

Anti-heroes and Androgynes: Gothic Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Men's Fiction

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In his discussion of 'Angry Young Masculinities', Berthold Schoene argues that:

Naturally, questions of sexuality and gender make up a crucial part of one's identity. But whereas women and gays — keen to reach a fulfilling definition of their place in society — can never avoid a confrontation with the strai(gh)tjacket of traditional gender roles, heterosexual men have so far managed to do without such a confrontation which would involve a profound reconsideration of all one's attitudes towards sexuality and gender.(1)

Schoene's comments reflect recent sociological discourse concerning masculinity. As the indefinable and unknown norm(2), heterosexual male identity is represented by 'the signifiers of "normal" sexuality [which] maintain a kind of hegemonic power by remaining invisible.'(3) Yet, by employing the Gothic mode, a number of Scottish male writers present the confrontation with literary representations of conventional heterosexual roles that Schoene calls for, indeed providing the potential for a reconsideration of sexuality and gender, and in turn widening the scope of Scottish fiction. Two of the major contemporary Scottish exponents of the Gothic — Iain Banks and Christopher Whyte — exploit the distinctive Gothic tropes of excess, transgression and anxiety concerning the female, as referred to as central concerns by a number of critics of the Gothic (4), in their often ironic and consistently interrogative portrayals of and confrontations with heterosexual male identities. Scottish fiction has previously only rarely been examined through the lens of the Gothic, with nationality and the construction of a tradition wholly distinct from that of English literature taking precedence. This paper argues for Banks's and Whyte's insertion into the lengthy and highly regarded tradition of Gothic fiction that addresses the nature of masculinity, whilst maintaining a recognition of their place in the Scottish literary canon.

Masculinity

These writers deal with masculinity not as the normative referent against which all other identities are evaluated, but as a problematic gender construct. Gothic, like the emerging post-feminist field of men's studies in sociology, is the site 'where the scripts of the heterosexual matrix and normative masculinity are being interrogated and rewritten.'(5) Sociologists have also noted a recent 'crisis of masculinity' in the West (6) where, post-war and post-feminism there exists an identifiable 'weakening of masculine potency.' Gothic is often interpreted as a compensatory mode, a response to just such historical stimuli, and 'theorised as an instrumental genre, re-emerging cyclically at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises.'(7) Through their use of the Gothic, Banks and Whyte do not so much attempt to negotiate the current anxieties surrounding masculinity, as confront them bluntly and remorselessly, depicting heteronormativity as grotesque and monstrous through exaggeration and illustrating the subversive potential of threats to that conventional masculine identity in the form of transgressive androgynous, hermaphroditic and homosexual figures or threatening abject females; in short, anything identifiably 'other'. This article will argue these points with specific reference to Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and *Excession* (1996) and Whyte's *The Warlock of Strathearn* (1997) and 'Stifelio' (2001)(8), although similar concerns are evident throughout their work.

With reference to literary representations, literary critic as well as creative writer Whyte argues that heterosexual masculinity ‘is the unknown which subsists in a space from which the known has been eliminated. It is originary, axiomatic and indefinable’, and that ‘the only speakable forms of heterosexuality are the perverse ones.’(9) The texts to be discussed support this premise, rendering male heterosexuality visible through perversity and excess. Indeed, the Gothic denotes a general and consistent concern with perversion and taboo, and with ‘the unspeakable’, which according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is ‘one of the most distinctive of Gothic tropes’, allowing for the discussion of ‘things that are naturalistically difficult to talk about.’(10) Yet the texts all elaborate upon this notion of visibility through perversity by suggesting that due to its inherently superior and conventionally more powerful position, straight male identity is consequentially receptive to depravity and sordidness. As Lord Acton famously stated, ‘power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.’(11) The texts abnormalise heteronormativity by presenting Gothic masculinities, both excessive and transgressive, from the monstrous anti-hero to the binary-eluding androgyne, thus undermining the hegemonic power of the male by destabilising traditionally the most stable of identities.

The Gothic

Yet what exactly is meant by the term ‘Gothic’ proves considerably more elusive than the highly visible and locatable, monstrous and mutable masculinities presented in these texts. Definitions of the Gothic, particularly in a post-diffusion-of-media contemporary context extending from ‘high’ literature to graphic novel to cinema to computer game, are myriad and consistently lengthy (‘Gothic Fiction’ receives a six-page entry in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*)(12), and often evasively conclude with the growing recognition that there is no such thing as ‘*the Gothic*.’(13) Ambiguity, ambivalence and a concern with boundaries are habitually listed as Gothic traits. Yet these obscure and protean qualities fail to delineate a coherent and autonomous genre. Hence, for the purposes of this paper, the term ‘Gothic’ applies to a mode, a certain approach to specific problems and anxieties, a connecting thread woven throughout literature from many genres and traditions.(14) This also gives rise to the title of the paper: ‘Gothic’ is used to refer to the masculinities portrayed within the texts rather than to the texts themselves, concomitant with the increasing difficulty in identifying fiction as generally and wholly Gothic. Certain relevant features of this mode — such as the ‘unspeakable’ — can, however, be identified. Glennis Byron and David Punter note a prevalent concern in the Gothic with ‘the unbinding of coherent sexual identities.’(15) Early on in the history of Gothic criticism, Leslie Fiedler stated that ‘the Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness’ (16), while Angela Carter similarly, and more recently, argued that:

Gothicism grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane [...] Characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality to become symbols, ideals, passion. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. It retains a singular moral function — that of provoking unease.(17)

This is precisely the achievement of Banks’s and Whyte’s differing portrayals of masculine identity: conventions are exaggerated to the hyperbolic point of grotesquerie and the evocation of man as monstrous becomes a way of assailing clichés, unbinding coherent identities and exposing as absurd existing stereotypical power structures. Carter accurately locates the Gothic ‘beyond reality’. In his discussion of *Sexuality*, Joseph Bristow observes ‘the persistent sexual inequality that remains highly

visible in the West', (18) and indeed, rather than realistically reflecting their social context these writers hyperbolise and present reality as perverse in their fiction, amplifying and intensifying to expose these representations of persisting gender structures to Schoene's 'profound reconsideration', and even outright scrutiny.

Male Gothic

The difficulty in tracing distinctive and uniform Gothic features in contemporary fiction, however, should not imply the absence of any continuity with the so-called 'original' Gothic of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the rough time frame denoting when the Gothic was identifiable as a coherent literary genre (although even here there is a degree of debate.) The phrase 'Male Gothic' has been retrospectively coined to classify those original Gothic texts dealing with similar anxieties surrounding the problematic portrayal of masculinity, the patriarchal family and the threatening female, such as the first self-proclaimed 'Gothic novel', Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In addition Beckford's *Vathek* (1787) and Lewis's notorious *The Monk* (1796) would fall into this category. Centering around a rebellious male protagonist who absents himself from society rather than conform, Male Gothic has been defined psychoanalytically as 'the clash between the ego and the super-ego refigured as conflict between the questing self and the ego-ideals of church, state, or "nature"'. (19) Anne Williams discusses specifically how

The hero/villain is an isolated overreacher punished for his hubris, his violation of the Law [...] even the survivors of the Male Gothic plot [...] emerge from the concluding apocalyptic orgy of violence with lowered expectations, permanently marked by what they have suffered. (20)

Indeed, in all the texts the central protagonists, isolated overreachers every one, clash with varying kinds of 'Law': Frank in *The Wasp Factory* encounters the Law of the Father but manages to elude the law of the land; Genar-Hofoen refuses to follow the conventions and protocol of his society, 'the Culture', in *Excession*; the warlock of Strathearn collides repeatedly with the iron law of the Church in seventeenth-century Scotland; and the narrator in 'Stifelio' clashes with the unspoken codes of his society.

Moreover, violence and psychological damage abound in these texts, reminiscent of the sensationalist 'horror', that source of fear connected to the body which 'contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates' the senses (21), of the original Male Gothic. Likewise, a connection can be outlined in terms of the Gothic's continuing concern with sexual identity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses early Gothic by men in connection to sexual identity, noting that 'the Gothic was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality', and listing 'a group of authors [who were] in some significant sense homosexual — Beckford notoriously, Lewis probably, Walpole iffily' (22) i.e. the main proponents of what is now termed Male Gothic. Christopher Whyte is the only gay-identified writer of the contemporary duo, but despite connections with Male Gothic, the writer's sexuality now seems wholly irrelevant in the face of an increasingly volatile and pluralistic notion of identity as a whole, not just sexual identity.

Sedgwick also notes the importance of paranoia in the Male Gothic, in the Freudian sense as a symptom of homosexual panic whereby the male protagonist is 'not only persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male.' (23) Similarly, David Punter theorises this as demonstrating continuity throughout the Gothic, arguing that it is 'impossible to make much sense

out of Gothic fiction without continual recourse to the concept of paranoia'(24) and this proves accurate in relation to the contemporary texts. However, one of the sources of panic and fear is now not so much the threat posed by homosexuality as the threat posed to freedom of identity by conventional masculinity, a prevalent feature of which, according to Michael Kimmel, is homophobia.(25) Homosexuality is no longer a horrific transgression, and monsters have mutated just as societal attitudes have evolved. The fear is no longer of an easily identifiable 'other', but of the fact that there may no longer be an 'other', a certainty to react against. This terrifying prospect, amplified by uncertainty and obscurity, necessitates internalisation; the monster becomes located within. This reflects the divergent socio-cultural context of contemporary Gothic, inheriting from but not concurrent with its ancestor.

Correspondingly, paranoia itself has evolved. Many of the protagonists in Banks's and Whyte's works believe themselves transparent to and under the compulsion of an often maternal female figure rather than a dominating male, again reflecting changing societal and gender structures. Paranoia and fear, symptomatic of the aforementioned 'crisis of masculinity', represent a last ditch attempt by male characters to aggressively reassert a lucid and straightforward identity. Contemporary Gothic by men is somewhat more problematic than an application of the term Male Gothic would allow for, and thus the term is only employed here to point up the partial continuity evident in the Gothic in general, but moreover to highlight the diffuse and multifarious nature of contemporary Gothic when compared to the more 'coherent' original variety.

Scottish literature

Correspondingly, the diverse backgrounds of these new male purveyors of the Gothic reinforce this. Iain Banks writes both science fiction and more mainstream fiction, such as detective stories and *bildungsroman*, and consistently casts a Gothic shadow over his work. In addition he often draws from a distinctively Scottish tradition in literature, incorporating the figure of the double (perhaps the most renowned examples being James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)), the significance of the land and setting (as notable in George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) and Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* (1932)), and folkloric aspects involving the supernatural, primitive religion and superstition. Again, the Gothic is one tradition amongst many evident in the work of Christopher Whyte. Although he often sets his work in Scotland, much of it has more in common with wider European traditions of magic realism in the vein of Kafka and Gogol, than Scottish fantasy, which appeals to an afterlife and an otherworld separated only tenuously from our own. However, *The Warlock of Strathearn* in particular draws on traditional customs and beliefs, and refers to actual events in Scottish history.

Banks

The Wasp Factory is Banks's first published novel and, set in the remote North of Scotland, it focuses on, in Thom Nairn's words, 'growing up in a society where machismo is paramount'.(26) The chief Gothic feature of the novel lies in the fact that throughout his sixteen years of existence, central protagonist Frank believes himself to be male (his genital indiscrepancy explained by a dog attack when very young), only to discover that he is she, the product of an elaborate experiment carried out by his father.

Contrastingly, in *Excession*, set in the liberal future society of the Culture, bisexuality and sex changing are the norm, and *ubermensch* Genar-Hofoen performs the role of Gothic transgressor. He initially refuses

to ever be anything but male, yet eventually becomes female at the request of his female lover. He then swiftly reverts to male humanoid form, and finally becomes an Affronter, an alien life form whose society revolves around a deep-seated and violent patriarchy, even misogyny, and where the favoured past-times are hunting and war. It is said that within Affronter society, made up of tribes such as the Winterhunters and the Bladescorners, Genar-hofoen 'had never felt so thoroughly at home.' (38) In the best allegorical tradition of science fiction, Banks extrapolates traits of present-day society and projects them onto a future macrocosmic world, defamiliarising to allow for objective interrogation.

Whyte

Whyte presents the core of his novel *The Warlock of Strathearn* as a discovered eighteenth-century manuscript of a seventeenth-century tale, edited by the vain and pretentious patriarch Archibald MacCaspin, and after his death by his homosexual nephew. Thus situated clearly and self-consciously within the tradition originating in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the novel also makes use of wider Scottish folklore and fantastic stimuli. Another *bildungsroman*, the narrative follows the life and times of an unnamed protagonist who possesses great supernatural powers. As an adolescent, he attempts to conform by becoming a hard-drinking womaniser who finally falls in love with the unattainable (for most) lesbian witch, Lisbett. To win his desire, he magically turns himself into a woman and a plethora of problems ensue.

Similarly, the protagonist of short story 'Stifelio' is an ultra-masculine figure. An Italian sixteenth-century assassin who enjoys drinking and prostitutes, his downfall is also instigated by love for the wrong woman. By providing a historical setting, Whyte is again alluding to the original Gothic, and, like Banks, allowing for distance to defamiliarise features of our contemporary society.

Monstrosity

This portrayal of hegemonic masculinity — involving a power 'constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women'(27) — is Gothically monstrous. Sociologist Gregory Herek states that 'being a man is a crucial component of personal identity for males in our society, stemming from the early experience of gender as a self-defining characteristic.'(28) Both Banks and Whyte show an ironic awareness of this view, portraying characters who actively and aggressively adopt the stereotypical characteristics of 'being a man', and exist within a symbiotic relationship with a patriarchal, masculine society; itself, often monstrous and threatening. Monstrosity has been a continuous central concern of the Gothic since its origins. However, as that which can be superficially identified as 'other' and to which fear and horror can be relegated and made tangible and thus certain through symbolic embodiment, the exact forms and origins of the monstrous have evolved greatly over time. Fred Botting notes:

a major shift in perceptions of Gothic monstrosity from a horrifying sight of that which was most unbearable in a culture to a recognition and embrace of the monster as the image, the inner, often denied aspect, of who we, in a (post) modern western world, truly are.(29)

The monster has moved within, and is no longer securely locatable as the embodiment of an outside fear such as race or class. This is evident from the outset in the texts with the use of first person or internalised omniscient narrative voices, providing the monster's point of view. The first groundbreaking example of this technique is Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, where she allows the monster himself to narrate a portion of

the story, illustrating the significant Gothic inheritance these writers have drawn from. Monstrosity is now a psychologically terrifying force threatening individual identity. A socially constructed hyperbolic masculinity is presented as such a threat in Banks's and Whyte's texts, and is depicted as monstrous to make visible, challenge and critique existing hegemonic structures, whereby the masculine exists through subordination of the feminine and the homosexual.

The literary notion of the stereotype is particularly relevant here. Stereotype and schema theory, involving the evocation of reader expectation through the portrayal of certain categories of people and situations can be applied to the heterosexual male:

In so far as we regard the category of person as displaying strongly predictable attributes or behaviour, the category may harden into a stereotype, an extremely simplified mental model which fails to see individual features, only the values that are believed to be appropriate to the type. This is, of course, a basic ideological process at work. A socially constructed model of the world is projected onto the objects of perception and cognition, so that essentially the things we see and think about are constructed according to a scheme of values, not entities directly perceived.(30)

The 'we' here refers to the reader, but in the texts it is the characters themselves who project stereotypical traits onto their own identities, adopted from the society around them, and Gothically exaggerated to evoke fear and horror. They assume an easily recognisable scheme of values and pattern of behaviour to allow for a glossing over of their own fundamental anxieties. This is also often an attempt to enter into and become accepted by a particular (patriarchal) society, but this regularly fails due to the excessiveness of the attempt, the compensatory exaggeration of the expression of 'being a man'.

In *The Wasp Factory*, Frank must compensate for his perceived physical lack of a phallus. Believing himself to have been castrated by the family dog in a savage attack during early childhood, Frank unconsciously models his actions, appearance and behaviour on a socially-given image of ultra-maleness involving violence and misogyny, even going so far as to commit murder. The masculine pronoun is used with reference to Frank since that is the identity he assumes and what, for the greater part of the novel, he believes himself to be. Post-revelation of actual biological sex, Frank realises:

I believe that I decided if I could never become a man, I — the unmanned — would out-man those around me, and so I became the killer, a small image of the ruthless soldier-hero almost all I've ever seen or read seems to pay strict homage to. I would find or make my own weapons, and my victims would be those most recently produced by the one act I was incapable of, my equals in that, while they possessed the potential for generation, they were at that point no more able to perform the required act than I was. Talk about penis envy. (183)

The use of the phrase 'penis envy' here highlights Banks's awareness of existing gender stereotypes and clichés. Freud's notion that women experience in their bodies a lack and perceive themselves to be castrated which results in a life-long desire for a penis(31) persists as a hackneyed notion of gender identity, one which Banks employs to suggest the triteness of any socially-constructed gendered identity.

Frank is a Frankensteinian product of his society. The allusion in his name is no coincidence. We witness Frank endlessly consume popular culture in the form of punk rock and other music, television and literature. In turn he internalises the violent and patriarchal images contained within this — that which almost all he has seen or read pays homage to — to become a monster, created largely by his context, and not merely by the dubiously successful hormone-based experiments of his scientist father. Michael Kimmel states that ‘violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood’(32), and violent behaviour is the most monstrously exaggerated cliché of masculinity that Frank performs. The notion of gender as performative, i.e. culturally constructed, consisting of an accumulation of both conscious and unconscious acts, gestures and modes of discourse that accrue a gendered meaning, is now a staple of gender theory thanks to Judith Butler’s influential study, *Gender Trouble*. (33) The fact that gendered meaning is socially given rather than essentially connected to the body suggests gender identity’s severance from biological sex, and implies the possibility of a person of one sex adopting a traditionally opposing gender identity. This is precisely what Frank, unconsciously, does. As well as seeing off three of his young relatives, he sadistically and ritualistically kills ‘God’s creatures’ by the sackload: ‘How the hell am I supposed to get heads and bodies for the Poles and the 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.’ (13) His hobbies include making explosives and staging wars between various inanimate objects, such as ‘the Ordinary Soldiers versus the Aerosols [...] A good War, with all the right ingredients and a more spectacular ending than most (I even had my father asking me what all the explosions and the fire had been about, when I got back to the house that evening).’(24) Victor Sage notes that the male protagonists in Banks’s work often belong to a ‘barbarian, male, warrior-culture, essentially religious and ritualistic in nature’.(34) Indeed Frank, with his primitive quasi-religious beliefs and animalian territorialism, is one in a long line of almost feral anti-heroes (see for example ‘the Barbarian’ in *The Bridge*), typifying a central dialectic in Banks’s Gothic involving the Civilised and the Barbaric, and the fear that the primitive past may not be as distant as initially assumed or hoped.

In a sense, Frank’s maleness is simply ‘too much’, and it is only the subtle humour of the novel that saves the narrative from becoming intangibly far-fetched. This in itself is a distinctively Gothic trait. Judith Halberstam argues that monstrosity is the means by which the Gothic negotiates excess:

The production of fear in a literary text emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning [...] Within Gothic novels, I argue, multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realisation that meaning itself runs riot. Gothic novels produce a symbol for this interpretive mayhem in the body of the monster.(35)

The reality of Frank’s gender can be read in many different ways. Banks may be reinforcing the now common ideas concerning the power of nurture over nature, the notion of gender as performative, or making a wider comment regarding the problematic relationship between society and the individual. Yet despite its over-determined nature, Frank’s excessive maleness is clearly a monstrous source of fear and horror, threatening and destabilising through the grotesque exaggeration of conventional views of masculinity and thus allowing for a reconsideration of gendered identity in general.

In *Excession*, the monstrous other takes on the macrocosmic form of an opposing species, complete with green skin and tentacles, namely the Affront. This barbaric, patriarchal warrior culture exists in opposition

to the Culture, Banks's socialist but at the same time imperialist utopian society. The Culture consists of sex-changing humanoids and assimilated volunteers from other species, living in harmony in a society where everyone is equal, money does not exist and where, 'some people cycled back and forth between male and female all their lives, while some settled for an androgynous in-between state, finding there a comfortable equanimity.' (321) Isolated overreacher, Genar-Hofoen rebels against the perceived constrictions of the Culture and is attracted to the liberating alternative of Affronter society, which he ultimately joins, enjoying experiences unobtainable within the Culture. Genar-Hofoen is a hard-drinking womaniser who is most reluctant to change sex, and as a result is viewed as abnormal by his peers. He defensively states, however, 'I am who I ever was. What I called masculinity, what I celebrated in it was just an excuse for me-ness, wasn't it?' (348) Even the utopian Culture is shown to be restrictive and dogmatic, and Banks's rejection of any strict polarisation of good and evil where opposing societies are concerned combines with Genar-Hofoen's uncertainty concerning his true coherent self to suggest the arbitrary nature of gender-based identity in general.

The masculine becomes perverse in Whyte's short story 'Stifelio' through its association with death. The very title is a double reference to the erect penis — ultimate symbol of virile manhood — and to the corpse, or 'stiff'. The story relates the demise of a successful assassin in Florence in the sixteenth century. The assassin embodies all the male characteristics that come with such a career — coldness, rationality, stealth and a potential for violence, and as a pastime he frequents a dilapidated tavern, employing prostitutes there and justifying this, thus: 'What would happen to those poor wretches if men like you and me did not bring to them desires we have no lawfully wedded wives to satisfy, and pay them richly for their services?' (186) Women are reduced to economic commodity, available to be bought and sold, demonstrated again when the assassin's lover is sold by the mistress of the brothel she belongs to. (188) The assassin's downfall is triggered by a moment of weakness, when he falls in love with this prostitute. Some time later he is hired by a noblewoman to kill the future wife of her grandson, and in this way he becomes a kind of prostitute himself, exchanging specific characteristics of his gender identity — violent behaviour, detachment and unsentimental rationality — for money. The assassin discovers, moments too late, that the now-dead woman is the same he previously loved. A return to conventional hard-drinking masculinity provides comfort. This is where we encounter him, in the tavern relating the events of his life to a male stranger, and asking of him, in the unnerving conclusion to the story:

Will you forget my threats and taunts and stay at my side for as long as it takes? Will you hear everything I have to say and lodge it inside you, without betraying me? And without allowing it to contaminate you? For that would mean that the rottenness I am seeking to expunge would merely take root in another man. Can you help me be free of it without yourself succumbing?
(190)

This rottenness is his monstrous masculinity, and the call to the stranger to resist is also a call to the reader to distance themselves from the contemporary version. The assassin kills the only thing he has ever loved, suggesting that conventional maleness is self-destructive, and that the adoption of constructed roles annihilates individual identity. Love is prohibited in this masculine scheme and therefore must be destroyed by a suitably masculine force, cold-blooded violence for the sake of economic gain. Masculinity is revealed to be, to actual people and to the self, deadly.

Contrastingly, in *The Warlock of Strathearn*, male-dominated society acts as primary monstrous ‘other’, positioned in opposition to the protagonist and narrator of the manuscript, the unnamed warlock himself. The manuscript is set in late seventeenth-century rural Scotland, where post-Reformation religious structures maintain an iron hold on public life. This allows Whyte, in a similar technique to that used in ‘Stifelio’, to defamiliarise contemporary values through their distancing in time. It is said of the Church that ‘it withered away and died, leaving only a rigid hierarchy of frightened men, hungry for power’ (54), and at one point during a sermon, a woman is verbally reprimanded for being single: ‘Why has she never married? Why has she remained, in defiance of St. Paul, without a man to guide her, to command her in the doings of each day?’ (83) The horrific consequence of this excess is witch burning, and throughout the novel many women who do not share the views of the establishment are singled out, ostracised and publicly executed, their ‘unnatural’ resistance linked to paranormal power. Interestingly, the contemporarily set frame, narrated at first by editor, Archie MacCaspin, subtly illustrates the persistence of patriarchy into the present day. Archie is a stereotypical pompous patriarch, schoolmaster whose word is Law, and who misogynistically lists his wife’s sole qualities as being a ‘faithful spouse’ and having ‘incomparable culinary skills.’ (8) The warlock’s main anxiety as an adolescent is that his supernatural powers will set him apart from his peers: ‘Any observation that implied I might differ from my contemporaries unnerved me [...] In order to live in the day-to-day, to pass for a normal adolescent, I had to blot out an entire field of receptivity.’ (112) As part of this ‘blotting out’, he adopts overtly masculine behaviour, winning respect for his skills in the arts of the bedchamber and his contributions to a circle of male friends who frequent a local tavern (118-120), successfully forming various homosocial relationships, bonds that, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, maintain the privilege accorded to the male sex.(36) He becomes accepted in this male community by drawing from the values and customs of the society around him, existing for a time, like Frank, as a Frankensteinian product of his context, within which he has generally felt himself an anomaly. The warlock’s eventual failure to belong to this misogynistic society, as he himself is attacked for his paranormal abilities and subsequently transforms himself into a woman to obtain love, is a covert critique of these values.

Ritual

The warlock’s almost ritualistic donning of male traits highlights the anaesthetising power of ritual. As Louis Breger states, ‘rituals, whether personal or religious, can serve to contain and relieve anxiety and other disruptive emotions.’(37) Through stock, patterned responses the warlock is able to convince others of the authenticity of his performed identity for a short while, and also gloss over the disparity between persona and self. A childhood incident involving a punishment session he receives from his grandmother and her religious adviser, the sadistic Reverend Vincent MacAteer, indicates the importance of ritual through its lack:

If I had known with what frequency I was to be punished, or the likely number of strokes, I could have practiced economy, measuring out my determination to endure their cruelty in the needed doses. The utter unpredictability of it all came close to driving me mad. (100)

The absence of ritual actually amplifies disruptive emotions here. Williams argues that ritual is a distinctive feature of Male Gothic: ‘these “rules” even suggest a ritualistic or neurotic expression of “repetition compulsion”, a symptom of the male subject’s primitive, superstitious attempts to accommodate disorder within a pattern of order.’(38)

This is precisely what Frank of *The Wasp Factory* attempts. Ritual covers up, elides gaps, and anaesthetises both the victim and the proponent of monstrous masculinity. Frank uses personal ritual to desensitise himself to his horrifically violent acts by normalising his life through the imposition of routine. His grooming habits have an uncanny air of repetition:

Next the shave. I always use shaving foam and the latest razors (twin-blade swivel-heads are state-of-the-art at the moment), removing the downy brown growth of the previous day and night with dexterity and precision. As with all my ablutions, the shave follows a definite and predetermined pattern; I take the same number of strokes of the same length in the same sequence each morning. (44)

However, he extends this by building up an entire religion and way of life around everyday rhythms and patterns, complete with totemic symbols such as the head of the dog that supposedly castrated him, and fortune-telling machine in the form of the wasp factory itself which, Frank believes, prophesies events according to how the wasp trapped inside dies. These repetitions, recurring beliefs and patterns allow him to validate his manhood by negotiating his over-compensatory masculine behaviour. He relieves unresolved gender anxieties, a continuous and unconscious source of disruptive emotion for Frank, by imposing order on what would otherwise be chaos.

Enclosing Structures

Indeed, order would be chaos in the paradigmatic binary sense also, as male Frank would be female were it not for ritualistically imposed conventional masculine traits. Gender identities in the texts are represented as at first sight conforming to traditional and implicitly hierarchical binary codes, upon which the Symbolic Order is founded. There clearly exists a hegemonic masculinity which relies on an active subordination and marginalisation of women and effeminated and homosexual masculinities, something that occurs in all four texts. Frank, Affronter society, the assassin and the community of Strathearn all demonstrate a deep-rooted misogyny, corporealised by violent acts towards women, while often concurrently holding strongly homophobic attitudes in a defensive attempt to prove and validate manliness.

Yet, furthermore, this excessive conformity to the dominant side of binaries and consequent adoption of a rigid masculine identity is exposed as just as entrapping and restricting as the limits posed on women and homosexual men by patriarchy. Through their Gothic explorations of masculinity, these writers present grotesque ostentations of traditional binary structures, exaggerating to expose as arbitrary. Frank metaphorises the enclosing nature of these hackneyed structures when he envisages the family home, traditional isolated Gothic site, as a head:

The House was dark. I stood looking at it in the darkness, just aware of its bulk in the feeble light of a broken moon, and I thought it looked even bigger than it really was, like a stone-giant's head, a huge moonlit skull full of shapes and memories, staring out to sea and attached to a vast, powerful body buried in the rock and sand beneath, ready to shrug itself free and disinter itself on some unknowable command or cue. (86)

The body is large and powerful, but is interred in the ground, the very foundations of life, and the liberating formula is paradoxically ‘unknowable’. Live burial is another emblematic Gothic image, and the texts suggest that the adoption of a specific gender identity, with all the customs and expectations that come with it, is one form of being buried alive, trapped and suffocated by convention.

Images of enclosure are also numerous in *The Warlock of Strathearn*. In the local brothel, the mistress’s laugh takes on a terrifying quality for the warlock: ‘doomed and pitiless, as if it were welcoming me into a chamber of horrors from which no further escape was possible.’ (130) Masculinity, as prescribed by patriarchal society, is as restrictive and limiting as femininity, if in vastly different ways, imposing as many obligations on behaviour and action, and becoming a chamber of horrors for those who struggle against conformity. Concurrently, binary oppositions have been hugely re-examined, debated and all but discredited in recent theory and this is connected to the generally acknowledged disparity between gender and sex and the dissolution of essentialist gender attitudes. As Butler states:

Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders [...] even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it.(39)

Banks and Whyte self-consciously utilise the binary gender system and its inherent essentialism in order to bring in the shared knowledge of stereotypes to provide a horizon of reader expectation to transgress. Expectation is overwhelmed through monstrous exaggeration, as we have seen, in the way that Botting acknowledges with his argument that ‘horror marks the response to an excess that cannot be transcended.’(40) Moreover, the inherent essentialism belonging to these conventional gender binaries is often radically undermined by the ultimate revelation of true biological sex, in the case of Frank, or sexual metamorphosis, in the case of the warlock of Strathearn and members of the Culture.

Androgyny

Leading on from this, three other seemingly transgressive figures demonstrate an initial disregard for the incumbent boundaries of gender: the homosexual, the androgyne and the dominant female. Some or all three of these are present in each of the texts, co-existing with and foregrounding monstrous masculinities. Yet, more often than not, the homosexual figures and powerful females ultimately reinscribe binaries by consciously or unconsciously adopting the conventional behaviour of the opposite sex. Homosexual figures such as Andrew Elliot, Archie MacCaspian’s nephew, are feminised, while women such as Frank’s absent mother, the warlock’s grandmother and the noblewoman of ‘Stifelio’ display traditionally masculine attributes. Frank’s mother rides in on a motorcycle, gives birth, then leaves the infant Frank to be brought up by his father. The warlock’s grandmother Alison perceives his supernatural gift early on, and viewing him as a threat to her position, makes several attempts to murder him. In ‘Stifelio’, the grandmother who hires the assassin is described by him as ‘rotten inside with ill will and viciousness [...] She is a cancer in the body of that family, ruling it still and sucking their vigour from the men.’ (184/5)

It is with the figure of the androgyne, however, that liberation from binary restriction is made possible. Alongside the presence of homosexual, transgender and transsexual figures (who more often than not reaffirm hierarchical binaries), there are only two truly androgynous figures: Amorphia, the humanoid representative of the Mind ship 'Sleeper Service' in *Excession*, and the warlock himself in Whyte's novel. These figures manage to exist outside and beyond the control of traditional power structures. Androgyny, like the Gothic, remains notoriously obscure and difficult to define, but is clearly distinct from the sex/gender severance found in *The Wasp Factory* and *Excession*, and the feminised masculinity and masculinised femininity found in Whyte's texts. Again like the Gothic, androgyny is characterised by its extreme ambivalence, representing an unmarked and difficult to locate site for the meeting and melding of various oppositions; in Marjory Garber's words, 'a space of possibility.'⁽⁴¹⁾ According to this definition, only the warlock and Amorphia are androgynes. Androgyny is a psychological rather than a physiological state, existing tentatively as liminality and balancing precariously on the unmarked border between genders, as these figures do. June Singer vaguely defines androgyny as that which:

threatens many presuppositions about individuals' identity as men or as women, and hence threatens the security of those people, including most of us, who have vested interests in the conventional attitudes towards sex (maleness and femaleness) and gender (masculinity and femininity).⁽⁴²⁾

Despite the haziness of this outline, androgyny is clearly not a biologically definable characteristic (unlike hermaphroditism, which involves the presence of both sets of genitals). Neither is it related to sexual preference, and is thus distinct from homo- and bisexuality. Androgyny is the most explicit indicator of the independent existence of sex and gender, involving the formation of an identity completely dissociated from anatomy, and also from traditional binaries, relying on the amalgamation of maleness and femaleness to produce a liminality inexpressible through the present, inherently gendered, signifying system. The gendering of pronouns makes it impossible to designate and therefore constrict or pin down an androgynous being. It exists outside, beyond and in the liminal space between binaries rather than simply inverting or oscillating from one to the other. This excessive, ambiguous space where meaning is protean and multifarious is a most Gothic location.

In *Excession*, the artificially intelligent ship's avatar Amorphia, as the name suggests (connoting that which lacks definite form), is a 'cadaverously sexless creature', 'deliberately formed to look not simply neither male nor female but as perfectly, artificially poised between maleness and femaleness as it was possible to be.'⁽⁶⁾ However, the fact that 'this seemingly quite human person was nothing of the kind'⁽⁶⁾ implies the impossibility of this idealised state for anything other than a highly advanced machine. Amorphia's form serves a specific function, appearing as unthreatening and inoffensive as possible to both sexes and all genders, a necessity when working to promote machine/human relations. Humanity is plainly much too gendered to ever achieve this ideal, even the liberated transsexual humanity of the Culture where although biology is almost redundant, gender identities persist, as exemplified by Genar-Hofoen and his pregnant — therefore firmly female — former lover Dajeil Gelian. This perfection requires the cold, hormone- and culture-free logic of a machine, and is experienced as threatening by monstrous males such as Genar-Hofoen, and more generally the Affront who are defeated in their attempt to instigate war with the Culture by the collaborative efforts of several of these androgynous Mind-ships.

Helene Cixous argues that the solution to restrictive binary structures lies within the form of androgyny, dissociated from sexual preference, she refers to as:

the *other* bisexuality, the one with which every subject, who is not shut up inside the spurious Phallogocentric Performing Theater, sets up his or her erotic universe. Bisexuality — that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex, and, starting with this permission one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of desire's inscription on every part of the body and the other body.(43)

This *other* bisexuality, or androgyny involving the welcome and fluid location and amalgamation within one's identity of difference, can only be conceived of by 'subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.'(44) One such peripheral individual is the warlock. Despite his short-lived initial attempts to integrate himself, the warlock continues to elude patriarchy, epitomised in his context by the Church, and even often outside the inherently masculine 'symbolic' through his ability to communicate non-verbally with plants and animals and his susceptibility to the rhythms and drives of life. This is the realm of the semiotic, an unordered, unrestrained domain indifferent to verbal language and governed by drives and instincts.(45) The warlock has ready access to both modalities, to culture and nature, to male and female. After changing sex, he looks in the mirror and acknowledges that, 'the face was familiar, myself yet not myself [...] But the eyes that met mine were the eyes I knew.' (154) Eyes are important in psychoanalytic interpretations as a general site of identity, and his eyes remain unchanged by his genital transformation. His biological identity shifts from male to female, but his gender identity exists as neither, ceasing to be a *gender* identity and continuing simply as an *identity*. Apart from the purely superficial, such as dress, his behaviour, attitudes and values remain consistent. He does not subscribe to societal pressure to remain on one side of any binary, and in this sense is a highly transgressive figure. Yet, like the machine Amorphia, who exists as a similar somatic metaphor for the destabilisation and deconstruction of binaries, he makes use of powers and skills unattainable to mere humanity to achieve and express androgyny. The human scheme again proves simply too inherently gendered to allow for liminality, and these figures are interpretable only within the metaphorical domain of fiction.

The warlock is positioned almost entirely outside the domain of existing 'human' structures, is thus indefinable and uncontrollable by them. He therefore becomes a threat to ultra-patriarchal figures such as the Reverend McAteer. Yet he is also portrayed in contrast to the abject and castrating uber-female Alison. Similarly, Amorphia exists in opposition to the two explicitly gendered figures of Genar-Hofoen, and the patriarchy he represents, and Dajeil Gelian who is 'perpetually pregnant' (383) and thus unambiguously female. These juxtapositions illustrate androgyny's dependence on gender: it requires gender's *lack* to *be*. The polarisation of the androgyne with extreme heteronormativity foregrounds the symbiotic relationship, and in both texts the opposition is made tangible through direct aggressive conflict. Amorphia maintains a dislike and distrust of Genar-Hofoen and his misogynistic and carefree behaviour (e.g., 394), while the warlock clashes repeatedly with the Church and with his grandmother. Yet both figures remain beyond the often-engulfing control of the potentially powerful forces signified by their opposites; Amorphia is fundamental in defeating the Affront in battle and is successful in encouraging Dajeil Gelian to have her child and leave pregnancy behind, while the warlock defeats

Alison and is relentlessly autonomous despite continuous torture and persecution by the Church. In Cixous's words, they are 'peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.' Yet in the presently gendered context, supernatural power or highly advanced artificially intelligent technology is required to obtain peripherality and elude subjugation by powerful others.

These factors may explain the lack of any detailed definition of androgyny; it lies beyond the possibilities of present gender discourse and is therefore impossible to explain clearly, subsisting in the unmarked liminal space between definitions. The ambiguity and subversiveness intrinsic to androgyny in these texts are distinctively Gothic. Indeed, the Gothic in general readily accommodates androgyny. This is evident from its outset, for example in the androgynous figure of the devil in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (46), through to contemporary popular adaptations of the Gothic, such as in 'Goth' culture and fashion, epitomised by androgynous figures like Marilyn Manson, who is biologically male but whose identity, still clearly fictitious, is an amalgamation of many diverse expressions of gender. These figures are consistently subversive, unseating heteronormativity and reader/audience expectation, threatening and destabilising conventional male-dominated power relations, and as Whyte proffers, successfully and visibly articulating transgressions.(47)

Conclusion

Ultimately, this article has been concerned with arguing for a place within the tradition of Gothic fiction for Banks and Whyte as writers with canonical status within Scottish literature, and in turn refreshing Scottish literature by demonstrating its recurrent symbiosis with the Gothic. Examples of this symbiosis are evident in the work of many Scottish writers, from the Gothic works of Walter Scott and James Hogg, through Robert Louis Stevenson and into the present day. However, the argument here has focussed on Banks and Whyte as contemporary writers who draw from the Scottish tradition, while employing the Gothic mode, to interrogate masculinity as part of the significant and timely re-evaluation of masculinity in general.

1. Berthold Schoene, 'Angry Young Masculinities and the Rhetoric of Homophobia and Misogyny in the Scottish Novels of Alan Sharp', in *Gendering the Nation*, ed. Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p.102/3.
2. John MacInnes, 'The crisis of masculinity and the politics of identity' in *The Masculinities Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p.311.
3. Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.13.
4. See for example Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge New Critical Idiom Series, 1996); and Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.xi.
5. David S. Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the interrogation of masculinity', in *Theorising Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (California: Sage Publications, 1994), p.226.
6. See note 2.
7. Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the fin de siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.3.
8. Iain (M) Banks, *The Wasp Factory* (London: Abacus, 1990 (1984)), *Excession* (London: Orbit, 1996). Christopher Whyte, *The Warlock of Strathearn* (London: Indigo, 1997), 'Stifelio', in *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction*, ed. Alan Bissett (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001). Subsequent references will appear in brackets.
9. Christopher Whyte, 'Unspeakable Heterosexuality', in *The Edinburgh Review* (No. 95, Spring 1996), p.127 &125.
10. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), p.14.
11. Lord Acton, in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 1887.
12. J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp.381-386.
13. Allen W. Grove, 'Coming Out of the Castle: Gothic, Sexuality and the Limits of Language', in *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* (Vol.26, No. 3, 2000), pp. 429-446, p.429.
14. For a fuller discussion of Gothic as a mode, see [Richard Haslam](#), '[Irish Gothic: A Rhetorical Hermeneutics Approach](#)' in *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* (Issue 2, March 2007).
15. Glennis Byron and David Punter, *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.8.

16. Leslie A Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960).
17. Angela Carter, *Fireworks* (London: Quartet, 1974).
18. Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge New Critical Idiom Series, 1997), p.46.
19. Robert Miles, introduction to *Women's Writing* (Volume 1, Number 2, 1994), p.137.
20. *Art of Darkness*, p.103-4.
21. Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.163-172, p.168. Here Radcliffe may have been directly and derogatorily referring to the techniques employed by Matthew Lewis.
22. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.91-2.
23. Freud outlines his notion of paranoia as homosexual panic in many articles, including the 1911 'Notes on a Case of Paranoia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XII*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p.60 onwards. Sedgwick posits this in *Between Men*, p.91.
24. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror vol.2*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996), p.1.
25. See Michael S. Kimmel, 'Masculinity as Homophobia' in *Theorising Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (California: Sage Publications, 1994).
26. Thom Nairn, 'Iain Banks and the Fiction Factory', in *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, ed. Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.128.
27. Robert W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p.183.
28. Gregory M. Herek, 'Reformulating the Male Role', in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (California: Sage Publications, 1987), p.72.
29. Fred Botting, *The Gothic* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), p.3-4.
30. Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.92.
31. Sigmund Freud, 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' (1924), in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.196.

32. 'Masculinity as Homophobia', p.132.
33. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
34. Victor Sage, 'The politics of petrification: culture, religion, history in the fiction of Iain Banks and John Banville', in *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, ed. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd-Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.24.
35. *Skin Shows*, p.13.
36. This is defined in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.
37. Louis Breger, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), p.328.
38. *Art of Darkness*, p.175.
39. *Gender Trouble*, p.10.
40. *Gothic*, p.75.
41. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.11.
42. June Singer, *Androgyny* (London: Routledge, 1977), p.28.
43. 'Sorties', p.582.
44. Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975), in *Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. Maggie Humm, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.200.
45. For more on this and its relation to gender see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), trans. Margaret Waller with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
46. The notion of androgyny is prevalent throughout this, one of the 'original' Gothic novels dating from 1796, from the androgynous and sexually attractive figure of the devil, who appears first as a naked youth with 'perfect form and face' and 'silken locks', to the cross-dressing and transgressive figure of Matilda. The categories of masculinity and femininity are shown to be unstable throughout. For more on this see William D. Brewer, 'Transgendering in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*' in *Gothic Studies Volume 6, Issue 2* (November 2004), pp. 192-207.
47. 'Unspeakable Heterosexuality', p.125.