get back and waste the cunt on the ground for good” (134). Welsh renders this similitude more explicit by juxtaposing the pack instinct and territoriality of the storks with that of Roy’s gang:

Flamingos tolerate and may even repel from one to five Marabous, but six or more, always six or more, cause mass desertion. Nature is so specific in its arithmetic.

*When it came to swedgin, we always broke up intae groups ay between six and ten. At the Underground and Ibrox we came upon the beasts. (171)*

In the brief chapter entitled “The Flamingo Massacres”, from which the above extract is drawn, Roy’s narration alternates between the safari narrative and memories of gang violence. The effect is akin to the commentary of a nature documentary, and suggests that brutality is natural, if not innate. After his account of terrorising a “*Weedgie*” pub (172), for example, Roy sees “another couple of large Storks . . . devouring the unrecognisable corpse of an animal. It looked like the body of a woman” (173), an image which foreshadows the gang-rape that is described in the following chapter, ironically entitled “Respect”.

Throughout the retrospective narrative, Roy recounts the childhood of abuse to which he was subjected, as well as the violence which he has inflicted upon others. On the one hand, he was bullied at school and at home, forced by his father to fight his half-brother, and was sexually molested by his Uncle Gordon during the family’s brief immigration to South Africa. On the other hand, however, he stabbed a child at school, sexually assaulted a girl in his class, and forced an effeminate boy to “wank [him] off” (109) at knife-point. Roy’s narrative locates him, then, both as victim and perpetrator, human and monstrous.

Christopher Whyte’s discussion of the “hard man”, a significant trope in contemporary Scottish fiction, is relevant here. As a “dysfunctional urban male”, the “hard man”

comes from a working class or at most a lower middle-class background, is often represented as unemployed, and is the victim of injustice and discrimination on a class basis. His status as victim and loser makes him the focus of a surprising but persistent pathos, a pathos that oddly “feminises” a figure who wants to be so resolutely and absolutely masculine. (274)

Due to this „feminised“ position, the “hard man” is obsessed with an excessive performance of masculinity which is “rooted in vanity and therefore narcissistic” (275). Whilst Roy is certainly not vain in the sense that he deems himself handsome in conventional terms, he is constantly concerned with his physical appearance, which he perceives as unappealing and awkward. His insecurity and „effeminate“ social status fuel his desire to dominate others and motivate much of his violence. He relates the story of Caroline Carson, for example, who once flicked the back of his ear in class: “It wis sair, bit it wis mair the humiliation. I was always sensitive about my ears” (106). He followed her home after school, and confronted her with a Swiss army knife, “purchased from Boston“’s of Leith Walk” (106). He explains that, after assaulting her:

I enjoyed the look in her eyes. Enjoyed having the knife at her throat. Enjoyed the power. That was it wi the power, I remembered thinking, you just had to take it. When you took it, you had to hold onto it. That was all there was to it. (106)

Roy learns as a child that, in the working-class schemes, “violence holds currency in the social sphere” (Borthwick para. 7). However, as Whyte indicates, in a “neatly gendered world”, where vanity is typically associated with femininity, the “hard man”’s narcissistic display is rendered absurd: “in the very act of asserting his masculinity, [he] renders it performative, a show which requires cosmetic preparation” (276). It is thus appropriate that Roy’s choice of weapon is a knife, a recurring symbol of the phallic. Furthermore, he notes in a later passage that he also purchased his “*sharpened carpet tile knife*” at “*Boston’s of Leith Walk*” (172). The fact that, on both occasions, he mentions the pretentious title of the store where the two knives were bought is significant, as it associates the „prop“ of his masculine performance with the economic system that ensures class-division, and consequently his marginalisation and feminisation. Welsh thus conflates the binaries of masculine and

feminine, hegemonic and marginalised, and complicates Roy's status as monstrous rapist.

Carole Jones comments in this regard that, in order to

contextualise and explain Roy's pathologically violent identity, Welsh makes him a victim of his environment and social position, of the imposition of gender roles in this context which valorises an aggressively dominant "hard man" masculinity. (para. 18)

This contextualisation and the use of animal imagery are nevertheless contentious, as they suggest that Roy's violence is somehow legitimate or at least understandable, if not altogether „natural“ or to be condoned.

By the climactic rape scene of the novel, Roy has deliberately positioned himself as a victim of his social and economic circumstances. At a party, he and his friends lure Kirsty – a young woman who is familiar with the group – into a bedroom where she is gang-raped, also at knife-point. Roy prefaces the scene by saying that he “sensed” her sniggering behind his back at his “inverted face” and “ears like a taxi wi the fuckin doors open”, and that he was “scared of Lexo”, who gave him a look he “never suspected a human being could be capable of” (182). He has earlier characterised Lexo as the animalistic and inhuman „alpha male“ of their hooligan gang and, in Roy's account of the rape, Lexo is the instigator and leader, whereas he himself “lay on [Kirsty] and faked it, thrusting rhythmically” (184). In his description, he then reverts to the imagery of the television nature programme:

The expression on her face was . . . I remember seeing a documentary about some animal being eaten from behind while its face seemed to register disbelief, fear, and self-hate at its own impotence. (183)

Although he claims that he “wanted to save her” (185), however, Roy is entirely complicit in this act and, according to Whyte, Welsh makes no “attempt to mitigate the effect of the gang rape which spreads across some eleven pages” (282). The scene has an intensely visceral

impact: aside from the graphically violent content, it is also rendered abject and grotesque by Roy's descriptions of Kirsty. He says that "fear had twisted and distorted her face", that she "looked repulsive already" (183), and compares her to "one of the female prisoners in concentration camp films", as her body, previously "lithe, athletic and curvy", now looks "bent, twisted and scrawny" (190). These physical descriptions of Kirsty exemplify the body in abject crisis. Roy realises, however, that they have not only violated her body:

I realised what we had done, what we had taken. Her beauty was little to do with her looks, the physical attractiveness of her. It was to do with the way she moved, the way she carried herself. It was her confidence, her pride, her vivacity, her lack of fear, her attitude. It was something even more fundamental and less superficial than those things. It was her self, or her sense of it. (190)

In *Rethinking Rape* (2001), Cahill examines feminist theories and approaches to the phenomenon of rape. She argues that rape should be understood as a complex and varied experience of embodied subjectivity: it is not *about* power or *about* sex, but rather entails the intricate interplay of both power and sexuality. According to Cahill, "[p]recisely because the assault is visited upon the victim's body, it will have profound effects on the victim's personhood and being" (130). She explains that:

Because this assault is bodily, it is sexed; and because it is sexed, the scope of its harms includes the personhood of the victim. The dominance inherent in an act of rape, by which the assailant forces his incarnate will on the victim, is a hierarchical structure by whose unity and coherence the victim's difference from the assailant – her ontological, ethical, personal distinctness – is stamped out, erased, annihilated. (192 – 193)

It must be noted that Cahill is generalising when she makes use of the pronouns „she/her“ and „he/his“ when discussing the rape „victim“ and „perpetrator“ respectively. Whilst she acknowledges that men are also raped, and that women are potentially rapists, she justifies her use of these pronouns here by claiming that "the overwhelming majority of rapists are

male” and the “overwhelming majority of rape victims are female” (192). Nonetheless, her arguments in the earlier citation are directly related to Roy’s comment that they have damaged Kirsty’s “self, or sense of it” (190), as well as her body. It is also appropriate that Welsh returns to images drawn from the concentration camp: the systematic degradation of the body becomes a means to refute the Other’s humanity, to reduce a person to an object, and to destroy his or her subjectivity. Thus, in the act, Kirsty is denied her personal identity; the gang-rape is violence committed against her personhood. Significantly, then, Kirsty is referred to as Miss X for most of the story, and remains unnamed until a brief chapter – “Miss X’s Confessions” – toward the end of the novel. The elision of her actual identity reinforces the denial of her subjectivity – that is, until she (re)asserts and (re)inserts herself in Roy’s narrative strand in the present.

Welsh, however, extends the assault upon Kirsty beyond the immediate violation of her bodily and personal integrity in the rape scene, and implicates the judicial system in this process. Susan Estrich examines the gender bias implicit in rape trial court proceedings:

while the focus is on the female victim, the judgment of her actions is entirely male . . . [the issue has become] the appropriateness of the woman's behavior, according to male standards of appropriate female behavior. (1094)

Women rape victims are therefore held accountable for the horrific actions perpetrated against them. Thus, during the court case, Roy notes that it “became like [Kirsty] was the one on trial; her past, her sexuality, her behaviour” (208), since both the lawyer representing the gang and the judge echo this ascription of female culpability. Whilst their lawyer obviously does not believe that they are innocent (206), he nevertheless opportunistically exploits their relative advantage, as, in his words, the judge is of the opinion that “[f]emale sexuality is . . . by nature . . . masochistic, hence rape cannot logistically take place since it directly encounters the argument that all women want it anyway” (207). Though their lawyer does not

intimate whether or not he too subscribes to this notion, his intention to give Kirsty a “damn good shafting” (207) in the courtroom suggests that he is equally culpable for her degradation and dehumanisation, and that the legal processes of the rape trial are as traumatic as the rape itself, since another power struggle ensues over the sexualised feminine body.

In the courtroom, moreover, the rapists themselves assimilate the supposedly feminised position of victimisation and, in turn, hold Kirsty responsible. Their account of the gang-rape becomes a perversion of the truth, an account in which *they* were the ones degraded and denied their individuality. Roy recounts his participation at the trial:

It just wouldn’t come out, then I got into full flow and ranted accusingly, – I didn’t want to. I thought the whole thing was just . . . sick. It was horrible. If it had been just me and her together, but it was like she wanted everyone. I could’ve been anybody. (211)

Furthermore, the other gang members also profess this version of *their own* abasement: Ozzy claims that the “whole thing” was “degrading for all of [them]” (211), whilst Roy remarks that Lexo “was right into his role as the victim” (212). The belief that female sexuality is by nature masochistic and voracious, concomitant on the men positioning themselves as victims, makes Kirsty culpable by virtue of her sexuality. Whilst this blurring of victim and victimiser is questionable, given the self-serving nature of this strategy, MacKay argues that the “treatment of Kirsty’s rape, alongside the ugly predatory images attached to the pack behaviour of underclass men, provides Welsh’s strongest critique to date of the tribalism of male behaviour” (272). The notion of tribalism, here, is significant, as it indicates the dynamics within a (male) group or community, characterised by a strong group loyalty. In an interview with Dave Welch, Welsh discusses the implications of this group mentality:

There are a lot of great things about male culture, but there’s also the slightly twisted, fascistic part when you get a bunch of guys together. They do turn into nutsos sometimes, the whole group intoxication thing. (para. 45)

*Marabou Stork Nightmares* presents not simply the “slightly twisted” but rather the potentially extreme perversity of this masculine tribalism, a perversity reinforced by the comparison of the gang to the marabou storks of Roy’s imagination: the latter are represented as ruthless carnivores that terrorise the beautiful flamingos, yet it is only by acting as a group that they are able to maintain their power and dominance. In the account of Kirsty’s rape and its aftermath, the male gang or „tribe“ is not restricted to Roy and his friends/accomplices: it extends to include the lawyer and judge in the court trial, the police whose “hearts weren’t in it” (192) and who dawdled in laying formal charges against the gang, and the larger social context in which female sexuality is deemed culpable for male transgression. Thus Welsh compounds the distinction between private and public responsibility, critiquing not only the actions of the individual members or the gang as a whole, but also the culture and society from which they emanate.

### 5.3 Context and Culpability

Jones maintains that “claiming victimhood in a society that valorises victims is a way of claiming authority” (para. 7), and that “part of the shock value” of *Marabou Stork Nightmares* relies on “Welsh’s engagement” with congruent “narratives of oppression” (para. 16). In this respect, Roy notes the similarities between South Africa under apartheid and the working-class schemes in Scotland:

Edinburgh to me represented serfdom . . . it was exactly the same situation as Johannesburg; the only difference was that the Kaffirs were white and called schemies or draftpaks. Back in Edinburgh, we would be Kaffirs; condemned to live out our lives in townships like Muirhouse or So-Wester-Hailes-To or Niddrie, self-contained camps with fuck all in them, miles fae the toon. (80)

Although the two situations are not interchangeable, and the analogy “has certainly incensed many critical readers” (Jones para. 18), Roy recognises that marginalisation is institutionalised as well as contextual: “Edinburgh had the same politics as Johannesburg: it had the same politics as any city. Only we were on the other side” (80). The Strang family are privileged as „whites“ in South Africa, but Othered as working-class „schemies“ in Scotland. In both instances, the hierarchy of the political economy is constructed and maintained by institutions of physical exclusion (architecture and location), as well as social marginalisation (education, employment and class). For example, in South Africa, Roy begins to excel in school, whereas his academic potential is neglected in Scotland, a disparity which intimates the impact of his environment upon him. By providing Roy’s brutality with a context – a “background that fosters the worst excesses of a pathological masculinity” (Jones para. 17) – the novel appears to complicate the notion of culpability. I wish to argue, however, that the style of narration further problematises this notion, and offers another interpretation of the novel.

After the trial, Roy is confronted by the slogans of the Zero Tolerance campaign, which are framed and isolated from the rest of the text, and are “set against the essentially subjective and self-justificatory narrative” (MacKay 280) of Roy himself. The posters “graphically dominate” (280) the fourth and final part of the novel (entitled “The Paths of Self-Deliverance”), and interrupt Roy’s narrative with assertions such as “**NO MAN HAS THE RIGHT**”, “**MALE ABUSE OF POWER IS A CRIME**”, and “**WHEN SHE SAYS NO SHE MEANS NO**” (199). The sentiments expressed by the campaign infiltrate his guilty conscience until he suffers a mental breakdown, and attempts suicide by suffocation with a plastic bag, after which he enters a “blissful void” until he „wakes up“ in his fantasy safari world (256). Towards the end of the novel, however, Roy struggles to escape to or remain

„hidden“ in the depths of unconsciousness – his “darkened lair” (57). The typographic fragmentation becomes increasingly exaggerated as the three narratives rift and collide, until Roy can no longer selectively suppress certain memories and, in the final chapters, is exposed as an unreliable narrator – a revelation which retroactively calls into question his account of his life story and his status as a victim. Initially, for example, he recalls that he “felt a sense of power, a sense of attractiveness, and a sense of affirmation” whilst being molested by his uncle, and that he “used that power by extorting gifts” (72). He recreates himself as the „powerful“ and manipulative agent in the relationship, and describes Uncle Gordon as a “drooling tit” (72). Later, however, when Roy describes the sensation of suffocating with a plastic bag over his head, he recalls “GORDON WITHDRAWING HIS BLOOD-STAINED COCK FROM A FRIGHTENED YOUNG BOY BENT OVER A WORKBENCH” (255). Furthermore, in the ultimate chapter, “Facing the Stork”, Kirsty reveals that Roy was not a complicit if unwilling participant in the gang-rape, but the instigator and leader. These two separate revelations have an equal but contradictory impact. On the one hand, Roy is exposed as the victim of numerous rapes executed by a trusted family member, and deserves the reader’s sympathy as a sufferer of sexual abuse. On the other hand, however, he is also exposed as a grotesque and ruthless rapist himself, and warrants our disgust and horror. This emotional ambivalence is both powerful and unsettling, and does not allow the reader an easy or comfortable position from which to judge the novel’s protagonist. Moreover, Roy’s motivations for attempting suicide provide further insight, albeit ambiguous, into his awareness of his own monstrosity and vulnerability:

I was dying. I knew it, I felt it. I wasn’t a psychopath; I was just a fool and a coward. I had opened up my emotions and I couldn’t go back into self-denial, into that lower form of existence, but I couldn’t go forward until I’d settled my debt . . . This wasn’t about opting out. This was about the only resolution that made sense. Death was the way forward. (254)

It is thus appropriate that, in the final chapter, “Facing the Stork”, Roy eventually accepts Kirsty’s desire for vengeance and welcomes his inevitable death at her hands rather than his own.

In this chapter, Kirsty takes her revenge by visiting the immobile Roy in hospital, cutting off his eyelids and penis, and inserting the latter into his mouth. In an inversion of the rape scene, *he* now becomes the figure of abjection, inert and mutilated:

Roy’s body [here] is passive and signifies the fragility of the boundaries of the embodied masculine subject, its insecure containment, its permeability. He is the disgraced symbol of leaky, soft and spoiled manhood. (Jones para. 23)

Nevertheless, this is problematic when viewed from the perspective of typical assumptions of sexuality and power. Kirsty, previously feminine and powerless, is masculinised by her use of violence – particularly significant here is her use of the (phallic) knife – and thus becomes monstrous like Roy. She even says to him, “I want you to see what you’ve made me, because you’ve made me just like you” (259). This complicates her position, as she is transformed from victim to perpetrator – the converse of Roy and his gang’s strategic positioning during the trial – in the final scene of the novel. For some readers, then, Kirsty’s revenge becomes more prominent than the gang-rape itself, during this *dénouement*. Jones, for example, argues that the novel “focuses on the effect the rape has on [Roy] rather than the woman he has raped” (para. 25), and hence engenders empathy (or at least sympathy) for him in his mutilated, literally emasculated state. However, Roy is still a monstrous figure and, indeed, wishes to be punished for his crimes.

If the marabou storks of his imaginary safari are an emblem of monstrosity, the detail that emerges towards the end of the novel – that Roy, as a child, was not nicknamed “Dumbo Strang”, but rather “Captain Beaky” (264), due to his large nose – is significant: marabou storks are characterised by protuberant pouches below large beaks, featherless heads, and are,

to most, extremely unattractive creatures. Roy's surreal and fantastical adventure to hunt the marabou storks is thus a symbolic journey which entails confronting and attempting to destroy the most abject and horrific part of himself. The storks do not represent the freedom he associates with other birds, but rather are "evil and nasty", and follow the stench of "diseased, decaying carrion" (145). They are creatures of "such horror and evil" (37) that they have haunted Roy's nightmares since childhood. As he comes to terms with his willing participation and dominant role in the gang-rape, he imagines examining himself in a mirror and recalls a pertinent slogan from the Zero Tolerance campaign:

I see an image in the mirror, the image of the Marabou Stork. It's on the flamingo . . . tearing into it, ripping it to shreds, but the flamingo's still alive, I see its dulled eyes . . . THERE IS NEVER AN EXCUSE. (262)

As a predator and scavenger, therefore, the marabou stork of Roy's imagination is the manifestation of his own violence and self-loathing. Moreover, as his control over his story begins to diminish, his narrative approximates stream of consciousness:

who do you fuckin hate Roy Strang you hate schemies Kaffirs poofs Weedgies  
Japs snobby cunts jambos scarfers English cunts women only you don't do you  
Roy Strang the only cunt you really hate is Roy Strang. (262)

In this passage, Welsh draws a direct connection between Roy's insecurity and self-hatred and the violence he inflicts upon others, a connection which suggests that his abusive over-performance of masculinity and sadism are, ironically, a form of projected masochism.

In the final scene of the novel, however, he embraces the supposed passivity and masochism of feminine sexuality. As Kirsty mutilates his body, he reports that:

She's looking into my eyes, my lidless eyes and we see each other now. She's beautiful. Thank God. Thank God she's got it back. What we took. I'm trying to smile. I've got this severed cock in my mouth and I'm trying to smile. (264)

Again, it is ironic that he takes pleasure from her destruction of his body and subjectivity – the same denial of personhood the gang inflicted upon her – as he welcomes the destruction of the conventional masculinity and control he has tried to maintain throughout his life. What Welsh suggests, then, is that the boundaries that denote dominance and submission, sadism and masochism, masculinity and femininity are not only unstable, but bound to collapse. By performing the stereotype of hyper-masculinity, Roy reveals his vulnerability (typically associated with femininity), and renders these labels absurdly arbitrary. In this disintegration of gendered binaries, Roy not only finds *jouissance* and release, but also derives pleasure from the recognition that Kirsty has re-asserted her self-hood, despite the fact that this is at the cost of his own. He states:

I understand her.  
I understand her hurt, her pain, how it all just has to come out. It just goes round and round, the hurt. It takes an exceptionally strong person to just say: no more. It takes a weak one to just keep it all to themselves, let it tear them apart without hurting anyone else.  
I'm not an exceptionally strong person.  
Nor is Kirsty.  
We're just ordinary and this is shite. (264)

Roy finally identifies with Kirsty, or „understands“ her, once their roles are reversed. Yet it is ironic (and perhaps tragic) that he only realises the possibility for alternative modes of existence in his dying moments, and he laments, “*But there's another world Kirsty, it disnae huv tae be this wey*” (260).

The novel ends as the narrative strands converge – past meets present, reality meets fantasy – and Roy dies. He “spread[s] his large black wings” and is “smoking [his] own penis

like a limp, wet cigar” as Sandy Jamieson turns the gun on him: “Jamieson”s facing me and he”s pointing the gun and I hear it going off and it”s all just one big **Z**” (264). Previously, “Z” has signified the constant reminders of the Zero Tolerance campaign that penetrate Roy”s psyche. Nonetheless, as Kirsty removes his catheter tube, she notes that the “posters were prescriptive, they were talking about a world as it should be rather than as it is” (260). Whilst the slogans denoted by the “Z” may haunt Roy, they do not guarantee an end to sexual violence and abuse, and they do not change his status as a monstrous rapist. The large, bold “**Z**” at the end, however, marks the finality of both Roy”s life and his narrative. The conflation of his narrative and the campaign material here is ambiguous and possibly problematic. It seems to suggest that for Roy, at least, death is the only appropriate end to his narrative as he can no longer harm anyone; as mentioned above, he himself acknowledges that death is “the only resolution that made sense” (254). Similarly to *The Wasp Factory* and *The Cement Garden*, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* epitomises the perverted *Bildungsroman* insofar as Roy”s personal revelation and individual growth does not coincide with inclusion into society, but rather, and in this case, especially, the most extreme removal from it. Moreover, his apparent repentance renders him human again (even if only partially, or ambiguously) at the end of the novel.

I do not believe, however, that Welsh wishes to make a martyr of his protagonist, or to endorse the notion that the penalty for rape should be castration or death. Rather, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* suggests that the roles of monster and human, or perpetrator and victim, are as fluctuating and complex as the binaries of sex and gender. Welsh does not offer any simple solutions to the issues of sexual violence and exploitation he addresses. Part of the discomfort of reading this novel is the way in which Roy”s violence is not entirely „explained away” by either nature or his environment. As in *Trainspotting*, Welsh”s characters here cannot escape the systems and institutions that marginalise them, despite their awareness of these systems.

This may have metatextual implications, too, since they are, of course, characters „trapped“ within the fictional world of the novel. However, I propose that this metafictional element is as much a reflection of „reality“ as of the „unreal“ world of fiction. Like Welsh’s characters, we are all located within a cultural and temporal context, and awareness of this context does not equate to freedom from the borders that define our perceptions and interactions: the boundaries of gender, „race“, religion and class (for example) may be socially determined or constructed, but they are also self-regulated and maintained *by us*. Similarly, Roy’s own experiences of childhood abuse do not prevent him from inflicting violence upon others; instead, he is as much a part of the hierarchical system of power and abuse as his Uncle Gordon, and he perpetuates the same brutality and exploitation. He regulates and maintains the systematic violence that was imposed upon him.

Roy is thus both a victim and a perpetrator, both a vulnerable human and a merciless monster. The abjection and concomitant *jouissance* he experiences at the culmination of the novel – suggested by his acceptance of Kirsty’s revenge and his pleasure in the return of her beautiful self – indicate a fluidity of boundaries. As Jones argues, then,

Such a representation points to the possibility of an area of negotiation that dominant masculinity is willing to enter into, subtle changes it is willing to undertake within shifting social relations. (para. 24)

This possibility of negotiation and change relies on an awareness that supposedly rigid binaries (and the bodies upon which they are imposed) are permeable and flexible. Roy’s exaggerated performance of violent masculinity is a function of his having been „feminised“ by his working-class status in Scotland. However, as the Zero Tolerance posters remind the reader, “THERE IS NEVER AN EXCUSE” (262). The novel suggests that individuals need to be held accountable for their actions – Roy is certainly not innocent – and yet we need to acknowledge that society creates its own monsters through systematic dehumanisation and

degradation. Roy's acknowledgement that "*it disnae huv tae be this wey*" (260) provides a pertinent counter to the quotidian acceptance of sexual violence and abuse, and implicates readers in the process of bringing about change.

#### 5.4 Taboo or Not Taboo?

In Chapters Three and Four, I discussed the taboos of murder and incest in *The Wasp Factory* and *The Cement Garden*, respectively, and, as mentioned in Chapter One, these are regarded as the primary taboos in most societies, since they maintain a symbolic status quo and have severe practical consequences for a society. Despite their status as taboo and illegal, however, murder and incest are still ubiquitous. Similarly, rape is all too prevalent and – in a social economy of rigid gender binaries – the ways in which the media often portray acts of rape and sexual violence further contribute to a representational regime that aligns femaleness or femininity with weakness and innate „rapability“, and maleness or masculinity with dominance and the innate ability *to* rape. Unlike murder, however, rape and incest are often treated as „sensitive“ or inappropriate topics due to the sexual component of these transgressions and the larger social taboos that still surround talking about sex, desire and sexuality in general. Nonetheless, social awareness of the issue of rape and sexual violence is growing and, as Nicola Gavey maintains in *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* (2005), the last thirty years have seen

a marked transformation in Western representations of rape – in psychology, the law, and the media. Rape is in many ways still tolerated in our society, but no longer without fierce contestation on multiple fronts. (17)

In spite of this “fierce contestation”, however, rape and sexual violence continue to take place with alarming frequency in contemporary society. Furthermore, it appears that the acts of

speaking or writing *about* rape, on the one hand, are as transgressive as sexual violence, on the other. Two possible reasons for this implicit discrepancy are the diverse interpretations of what exactly *defines* rape, and the individual and personal nature of the experience.

In order to discuss rape, one must discern the often problematic and sometimes vague distinctions drawn between rape, harassment and assault, and the significance accorded sex, gender and sexuality in these definitions. Feminists such as Adrienne Rich, Catharine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, for example, draw links between “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 1762) and rape, and suggest that, insofar as women are overtly or covertly coerced into heterosexuality by patriarchal society, they are all raped whenever they engage in heterosexual sex, regardless of consent (Rich 1769). However, this definition is too broad; it annihilates the possibility of female agency, and “overestimates the influence and coherence of the patriarchal construction of heterosexuality” (Cahill 37). Other approaches to rape aim to define it as primarily an act of violence and relegate its sexual significance. This delineation is also incomplete: “When the sex-specific elements of rape are denied, when it is perceived as merely another kind of violence, the patriarchal aspects of rape are lost” (Cahill 33). Furthermore, one must also consider the inclusion of acts such as sodomy, as well as the question of whether women can rape men – or whether these kinds of violation should be categorised as „assault“.

Cahill situates rape as an “embodied experience” (109), and notes that this typically, but not exclusively, involves a male perpetrator and a female „victim“. Due to her emphasis on embodied subjectivity, she understands rape not only as an assault on the body, but also as a denial of intersubjectivity, agency and personhood. The personal and individual aspect of rape, then, makes it additionally difficult to address. Cahill acknowledges the unique significance the experience of rape may have for the „victim“, precisely because of the singularity of embodied subjectivity:

Embodiment is precisely the site of the possibility and necessity of difference; as such, it constitutes both that which is most shared by subjects qua subjects and that which differentiates subjects from each other. Precisely because all subjects are embodied, all subjects are embodied *differently*. (113)

Hence, when attempting to write or talk about rape, we risk over-generalising and possibly trivialising the subject's embodied experience. However, Cahill also suggests another motivation for the taboo entailed in addressing the issue of rape: "It is rape's *sexuality* that is socially interpreted as embarrassing, shameful, and inappropriate as a topic of civil conversation" (119). Despite the increasing prominence of anti-rape campaigns, then, the taboo that surrounds talking about rape and sexual violence continues to render them discomfiting and shameful subject matter.

In "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape" (2002), Carine Mardorossian discusses what she views as problematic feminist approaches to rape. She claims that "[s]exual violence has become the taboo subject of feminist theory today . . . Rape has become academia's undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue" (743). She criticises the prevailing discourse for its focus on the interiority of the „victim“, as "[h]egemonic culture typically represents women as dominated by inner and complicated compulsions that require personalized self-help rather than political transformation" (758). Furthermore, she asserts that:

For the last three decades, representations and discussions of rape and domestic violence have almost exclusively concentrated on the suffering of victims and have comparatively all but ignored the few studies of the behaviorial and psychological traits of perpetrators. (753)

Whilst the subjectivity and interiority of the „victim“ (or „survivor“) are important, Mardorossian suggests that the attention paid to victimhood elides the culpability of the rapist as well as that of the larger social, cultural, historical and economic contexts from which the

phenomenon of rape arises. She argues that we “need a feminist politics that addresses the psychological and individual effects of victimization without, however, locating the solution to victimization in individual or psychological narratives” (772).

*Marabou Stork Nightmares*, then, provides a necessary and valuable means of approaching the problematic, personal and „uncivil“ topic of rape and sexual violence. The novel offers a complex examination of the interiority of the rapist (as opposed to his „victim“), as well an interrogation of the society from which he originates. Whilst Whyte considers Welsh’s treatment of Kirsty’s rape as “naked commercial exploitation” (283), other critics agree that the “honesty and realism of Welsh’s work [is] a welcome addition to contemporary literature” (Brown para. 13). The inclusion of the Zero Tolerance campaign materials supports the authenticity of the story, and offers a counter to the fantastical narrative thread. By focalising the narrative through Roy Strang, the novel does not attempt to provide what might ultimately be a superficial or trivialising „insight“ into Kirsty’s experience. As a result, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* confronts readers with the ambiguous and fragmented interiority of its monstrous and abject protagonist, and complicates the ways in which we respond to his role as rapist. This ambiguity is further accentuated by the variegated form and typography of the novel, the use of analepsis and prolepsis, the perversion of the *Bildungsroman*, and the unreliability of the narrator. And, although he is culpable for his crimes, Roy is also a product of his socio-economic climate. It is ironic and tragic that Roy realises the possibility of an alternative existence too late, in his dying moments, and that Kirsty must become monstrous herself in order to regain the „sense of self“ that was taken from her.

In conclusion, Welsh does not propose any simple solutions to the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation, but rather exposes the very complexity of attempting to approach these issues. To purport to offer an „answer“ or explanation would be naïve, clichéd

and possibly offensive. Rather, the possible value of this contentious piece of fiction lies in its representation of the taboo subject of rape, and the ways in which it renders conventional binaries – masculine and feminine, hegemonic and marginalised, victim and perpetrator – arbitrary and fluctuating constructs. Though the affective dimension of the text is profoundly unsettling, it challenges neat preconceptions and suggests that we re-think the social structures that enable the perpetuation of sexual violence. The novel thus exemplifies the notion of Kristevan revolt, and the latter’s “potential for making gaps, rupturing, renewing” (*Revolt, She Said* 85).

## Conclusion

“Passing through the memories of a thousand years, a fiction without scientific objective but attentive to religious imagination, it is within literature that I finally saw [abjection] carrying, with its horror, its full power into effect.”

– Julia Kristeva (*Powers* 207)

*The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* are all novels that, by encouraging readers to engage imaginatively with uncanny and abject narrators and their transgressions of taboo, simultaneously shock and amuse. Frank, Jack and Roy confront readers with the arbitrariness of social boundaries and, in doing so, remind them of the innate fragility of these borders. The affect of this confrontation is, I have proposed, similar to the individual revolt outlined by Kristeva. This private revolt – the perpetual questioning and rethinking of hegemonic norms and conventions – prevents societal values from becoming stagnant and oppressive. Whilst art – from music and performance to “literary or pictorial creation” (Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* 107) – provides a space for this confrontation with, and questioning of, inculcated social mores, the novel in particular elicits “self-communion” (Brooks 29), a solitary communion which is akin to Kristeva’s notion of individual revolt and may engender self-investigation. In “placing a greater demand on [ourselves], and treating others with more generosity” (Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* 113), we are prompted to examine our own potential for monstrosity and abjection. The capacity of literature or art to provoke this effect is not guaranteed, nor is it a homogenous experience. Indeed, many novels (and other forms of art) do not challenge or destabilise the status quo, and have a soporific effect on the reader. However, the novels I have examined epitomise this potential for solitary communion and individual revolt. They invoke the indeterminacy associated with abjection, taboo and monstrosity, and their ambiguity undermines conventional binary classifications of pure and impure, or human and monster, thereby prompting the reader to question the

authority of these oppositions, which are located in the realm of language and the symbolic.

In this concluding chapter, I wish to elucidate the value of this ambiguity with particular reference to the perverted *Bildungsroman*.

## 6.1 Disruption and Affirmation

In the final chapter of *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva posits that all literature is “probably a version of the apocalypse” and is rooted on the “fragile border” where identities “do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogenous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject” (207). In this liminal space, “one’s own and clean self” (*Powers* 65) is temporarily suspended, and this disruption of subjectivity may engender a purging of emotion. Whilst the cathartic value of literature is significant, I am more concerned here with the way in which the disturbance or suspension of unified subjectivity is subsequently succeeded by the return of the „proper“ self. *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* epitomise the former interruption by revealing that the hegemonic mores that create and maintain subjectivity are arbitrary, fluctuating and inculcated. However, this recognition is fleeting, and the „clean self“ must be re-established: as speaking beings, we cannot live in a permanent state of semiotic abjection and flux. This return implies an affirmation of the symbolic order, if not an acknowledgement of its necessity. Indeed, Kristeva notes that borders, rules and authority are “indispensible” (*Revolt, She Said* 109): there can be no language, culture, art – or, indeed, revolt – without the symbolic order.

As demonstrated by the close textual analysis in Chapters Three to Five, the novels selected exemplify the ambiguity of works of abjection. Whilst these texts confront the reader with the incoherence of boundaries and the tenuousness of the symbolic order, they do not necessarily encourage the reader to embrace the loss of *all* social limits. Part of the ambiguity

of the three novels is the tension they manifest between the subversion of normative sex and gender expectations, and the abject, transgressive disruption of social law attributed to murder, rape and incest. On the one hand, the reader is confronted with the permeability of the sexed and gendered body. Frank, Jack and Roy provoke a complex re-assessment of the arbitrary distinctions of sex and gender: as narrators they effectively call into question the dualism of masculinity and femininity, and reveal the performativity of gender and sexuality, as well as the underlying monstrosity and taboo presupposed by this „nomality“. On the other hand, however, the protagonists remain culpable for their transgressions of the social prohibitions against murder, incest and rape. All three novels end on a note of ambiguity, and offer neither moral judgement nor „answers“, but they do not necessarily condone the actions of their narrators. Although an intimation of order is restored at the end of the novels, the narrators“ transgressions remain ambiguous and unexplained. Thus, like the monsters of horror fiction, these protagonists“ monstrosity – their capacity for transgression and abjection – threatens to return, “always at the verge of irruption” (Cohen 20). Due to this ambiguity, the novels allow us to engage with our simultaneous desire and repulsion as we confront the temporary dissolution of rules and borders.

In the foreword to *Revolt, She Said*, Phillipe Petit claims that there is “no absolute contradiction between the affirmation of desire and the imposition of a limit” (10). In Kristevan terms, because society is not a “closed totality” (Petit 10), we are free to scrutinise our norms and taboos, and literature provides an apposite space for re-imagining social boundaries. The novels I have analysed demonstrate the simultaneous “affirmation of desire” and the “imposition of a limit”. Whilst we may derive carnivalesque pleasure from the humorous narration and explosive transgressions of the novels“ protagonists, in reality we do not necessarily condone murder, incest and rape – or desire to commit these acts. Thus, although some taboos and limits are necessary for social order, others warrant critical

attention as we continue to question our definitions and understandings of prohibitions and transgressions: in order to evaluate a society's values and morality, we must examine those people, acts and objects regarded as perverse and monstrous. In a society premised on heteronormativity and the naturalisation of two sexes and genders, sexual/gendered polymorphousness – whether it is regarded as taboo, deviant or simply „distasteful“ – threatens to disrupt the foundations of what we consider „normal“ and „appropriate“. The three novels analysed in this thesis present the opportunity to challenge and rethink sexed and gendered identities, and their interrogation of normative sex and gender expectations is assisted by the form of the perverted *Bildungsroman*.

## 6.2 The Perversion of the *Bildungsroman*

In addition to the various taboos explored in *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the most significant similarity between these texts is their utilisation of the perverted *Bildungsroman*. In each case, the narrators' transgressions of taboo, accompanied by the subversion of sex and gender norms, follow the trajectory of the „novel of formation“ but undermine any ultimate *telos* to this formation. It is my proposition that the perverted *Bildungsroman* not only amplifies the fluidity and indeterminacy of identity, as the form itself resists the values typically associated with the traditional *Bildungsroman*, but also constitutes an interrogation of conventional gender roles.

To reiterate, in Chapter Two I discussed definitions of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and its already ambiguous literary status. On the one hand, it may provide insight into complex protagonists and their emotional, psychological and social growth: on the other, it is concerned with the notion of progress, and tends to promote the Enlightenment ideal of “human perfectibility” (Fraiman ix). The novels I have analysed, however, further augment

the ambiguity of the form by perverting these effects. As first-person narratives, they grant intimate access to the interiority and subjectivity of their uncanny protagonists. For the reader these protagonists may be Othered, or seem monstrous and perverse, by virtue of their transgressions, yet remain familiar, endearing or even sympathetic. As retrospective narratives, the texts mark the „progress“ of their protagonists through various crises, and each novel contains an epiphanic moment followed by a brief dénouement. In *The Wasp Factory*, Frank’s „true“ sex is revealed concomitant with Eric’s destructive return to the island, followed by the reconciliation of the two siblings. *The Cement Garden* features the climactic consummation of Jack and Julie’s desire whilst Derek demolishes the cement to uncover the corpse of their mother in the basement, then the arrival of the police to restore law and order. In *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Roy is revealed as the brutal leader of the gang-rape just as Kirsty prepares to exact her murderous revenge by castrating him and amputating his eyelids, and he then dies acknowledging his guilt.

Whilst some order is re-established at the conclusion of all three novels, it is not the dualistic order of symbolic law, and the characters are not fully integrated into society – as in the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Frank and Eric inhabit the liminal space of the beach, whilst Jack, Julie and their siblings are suspended in the surreal dreamlike instability of the house: in both cases, the future of these characters is unclear. Roy, however, is subjected to the most extreme removal from self and society – death – and yet he regards this an „appropriate“ end to his narrative. Moreover, the most powerful implication of all three novels is that their narrators’ behaviour cannot be fully attributed either to nature/biology or culture/socialisation. This ambiguity, compounded with the flexibility of gender, is exemplified by the perverted *Bildungsroman*. Whilst the novels do present an epiphanic moment of realisation for their narrators, this is not the teleological „end-point“ of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Rather, the revelatory climaxes of *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement*

*Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* present the human subject as a „work-in-progress“ and located on a continuum. By confronting the reader with the permeability of boundaries epitomised by abjection, they suggest that the supposedly unified, autonomous subject is always in a state of flux, and that socially-prescribed *teloi* are, by definition, unstable.

### 6.3 Irony

In all three novels, subtle irony is utilised to draw attention to the tenuous and arbitrary nature of conventional sex and gender roles. Frank’s „feminine disability“ is the catalyst for her excessive performance of masculinity. Similarly, as a working-class Scotsman peripheral to British capitalist hegemony, Roy’s hooliganism, violence and self-styled machismo are a means of compensating for his own marginalised and „effeminate“ position. Given the opportunity to usurp the role of the father in the family, Jack does not perpetuate patriarchal prohibitions – rather, he and Julie are provided with the circumstances in which to act upon their mutual desire for each other. Whilst these „corrupted“ performances of masculinity and femininity do not provide a totalising explanation of the narrators’ transgressions, the irony of their gender and familial subversions provides a significant juxtaposition, as the disjuncture between gendered expectations and the twisted performance of these expectations signals the fragility of inculcated sex and gender mores. Nonetheless, the sexual monstrosity of the protagonists is concomitant on their infringement of taboos and their exposure of the underlying monstrosity that underpins heteronormativity. If we return to the notion of the monster as a „warning“, two possible interpretations arise. On the one hand, the novels may signal the dangers of contravening taboos: to disregard the rules of society is to risk sexual grotesqueness. On the other hand, however, they also posit a perverse corollary: the performance of normative sexuality is as excessive, abject and monstrous as that which is

„abnormal“ or perverse. This reinforces the notion that the binaries of human and monster, pure and impure, normal and abnormal, and masculine and feminine, are not static, diametrically opposed forces, but rather mutually constitutive categories defined in relation to each other in a constantly fluctuating web of meaning.

#### 6.4 Subversion and Possibility

The value of *The Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* is thus that they undermine or subvert the binaries of sex and gender, and prompt us to consider the epistemological uncertainty of society's taboos, transgressions and values. Instead of perpetuating stereotypes, these novels call into question the definitions of gender, monstrosity and taboo, and impel us to engage critically with these often fragile distinctions.

Simultaneously, they also signal alternatives to the conventions of society (particularly gender conventions), and invite us to imagine other possibilities. The private self-communion or individual interrogation associated with reading fiction provides a space in which to challenge and rethink public, societal structures. The potential of this private experience to impact on our social interactions “isn't necessarily communitarian”, but rather “responds to the need for social ties, which, along with the acknowledgement of prohibitions, is a condition of psychic life” (Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* 40). The novels analysed in this thesis are but three possible examples of this tension between the need for authoritarian structures, and the need to undermine, subvert and question these structures. By exposing the reader to taboo and perversion, these texts of abjection place us on the threshold between fascination and disgust, and our social conventions and expectations may be both disrupted and affirmed. When confronted with our own perversity – our capacity to transgress taboos and become „monstrous“ – we are reminded of the instability and permeability of social boundaries. *The*

*Wasp Factory*, *The Cement Garden* and *Marabou Stork Nightmares* also elicit our sympathy for characters who are Other, and gesture towards alternative modes of existence and embodiment. The significance of these texts, finally, lies not only in their cathartic value, but also in their ability to affect our emotions and prompt us to critique and challenge hegemonic power and its economy of rigid binaries. In particular, these novels subvert the notions of monstrous sexuality, and gesture towards the possibility of alternative social structures that resist dichotomous distinctions of sex and gender.

## Bibliography

- Abrams, M H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999.
- “abject”. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010.
- “affect”. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010.
- Bagley, Christopher. “Incest Behaviour and Incest Taboo.” *Social Problems* 16.1 (Spring 1969): 505-519.
- Banks, Iain. “Out of this World: Iain Banks on how practising with SF led to *The Wasp Factory*.” *The Guardian* 12 July 2008.  
Accessed 23 September 2009.  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jul/12/saturdayreviewsfeatures.guardianreview5>
- . *The Wasp Factory*. 1985. London: Abacus, 1990.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. 1973. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” 1936. *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 1166-1186.
- Bernstein, Michael André. “Introduction.” *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. 3-33.
- Bocock, Robert. *Hegemony*. Sussex: Ellis Horwood, 1986.
- Bordo, Susan. “Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.” 1993. *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 2362-2376.
- Borthwick, David. “From *Grey Granite* to Urban Grit: A Revolution in Perspectives.” The Association for Scottish Literature Studies Conference, University of Aberdeen, 10 June 2001.  
Accessed 9 August 2008.  
[www.arts.gla.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Urban\\_Grit](http://www.arts.gla.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Urban_Grit)
- Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. London: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Brown, Tanya. “Irvine Welsh”. *Irvine Welsh*. 1 (2005).  
Accessed 9 February 2010.  
<http://0search.ebscohost.com.wam.seals.ac.za/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=15316629&site=ehost-live>

- Cahill, Ann J. *Rethinking Rape*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001.
- Carroll, David. "Narrative, Heterogeneity, and the Question of the Political: Bakhtin and Lyotard." *The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History*. Ed. Murray Krieger. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987. 69-106.
- Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *Stately Bodies: Literature, Philosophy and the Question of Gender*. Trans. Robert de Luca and Deanna Shemek. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2002.
- Childs, Peter. *Contemporary Novelists: British fiction since 1970*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Cochran, Angus R. B. "Ian McEwan (1948 - )." *British Writers: Supplement IV*. Ed. George Stade and Carol Howard. New York: Scribner's, 1996. 389-408.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 3-25.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- De Coppet, Daniel. *Understanding Rituals*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols*. London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1970.
- Dufresne, Todd. "Introduction." *Killing Freud: Twentieth Century Culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis*. London: Continuum, 2003. vii-xi.
- Elkins, James. *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- English, James F. "Introduction: British Fiction in a Global Frame." *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. 1-18.
- Estrich, Susan. "Rape." *The Yale Law Journal* 95.6 (May 1986): 1087-1184.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough" *The Sciences* 33 (March/April 1993): 20-25.  
Accessed 24 October 2009.  
[www.frank.mtsu.edu/~phollowa/5sexes.html](http://www.frank.mtsu.edu/~phollowa/5sexes.html)
- "The Five Sexes, Revisited" *Sciences* 40 (July/August 2000): 18-23.  
Accessed 26 October 2009.  
[www.neiu.edu/~lsfuller/5sexesrevisted.html](http://www.neiu.edu/~lsfuller/5sexesrevisted.html)
- Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*.

- New York: Columbia UP, 1993.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. 1913. Trans. A. A. Brill. London: Routledge, 1919.
- , "The Uncanny." *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 929-952.
- Galens, David. "Bildungsroman." *Literary Movements for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements*. Ed. David Galens. Detroit: Gale, 2002. 1-13.
- Gavey, Nicola. *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Liminal States and Transformations" *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Stuart Morgan and Frances Morris. London: Tate Gallery, 1995. 28-30.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Harré, Rom. *Physical Being: A Theory for a Corporeal Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Heard, Catherine. "The Persistence of Monsters." *Beauty and the Abject: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Leslie Boldt-Irons, Corrado Federici and Ernesto Virgulti. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 29-39.
- Hebdige, Dick. "From Culture to Hegemony." *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 2448-2457.
- Helgesson, Stefan. "Bildungsroman." *Writing in Crisis: Ethics and History in Gordimer, Ndebele and Coetzee*. Scottsville: U of KwaZulu-Natal P, 2004. 79-85.
- Hirsch Gottfried, Marianne and David H. Miles. "Defining *Bildungsroman* as a Genre." *PMLA* 91.1 (January 1976): 122-123.
- Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Jones, Carole. "White Men on Their Backs – From Objection to Abjection: The Representation of the White Male as Victim in William McIlvanney's *Docherty* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*" *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 1 (August 2006). Accessed 9 August 2008. [www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue1/jones](http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue1/jones)
- Joseph, Jonathan. *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*. 2002. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Kaplan, Fred. "The Moods and Scenes of Ian McEwan" *The Boston Globe* 2 (March 1999). Accessed 28 January 2009.

[www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-8526174](http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-8526174)

- Kerschen, Lois. "Bildungsroman." *Literary Movements for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements*. Ed. David Galens. Detroit: Gale, 2002. 10-13.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*. 1997. Trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.
- , "Of Word and Flesh: An Interview with Julia Kristeva by Charles Penwarden." *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Stuart Morgan and Frances Morris. London: Tate Gallery, 1995. 21-27.
- , *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. 1980. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- , *Revolt, She Said*. Trans. Brian O'Keefe. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.
- Lazzaro-Weis, Carol. "The Female *Bildungsroman*: Calling it into Question." *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 2.1 (1990): 16-34.
- Lea, Daniel, and Berthold Schoene. "Masculinity in Transition: An Introduction." *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-War and Contemporary British Literature*. Ed. Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene. New York: Rodopi, 2003. 7-18.
- Levine, Michael. "The Subject is Taboo." *Modern Language Notes* 101.5 (December 1986): 977-1002.
- Longhurst, Derek. "Introduction." *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*. Ed. Derek Longhurst. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- MacGillivray, Alan. "The Worlds of Iain Banks." *Laverock* 2 (1996): 22-27. Accessed 9 August 2008.  
[www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Laverock-Iain\\_Banks](http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Laverock-Iain_Banks)
- MacKay, Marina. "Marabou Stork Nightmares: Irvine Welsh's Anthropological Vision." *National Identities* 5.3 (2003): 269-281.
- Mardorossian, Carine. "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape." *Signs* 27.3 (Spring 2002): 743-775.
- McEwan, Ian. *The Cement Garden*. 1978. London: Vintage, 2006.
- McGinn, Colin. *Ethics, Evil and Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Moi, Toril, ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- Nagel, Thomas. "Sexual Perversion." *Moral Problems: A Collection of Philosophical Essays*. Ed. James Rachels. New York: Harper and Row, 1975.

- Neu, Jerome. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*. Ed. Jerome Neu. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991: 1-7.
- Nisbet, Robert A. *The Social Bond*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1970.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- , "The Literary Imagination in Public Life." *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*. Ed. Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman and David Parker. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 223-246.
- Oliver, Kelly. "Kristeva." *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*. Ed. Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 599-606.
- , "Kristeva, Julia." *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswith. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997. Accessed 2 February 2010.  
[www.taalfilosofie.nl/bestanden/hopkins\\_kristeva.pdf](http://www.taalfilosofie.nl/bestanden/hopkins_kristeva.pdf)
- , ed. *The Portable Kristeva*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Olivier, Bert. "Nature as „Abject“, Critical Psychology and „Revolt“: The Pertinence of Kristeva." *South African Journal of Psychology* 37. 3 (2007): 443-469.
- Perkins, John. *The Forbidden Self: Symbolic Incest and the Journey Within*. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- "pervert". *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010.
- Petit, Phillipe. "Foreword." *Revolt, She Said*. Trans. Brian O'Keefe. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.
- Punday, Daniel. *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 1762-1780.
- Roudinesco, Élisabeth. *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion*. 2007. Trans. David Macey. Cambridge: Polity, 2009.
- Russo, Mary J. "Introduction." *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Schoene-Harwood, Berthold. "Dams Burst: Devolving Gender in Iain Banks" *The Wasp Factory*. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 30.1 (January 1999): 131-148.
- Schroeder, William R. "Kristeva." *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*. Malden:

Blackwell, 2005.

Sgarlata, Emily. "Desire versus Conscience: Development of the Id and the Ego in Ian McEwan's Fiction." M.A. Thesis. Baylor University. Dept. of English. August 2009. Accessed 11 November 2009.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2104/5423>

Shildrick, Magrit. *Embodying the Monster*. London: SAGE, 2002.

Spain, David. "Taboo or Not Taboo: Is That the Question?" *Ethos* 16.3 (September 1988): 285-301.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allan White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Steiner, Franz. *Taboo*. London: Cohen and West, 1956.

Swales, Martin. "Bildungsroman." *Literary Movements for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements*. Detroit: Gale, 2002. 13-23.

Tew, Philip. "Contemporary Britishness: Who, What, Why and When?" *The Contemporary British Novel*. London: Continuum, 2004. 28-58.

Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen, 1972.

Toy, Crawford H. "Taboo and Morality." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20 (1899): 151-156.

Twitchell, James B. *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

"uncanny". *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010.

Valens, Keja. "Obvious and Ordinary: Desire Between Girls in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*." *Frontiers* 25.2 (2004): 123-149.

Weich, Dave. "An Interview with Irvine Welsh by Dave Weich." Accessed 14 May 2008.  
[www.powells.com/authors/welsh.html](http://www.powells.com/authors/welsh.html)

Welsh, Irvine. *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. 1995. London: Vintage, 2004.

-----, "Marabou Stork Nightmares – Comments." *The Official Website of Irvine Welsh*. Accessed 29 January 2009.  
[www.irvinewelsh.net/books.aspx?bkid=14&subid=1](http://www.irvinewelsh.net/books.aspx?bkid=14&subid=1)

Welton, Donn. "Affectivity, Eros and the Body." *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*. Ed. Donn Welton. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 181-206.

- Whyte, Christopher. "Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34.3 (1998): 274–285.
- Williams, Christopher. "Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* and the Tradition of the Child/Adolescent as „I-Narrator“." Accessed 17 January 2010.  
[www.ianmcewan.com/bib/articles/williams.pdf](http://www.ianmcewan.com/bib/articles/williams.pdf)
- Wolfreys, Julian, Ruth Robbins and Kenneth Womack. "Hegemony." *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002.
- World Health Organisation. "Violence Against Women: Rape and Sexual Assault." July 1997.  
Accessed 29 January 2010.  
[www.who.int/gender/violence/en/v6.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/en/v6.pdf)