

ANALYSIS OF *THE BRIDGE*

Coma

Starts with the main character, unnamed, in a first person inner monologue from his crashed car on a bridge. The first paragraph starts a red-blood-on-the-bridge recurring image that I seem to remember crops up later a lot. The main character can't remember his name, remembers that he's an atheist and swore he'd never pray for help, dimly senses people rescuing him. I probably could go over each sentence of this and find some allusion to something or other, for instance, in the scene where he's wondering if he's being rescued, he thinks:

"I lie on a flat plain, surrounded by tall mountains (or maybe on a bed, surrounded by ... machines? People? Either; both (Like, man, in the really wide view, they're the same. Far out.)"

which is a reference to a Culture idea. I seem to remember that when this book was written Banks had written some Culture works but not published any. At any rate, we come to the signature concept of the book, introduced within the introduction as per Banks standard operating procedure:

"Maybe there's life after life... hmmm. Maybe all the rest was a dream (yeah, sure), and I wake up to ("Thedarkstation") -- what was that?"

The rest of the book is going to have the fantasy in this sentence explored: the main character is going to have a highly detailed hallucination of a bridge that he wakes up on, while in actuality he's in a coma in the hospital, recovering from his accident.

In a section just above, the main character is wondering where he came from, there's a library list of a) God, b) Nature, c) Darwin, d) Marx, e) all of the above. Well, in the rest of the book the main character is going to try his own self-creation, of his environment, his body, everything. It's all in his head, of course, but this is still his one shot at being the Demiurge.

Metaphormosis: One

This chapter begins with the narrator's vision of the dark station mentioned at the end of the introduction; a dream that the narrator is the coachman for a sealed carriage that he has to bring somewhere. He is blocked by another carriage, with another driver who makes every motion at the same time as he does.

Then we find out that this is a dream that the narrator is describing to his therapist; actually, that he's made up the dream because he can't really dream anything. "I guess it means I'm frightened of something" the narrator snarls later. Frightened of what? Well, as far as I can guess, the sealed carriage is his consciousness of the reality that he is actually lying, near death, in the hospital, he is not actually in good health and talking to his therapist.

He's blocking himself from acknowledging it and trapping himself in his internal vision, as a way of blocking out pain and trauma.

The therapist scene quickly leads into some basics: the narrator is on a giant bridge, over the ocean. Everyone lives on this bridge. He's an amnesiac, so he's been given the name John Orr. (Orr because he was found in the sea near the bridge with a giant O-shaped bruise on his chest and broken ribs; the bruise is a recurring image. It's actually from where the steering wheel hit his chest in the car crash, presumably.)

The therapist, Dr. Joyce, is clearly a part of the narrator that's trying to get him to acknowledge his real situation, right from the start. Here's a precis of their actual situation, disguised as them talking about Orr's made-up dream;

"[Dr. Joyce is] looking very suspicious (as I've said, with good reason). 'You wake up?' he says. I try to sound as annoyed as I can: 'Damn it man, I can't control what I dream.' (A lie.)"

Typical Banks: he says right at the start what is going on. The narrator has not really woken up, he is still dreaming, and he can really control what he dreams, but he's lying about that to himself.

A bit later it gets even more blatant, the doctor says that the bridge might be a dream and asks Orr how he'd know if it wasn't. Orr asks him back the same question and Dr. Joyce says "No point asking me that; I'd be part of the dream." True. But at any rate, the doctor says that Orr probably can't tell him what the dream means, and it's clear that Orr isn't ready to leave his created world.

The bridge is a bit surreal. The therapist has two patients, one of whom thinks he's various items of furniture and has a policeman sitting on him, and the other a window washer who never comes in; there is a tax on wheels, so most people can only afford monocycles which crash often; everything has a kind of mock-Victorian flavor with giant elevators that have musicians and elevator operators. Orr has supposedly been trying to find out who built the bridge, what it is for, and what it is a bridge between, but all of his queries get lost or are answered in a language he can't read. The records are supposed to have been kept in the third city library, which has been lost. That has a definite flavor of images that will appear again in *Feersum Endgin*.

What is the bridge between? He knows it's between the City and the Kingdom, but not any more. But that's actually a very good hint for the reader: the City is the City of Man, and the Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, they represent Life and Death, and he's on a bridge hanging halfway between them, and could go in either direction.

The Dr. shows Orr the bridge, and we get the first description of it. It's red-painted.

Finally, at the end of the chapter we have the first intrusion of reality. Orr turns

on his TV, and instead of a program it shows a man lying in a coma in a hospital bed -- clearly the narrator himself. Notably, the visitor's seat next to him is unoccupied. The man in the bed doesn't look like Orr; in addition to his obvious wounds, he is short, ordinary-looking, and has a bald patch, and we've already gotten the impression that Orr is good-looking. Clearly the narrator has created a fantasy counterpart that is himself as he would like to be, not as he is.

Unlike, say, Stanislaw Lem in *The Futurological Congress*, or Philip K. Dick in most of his books, Banks isn't setting up a normal apparent reality that later catastrophically fails. Reality is intruding from the start, right from the first chapter. That, to me, indicates a certain basic optimism; we're not supposed to thrash around with a Philip K. Dick character whose world is shattering; we're supposed to inhabit someone's head as he puts himself back together.

Metaphormosis: Two

This chapter starts with Orr making up a dream for his therapist; the dream is similar to the first, with the narrator being one of the crew of a sinking ship; they board the ship they are fighting just as that crew boards their ship, the two crews and ships separate, both sinking.

In the scene where Orr gets up from bed, we hear about his fairly palatial apartment and clothes, and he combs his "hair (a pleasantly intense black, and just curly enough to give it body)". Clearly this is his wish fulfillment; from the end of the last chapter we've already seen that the narrator's real body has graying and balding hair.

Reality intrudes once again. This time, after he turns on his TV and sees the person on the hospital bed, aircraft fly by outside and leave smoke signals. The signals are "grouped in three-by-three grids, carefully spaced" -- in other words, this is a reference to Marian, the Culture's language, which we know from *Excession* is written on a three-by-three dot grid. But within the story they function symbolically as a signal from outside trying to break through. It's notable that in later passages the people of the Bridge express distrust of the aircraft, they are scandalous, something not approved of in advance. They might well be suspicious of the aircraft, because if the smoke signal message every gets through, the narrator's fantasy (the Bridge itself) will cease to exist... At any rate, the trilogy of signals is completed when Orr picks up his phone to call about the TV being broken and the phone just transmits slow, not quite perfectly regular beeps -- the beeps of the machine tracking the narrator's heartbeat as he lies in a coma on his hospital bed.

Orr has breakfast with his friend, the engineer Mr. Brooke. If the narrator has cast Dr. Joyce the therapist in the part of the person within the dream trying to wake the narrator up, Mr. Brooke is the corresponding figure trying to help him maintain the fantasy -- as symbolized by his job maintaining the bridge supports. Brooke always seems ill-lit, "even in direct sunlight he always seems to be standing in shade", so he's something of a devil figure. Brooke tells him that there's plenty within the Bridge to interest him and that he should

give up his investigations of what's outside it, the same investigations that Dr. Joyce told him he was giving up too easily. Brooke suffers from insomnia, which makes him diametrically opposed to Joyce the dream analyst.

Just after this, Orr goes to his appointment with Dr. Joyce, but the therapist's office has been relocated. Clearly Orr is nervous about talking to him and this is an avoidance mechanism. Orr's chest aches where the circular bruise used to be (actually, where it still is, it's just that as he loses confidence in the dream of the Bridge he feels his real pains more).

Dr. Joyce thinks the first two dreams tell nothing. He uses two drawings of the girders of the Bridge as psychological tests, asking Orr to indicate which direction of force the structures are indicating at certain points. I admit that I don't understand the significance of this scene at all.

Orr takes an elevator and sees that one of the floors is labelled as having the Third City Library, the one that supposedly explains the Bridge. He goes there in high excitement, but when he gets there, there has just been a disaster, firemen are running around and everything has either been burned or demolished. In other words, the narrator is not yet ready to admit what is going on to himself, so he has to take the Library back away at the last minute. But this seems a bit suspicious, even to Orr, so the integrity of the illusion is damaged. Orr finds a diagram in his pocket, supposedly a map of the way to Dr. Joyce's new office. It's a hexagon with an L-shaped line in the middle with an O and an H at each end of the line, the O next to the hexagon. It's clearly significant to the narrator, and he almost loses the Bridge illusion into formless mist. He feels himself seem to tip, which is something I've actually had happen to me. When I've realized with a shock that I'm dreaming, and I wake up, sometimes there is a readjustment of the feeling of gravity as I move from a perception of myself as standing, within the dream, to the true perception that I'm lying on my back in bed.

What does the diagram mean? A previous scene within the chapter referred to part of the Bridge as hexagonal. The lift that Orr took to reach the Third City Library is L-shaped, and he comments on this more than once. The elevator attendant said that it "doesn't look much like a library from this angle", and when Orr felt himself seem to tip, he felt like he was back in that elevator, "completing another unscheduled and dangerous lift-shaft maneuver", i.e. waking back to consciousness. The H could mean Here and O mean Outside.

But the hexagon with an H, an O, and another line also looks very much like a molecular diagram, with the hexagon being the carbon ring. Anyone have any ideas on that? Something about alcohol, possibly? I don't remember enough chemistry to see what it is without looking it up. We don't know yet in the story whether the narrator crashed his car because he was drunk, although he does indicate in the introduction that he thinks the crash is his fault.

Orr throws the diagram away after hearing his phone beep again. The narrator's been giving himself lots of messages, but it's clearly not working, because he's not yet ready or healed enough.

Metaphormosis: Three

This chapter, like the others in *Metaphormosis*, starts with a dream. The narrator sees an abandoned city, long since destroyed by the desert and the sea. There is a statue of someone the narrator can't remember the name of, he guesses at something like Mock or Mocca. At the shore, a ragged man is whipping the waves with a flail. The man seems to be chained by his ankle, but he says that he's employed to do this, and that once, a great emperor ... he no longer seems to see or hear the narrator, and as the narrator walks away a manacle appears on the narrator's wrist. Orr wakes and finds that he's really dreamed this dream, he didn't just make it up for Dr. Joyce. that he thinks the crash is his fault.

This dream takes mythological symbolism from two sources: Shelley's poem *Ozymandias* ("Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!") and the legend of King Canute whipping the waves. They are both stories about the futility of power. In this case, though, the kings and emperors are gone, but their servant remains, still carrying out their futile task. Clearly the narrator feels that he's playing this same role, self-chained to a meaningless effort that he thinks is voluntary. But I don't quite have this one interpreted to my satisfaction that he thinks the crash is his fault.

Orr wakes, looks at his TV, and sees the man in the hospital bed being given an injection. Orr never liked injections and winces with "sympathetic" pain which is of course not really sympathetic at all. The telephone is beeping a little faster than before, his heart rate has actually speeded up a bit.

Brooke breaks in with a phone call. He asks Orr to visit him at a bar, and bring a hat; Orr arrives and is annoyed by Brooke and a couple of other drunken engineers. But the main purpose of the scene is that he meets the Chief Engineer's daughter, Abberlaine Arrol. If Brooke is the devil assigned to keep the narrator's dream going, Abberlaine is clearly one of the chief temptations he has to offer. Orr has had several scenes in the previous chapters, which I haven't commented on (these posts are long already) in which he worries about his lack of libido; in this sequence, Brooke and the other engineers are going to a brothel, and Orr declines. Abberlaine's purpose within the Bridge fantasy seems to be to let the narrator approach the idea of sex within the Bridge. After all, if this is going to be a wish fulfillment, sex is necessary. But the narrator doesn't have real physical drives at the moment (in reality, his body is deeply wounded) and also, sex is something that often makes you more concious of your physical body and is therefore deeply dangerous to the narrator's avoidance of trauma. Orr and Abberlaine have a talk where they discuss whether it's easy to fool yourself or not, and she alludes to a child's creation of fantasy worlds.

Abberlaine's brother throws a pitcher behind him, and it shatters, just as Zakalwe does at the beginning of *Use of Weapons*. I think Banks had actually written most of *UoW* at this time. What does Abberlaine Arrol's name mean? Does anyone have a better idea of the UK context? At first "Arrol" reminded me of an amusing scene from Moorcock's *_The Runestaff_*, where the beast

lords of Granbretan have all of their ships named after their ancient gods, "Chirshil, the Howling God; Bjirn Adass, the Singing God, [...] and Aral Vilsn, the Roaring God, the Supreme God ..." It took me a while to realize that Aral Vilsn was Harold Wilson, and that this was a list of British politicians. Anyways, I vaguely remember a place in the UK called Abbey Lane in connection with the Beatles.

Anyways, back to the chapter. Orr can't figure out why the engineers wanted him to bring a hat, but one of them throws up into it, and he figures that may be why he wanted it in the first place. Orr's next appointment with his therapist is cancelled. He visits an art gallery where artists keep depicting the Bridge as a damaged human form or human tissue; surely this is striking too close for comfort. Orr goes home, turns on the TV, and waits for a new message, but quickly loses his nerve and turns the TV off when he sees the nurse coming to give another injection.

Metaphormosis: Four

In this dream the narrator is a sword-and-sorcery style swordsman, and the whole thing is written phonetically, in Scots-accented English, in a very similar style to *Feersum Endjin*. The swordsman tells about how he got a familiar (from a magician that he killed) that the swordsman can't get off his shoulder, even though it annoys him that the familiar keeps talking in highly intellectual English that he can barely understand. The familiar has been teaching the swordsman new words, though, and the swordsman says he's done all right since he got it -- not surprising, since later on in the dream the swordsman will more than once be stuck somewhere, the familiar will tell him what to do to keep going, and the swordsman will do whatever the familiar said as if it was his own idea, without acknowledging that he understood. You quickly get the idea that there is some mind vs body symbolism going on. Both the familiar and the swordman are very good at what they do; both share a casual attitude towards killing people.

In one of his first passages, the familiar says that the tower symbolizes retreat, the limitation of contact with the real world. Naturally the next scene has the swordsman fighting his way into a tower inhabited by a queen with magic powers. The familiar mentions that they are high enough for oxygen deprivation; yet another reference to a scene used later in *Feersum Endjin*.

(Parenthetically, I wonder if there is some general attraction for sword-and-sorcery heroes among anarchists? Bob Black, a well-known U.S. anarchist, wrote an appreciation of Conan as a sort of anarchist ideal.)

They run into a harem room full of mutilated women -- all their limbs have been cut off -- tied down, some crying, clearly sex objects in the worst imaginable sense of that phrase. There are a number of old men there; the familiar questions them and then tells the swordsman to kill them. Later we find that these were actually young priests; the vampiric queen keeps the mutilated women there to excite them, then she "milks" them, a process that ages them quickly. I really haven't yet figured out the point of the dream

blaming this version of twisted male sexuality on a dominating woman, but maybe it's part of the narrator's defense mechanism.

The final dream scene has the familiar facing the queen; the swordsman has been paralyzed by her magic, but she and the familiar are clearly old enemies and start fighting. The queen has a some kind of grenade-like ball that heats red hot and then explodes, taking the top off the tower, by then the swordsman is long gone, having seized the chance to get away from the familiar. Disappointed that he didn't find any gold, the swordsman rapes the mutilated women on the way out.

Orr wakes up and is promptly seized with guilt and self-disgust, because he was the swordsman in the dream, he lusted after the mutilated woman and raped them. Actually, he says that to the barbarian it meant nothing, but he, Orr, wanted the woman, actually created them. "My God, better a lack of all desire than one excited by mutilation, helplessness, and rape."

The narrator is at an especially difficult point. It appears that he's actually started dreaming, when he would normally wake up, he returns to the Bridge construct. He's wanted to revive his libido, sure, but now his unconsciousness is telling him that it wants something different than he thinks he should want, he really wants is a sadistic power fantasy. But he's far too guilty about it to just indulge himself and tell himself that it's not real anyway. What's the use of being the Demiurge and creator of whatever you like if you're disgusted by what you like?

Fascination with power in sexuality is a common theme with Banks. It drives a lot of the emotional action in *Player of Games*, where Gurgeh grows out of it, in *Excession*, where Dajiel and Byr-Hofoen have a sexual power struggle, in *Use of Weapons*, where the main character has sex just to hurt someone else, in *Inversions*, where the female characters are seemingly written mainly to pander to it.

Anyways, Orr gets his next appointment with his therapist, and determines to lie about his dreams. In a classic nightmarish embarrassing scene, he keeps telling Dr. Joyce about innocuous dreams that he invented, but Dr. Joyce keeps hearing him tell about the real dreams he had. Joyce asks him if he identified with the man whipping the water in the first dream, and what it meant that the man whipping the waves seemed real, and that the narrator was apparently the unreal person and had no shadow. For the second dream, the doctor asks what the dialect signifies, and whether it was a wet dream. Orr says no.

What does the dialect signify? I'd guess that it means that the narrator is really Scottish, but his fantasy image, Orr, is not; he's not comfortable with his ethnicity, probably because of class connotations.

After hearing Orr's dreams, Dr. Joyce says they're ready for the next stage of treatment, hypnosis. Dream analysis won't get them closer, according to the doctor, because if you regard the human mind as a castle, then all that they've

been doing for the last few sessions is going on a tour of the curtain wall. Orr is really uneasy about hypnosis and puts it off.

Orr goes on a walk and meets Abberlaine Arrol. They flirt and go on a fast rickshaw ride. Suddenly, their rickshaw crashes; Orr gets hit on the head and goes unconscious. He's had another crash on the bridge, even in his internal world.

When he wakes, he hears aircraft engines. It seems important to him to hear which direction they are flying in, but he can't.

Why is the direction important? Well, in the last flyby the signalling airplanes flew from the direction of the Kingdom to the direction of the City. Assuming that the Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e. death, and the City is the City of Man, life, that means that the narrator is getting better. Probably what happened this time is that he had a sudden medical problem that knocked him out, or perhaps an operation, and now he's trying to sense whether he's getting better or slipping away. That interpretation is supported a bit later in the scene; Arrol is kneeling next to Orr, and his internal monologue goes "I thought there were other people crowded around me, but there are none, just her." The shock has caused him to momentarily sense the medical personnel crowded around his bed.

Arrol promises to get back in touch with him, he lends her a handkerchief for her bleeding nose, and she leaves. In the last scene, he returns home to find that the hat that the engineer threw up in has been cleaned and returned, good as new. He throws it off the balcony.

If anyone can figure out some symbolism inherent in him lending out one piece of clothing and getting another returned, feel free. Maybe him throwing away the hat means that he's going to approach the Bridge as less of an intellectual experience? The bartender at a place where he stays after the accident says about Arrol; "God must have sneezed when he blew the life into that one." Since the narrator is effectively God in this place -- he created Abberlaine Arrol, anyway -- that clearly has something to do with him lending her the handkerchief.

Triassic

This chapter seems as good a place as any to bring up one of Bank's strengths: formal structure. The chapters are patterned Coma, Metamorphosis (4 parts), Triassic, Metamorphosis (4 parts), Eocene, Metamorphosis (4 parts), Coda. By this chapter it's clear that the four separating chapters are about the narrator's real life and that the "meta" chapters are about the Bridge, with the beginning of each "meta" chapter a narrator's dream within the Bridge.

So this chapter starts with an internal monologue of the narrator, in stream-of-consciousness as was the Coma chapter. The narrator acknowledges that he's creating The Bridge, that it's all inside his mind, and complains that the lights, tubes, and being turned over disturbs his concentration. He introduces "a

friend from wayback" -- i.e. his previous self -- and the "ghost capital" location is introduced insistently just as "the dark station" was at the end of the Coda.

The rest is a realistically told story of an ordinary person's past life, leading up to University. He's the youngest of his family, his dad's working class, and he's a little ashamed of him although he likes him too, his mom's a cipher. Edinburgh is his big city (hence "ghost capital", it was a capital once). He's taking courses in Geology (so that's why Brooke can know so much about rock layers) but he writes poems and song lyrics too. This is in the late 60's.

And he meets Andrea Cramond. She's beautiful, countercultural, and upper-class. He gets his first date with her when she's walking in a crowd without looking around her, and he purposefully bumps into her -- on a bridge. They start sleeping together, though she occasionally sleeps with other people as well, and he's jealous though he doesn't want to be.

He tries to find a class consciousness that he's satisfied with. His parents view he thought was too limited, Andrea's family too pretentious or self-satisfied. So he becomes a middle-class technocrat. He's the kind of annoying atheist who thinks that people who are interested in religion or mysticism, just for the fun of it and not really believing, are worse than actual believers.

He wants to show her the "three, long red summits of the Forth Bridge", but they never see it on their trip to her parent's second house. He habitually drives too fast.

So how much of this is Banks' real life story? I've wondered just how much of this is thinly reworked autobiography. It has that feel to it.

I'm going to write a few words about a subject that has interested me, the limitations of dreams. When Brooke, earlier in the book, started spouting details about rock layers, I was wondering how the narrator could produce that within his dream. I find that in my own dreams, I don't have the memory or creativity to come up with certain details like that on the fly. For instance, whenever I read a book in dreams, that's usually the end of the dream, because my unconscious can't produce real writing on the spur of the moment. Therefore I can't read the book and I realize that it's a dream, or at least feel a sense of annoyance that leads to the dream ending soon. That's why I don't generally think that it's possible to create a real dream world the way that the narrator in this book has done, at least for most people. (Dr. Joyce tells Orr that he has exceptionally vivid and coherent dreams, and he's certainly right.) Detection of dreams is fairly easy, if you become a bit more conscious within a dream; whatever part of you is producing the dream can't reproduce the details of reality. It's unsatisfying because it brings up the limitations of the unconscious, something that you don't normally think of as limited.

Metamorpheus: One

This one starts with Orr not sure if he remembers his dream last night -- other than that he knows it's all a dream, isn't everything? The Bridge has changed;

there are now barrage balloons tethered along to keep the planes from flying by. Orr gets a message from Arrol inviting him to a date, maybe the barrage balloons (i.e. his increased resistance to messages from reality) are due to him looking forward to his date within The Bridge. Orr sends a letter to Dr. Joyce rejecting hypnosis, further signalling his wish to preserve The Bridge.

But there's resistance to him cutting off all messages as well, or maybe he just can't. Repairmen arrive to fix his TV and phone, but they can't get in because his door mysteriously jams shut. By the time another repairman gets it open, the first two have left. His TV and phone are stubbornly going to continue to transmit his hospital view. By the way, the phone is fairly obvious -- he just hears the beeps -- but it wasn't clear, when I thought about it, how he was getting the TV picture, since he can't really see himself. Then I thought that he must have a mirror hanging in his room and his eyes slightly open. The view in the mirror becomes the picture in the TV.

On the way to the date, Orr sees that the balloons are only on the down-river side of the Bridge, not the up-river side. He's the only one astounded by the up-river view; everyone else goggles at the down-river one. I have no idea what the significance is of the balloons being missing from the up-river side.

Orr meets Arrol for their date; she is painting a picture using railway equipment as her subject. She chooses an engine hoist; this recalls a scene from Triassic where the narrator describes seeing a locomotive engine being tested as a young child, and how this feeling of power impressed him that anything was possible with "work and sense and matter" -- in other words, his early, defining religious experience. She paints the railway yard as a jungle, one engine has become a monstrous lizard and is chasing a terrified man -- it's the reverse of his early experience. He doesn't like it until she gives the painting to him. In addition, she gives his handkerchief back, cleaned and newly monogrammed with an O.

They discuss the Bridge a little more; it has farming sections and universities, in other words it's completely self-sufficient. Orr had originally thought that to get food the Bridge residents must trade with the land somehow, now he's starting to think that it could be a big closed circle in the ocean whose curvature is too small to see. She leaves, and he's fascinated by a glimpse he gets of her leg in fishnet stockings. He even indulges in a bit of symbolic word-play/analysis of the type I'm doing here, "Fishnet, indeed; I am netted again."

Orr drinks with Brooke again, Brooke supports Orr's decision against hypnosis. Then the planes show up again; they easily avoid the balloons and leave more signals. This time they are flying towards the Kingdom. I suppose that's because the narrator's increasing interest in his dream makes it less likely that he will wake up.

And at the end of the chapter, Orr talks to a journalist and the journalist tells him that the messages are in Braille, but that it's nonsense even when you decipher it. Orr is "dumbfounded".

Why Braille? Braille is the most appropriate language for the signals because it is completely tactile. The signals are coming from the narrator's body, which he can only feel -- he can't examine it in any other way -- thus a tactile signal.

That symbolism aside, it isn't really Braille. On pg. 31 of my edition, the text clearly states that the signals are in "three-by-three grids, carefully spaced." Braille is in 2 x 3 grids. As I pointed out before, Marain, the language of the Culture, is in 3 x 3 grids (from a scene in *Excession*). So the reason the authorities in the Bridge think the Braille message is nonsense is because they are reading it in the wrong language. Of course, you don't need to think of Marain to have this element work within the story. It makes perfect sense as nonsense Braille, both in terms of plot and symbolically. I'd guess that Banks left the 3 x 3 grid part in as an in-joke, perhaps for his friends that he had been showing his Culture material to.

Metamorpheus: Two

The dream this time has the narrator standing on a moor, near a canal. As a train approaches he sees that he's standing between the train tracks. No matter which way he runs the tracks move so that he's still between them. At the last minute he jumps in the canal, the train vanishes, and he finds he can breathe. He settles to the moss-covered floor of the canal and finds that there are train tracks that the moss has grown over; the tracks fill the whole tunnel. Finally, he hears the train start to approach again.

This dream is about escape -- back to the womb or birth canal, symbolically, just as the narrator has created a dream world in which seemingly nothing can really hurt him. Yet he can't escape; the knowledge of the crash (i.e. mortality) pursues him even there.

When he wakes, he wonders if he should take down Arrol's picture; he's disturbed by the dream and her picture did involve a man being pursued by a train. He takes a warm bath and falls asleep, suddenly waking up feeling cold, terrified, "that I was trapped in some constricting tunnel: the bath a tunnel-canal [...]" This is a reenactment of birth trauma; first he's in a warm bath, then he's stuck in a canal. He's worried that waking from *The Bridge* into his damaged body will be just as traumatic as being born. And it would be like being reborn into the world in a certain sense.

Here is where Orr actually speculates that *The Bridge* may run all the way around the world and meet itself, a closed loop; I had incorrectly mentioned that for the last chapter. Orr sets out to find the Third City Library again. On the way he sees that they are attaching additional barrage ballons to the trawlers that anchor them. He finds the great round window that marks the corridor that the elevator to it used to be in. Dr. Joyce's patient who never stops window-washing is washing it from outside. Orr looks outside and sees that a trawler has been attached to three ballons and is not floating up through the air towards them. Orr breaks a pane of glass and warns the window-washer just in time; the guy ducks as the trawler comes smashing through

then window, then continues to float upwards. The window-washer goes by to cleaning after bandaging his glass cuts; Orr gives up on looking for the library again.

I should point out that this scene has a lot of sexual imagery in the description and word choice. Orr comes to the familiar corridor; it's damp, the carpet squelches with each footfall, and it has a huge round window at the end of it -- i.e. he's in the birth canal. The window-washer is "Dr. Joyce's patient who refuses to leave the cradle." The trawler floats towards The Bridge, "rising as it nears". Orr breaks the glass with the knob on the tip of his stick, then the trawler crunches into the center of the great round window, making a terrible groaning, screaming sound as the structure shakes. The "barnacles and fragments of the shattered panes fall together onto the carpet, beating at the broad leaves of the nearby pot-plants like some hard, fierce rain. Then, incredibly, it is gone."

I'm not sure what to make of this, frankly. Orr is definitely also "Dr. Joyce's patient who refuses to leave the cradle", i.e. refuses to wake up from his dream. Now a giant metaphorical penis is breaking in -- similar to the train in the canal, now that I think of it. Is Orr worried that the existence of sex in his dream is going to inevitably destroy it? Or is this supposed to be some strange variant of birth anxiety, or of the narrator's anxiety about the aggressive aspects of sex?

If someone else wants to read this scene, and give their own opinion, that would be useful. I think that Banks tends to write male characters who are worried about sex in certain way (for instance, Zakalwe in *Use of Weapons* can't help but think of each sex act, no matter how loving, as an attack.)

Metamorpheus: Three

The narrator dreams that he's on another bridge, he doesn't know where, because he did something wrong. This bridge goes a small river, but it's actually the top quarter of a giant hollow iron wheel that rotates as the narrator walks, so that he can never reach either bank of the river. He can't swim the river because there are carnivorous fish in it. In short, he's trapped. On one bank, there are pavilions and wagons with a number of ladies living in them; they put trays of food on the bridge for the narrator every now and then. They are young and beautiful, and do everything possible to excite the narrator; call to him, undress, make love to each other, occasionally have full orgies with men who come running out of the forest. But the narrator can never reach them. He's tormented by lust, anger, jealousy and so on. He "recall[s] that witches cannot cross water."

It's interesting to note at this point that jealousy has been mentioned exactly once before in the book that I can remember; the part set in the real world where the narrator is jealous of his girlfriend Andrea sleeping with other people. This is also the second time that the concept "woman with control over sex = witch" has shown up; the last time was with the queen in the barbarian dream.

One day the mist clears and the narrator sees that the river goes on forever, and along it are spaced an infinite number of bridges with men in them and ladies on the shore, just like his situation. The man downstream looks at him, runs a little on his bridge, then jumps in the water and is eaten by the fish. The narrator decides to run and run until he dies; his ladies watch, sad-eyed but "somehow resigned, as if they have seen this all before". They start crying, but he's happy, "They are caught, trapped, transfixed, heads bowed; but I am free."

Here we start to get to the reason why the narrator crashed his car in the first place. We don't know much about that yet in the course of the story, just that he thinks it's his fault, and that he likes to drive too fast. But in this dream the narrator says "I am the keystone of the bridge" and this chapter is in the center of the book both by chapter count and page count. So this dream is the key to why the whole thing is taking place. To explain why, I'd have to use information I know from reading the book once before; at this point the reader is only supposed to suspect why. So I'll just leave it at that for now and come back to this later.

Orr wakes up in *The Bridge*, screaming, believing he's encased in ice (he is, he's in a coma). But the scream isn't his own, it's the "sheet metal works"; metaphorically he can't even scream. He finds out he's going to be on half allowance for a month till he pays off what he owes for the handkerchief and the hat. Maybe that's why people on *The Bridge* are so careful to return soiled clothes that they borrow, it's all a relatively closed system. Orr gets a new doctor, and gets to see what kind of great medical care the poor get; the doctor is overworked, undersupplied, and can't do anything for him until he's reviewed the case. Lynch gives Orr a forwarded letter from Arrol inviting him to a date. He calls her and tells her what happened, expecting her not to want to see him anymore because of their now divergent "places in society". But she asks to help him, oh joy. Of course we've seen a relationship between a lower-class guy and an upper-class woman in this story once before; the narrator and Andrea.

She arrives and gives him her brother's cast-off clothes; when he changes clothes and comes out she's actually getting along with Lynch and telling him - a dirty joke! Why, what a regular gal she is. Maybe it's because I'm an American, and we don't have the same feel for social class, but this seems faintly ridiculous. Are Orr's class fantasies supposed to be typical? I mean, here the narrator has created a lower-class guy who is nothing more than a stereotyped cipher, whose only purpose is to show what a great person his girlfriend is when she treats him "like a normal person" -- actually, in a rather condescending way. Does she really tell dirty jokes to many of the upper-class men that she meets casually for the first time?

Arrol asks Orr which is more important, regaining his social position, or getting back his lost memories. He says that having lost his memories is like having a sealed, forgotten chamber, she's says that it sounds like a tomb, and if he's afraid of what he'll find, he says "It's a library; only the stupid and the evil are

afraid of those." The narrator is obviously afraid of the library, he causes a disaster to happen whenever he gets close to it. So which is the narrator supposed to be, stupid or evil? We know he's not stupid, since he has the ability to make this incredibly detailed internal fantasy, so by his own standards he must be evil. He does think that the accident was his fault, ergo in some sense he wanted something like this to happen, so we can start to see why this judgment of himself is implied.

At this point the planes come flying by again, the lights go out, apparently turned off by the people who run the Bridge so that the planes can't be seen. They are flying from the direction of the City. That, according to our previously worked out symbol set, is a sign that the narrator is slipping deeper into coma/fantasy, perhaps because he's now even more interested in Arrol. Joyce set him up to be lowered in social class, for the purpose of disenchanting him with The Bridge, now Arrol (who Brooke introduced him to, remember) is re-enchanting him again. The smoke from the planes is just detectable as a smell "blown through the structural grammar of the bridge, like criticism."

Arrol sets him up in a disused apartment that her father owns but never uses. He's now the equivalent of a "kept woman". To reinforce this, Arrol needs something to reach the light switch with, and asks him to give her his stick. Orr says that she's being very kind, but the basic structure of the fantasy remains whether he's conscious of it or not. And that basic structure seems designed to give him unconscious cause to feel that she is controlling him.

Metamorpheus: Four or A Scottish Barbarian Trashes the Greek Underworld

The dream at the start of this chapter features the barbarian again. This time he's looking for Sleeping Beauty. "I luv the ded", an old man tells him when he asks where Sleeping Beauty is, and the barbarian, thinking that the guy is telling him that he's a necrophiliac, gets annoyed and slits his throat. The guy clarifies that he meant Isle of the Dead before dying. A lot of this dream is like that; violent and funny. Anyways the barbarian also has a lot of anachronistic equipment and makes jokes about modern-day things, so he's getting further away from the fairly straightforward sword-and-sorcery barbarian he was in the first dream.

One of the things he has is a knife missile. Yes, a Culture-style knife missile, though later it's called a cheap copy, though it is from the future. Plus it sings these little puzzle-poems that spell out names of things; it's first one, about itself, spells out "dagger", though the barbarian, who spells phonetically, thinks its spelling is wrong and that it means daggir. A witch gave it to him; he mentions how great witches are in bed too.

Anyways the barbarian gets a sorceror to conjure him to the Underworld and he proceeds to wipe out most of the well-known entities there. He didn't run into Tantalus, which is too bad, I would have thought that that encounter would have potential. Anyways, a quick rundown of the damage follows.

Sisyphus: escaped from his eternal doom. The barbarian helps him roll his stone to the top of the hill in return for directions on how to cross the river, and Sisyphus wedges the stone there before pointing toward Charon and delightedly running off.

Promethius: killed by liver cancer. The barbarian tries to ask him for directions, only gets Greek, and kills the eagle when it attacks him. P.'s liver is apparently used to completely regenerating every few minutes, and the eagle is no longer tearing it out and eating it, so when the barbarian passes Promethius on the way back he's dead with his liver burst out.

Charon: killed by petrification. Charon asks for Cerberus' head as the price of the barbarian's passage, the barbarian says sure but loses the head and brings back Medusa's as the nearest substitute. Hey, will this one do? he asks as Charon turns to stone and smashes through the bottom of the ferry. The barbarian has to swim the Styx to get back.

The knife missile starts to make a poem spelling out the name of Charon and each of the next two entities as the barbarian meets them, but the barbarian always shuts it up before it finishes.

Cerberus: killed by impact. The barbarian cuts off one of Cerberus' three heads to give to Charon, but the head starts growing back. (I've never heard of Cerberus having this ability, only the Hydra.) So the barbarian tells Cerberus to fetch the stick and throws the knife missile over a cliff, Cerberus tries to get it; splat. The extra head rolls over the cliff too so the barbarian is pissed.

Medusa: killed by knife missile. The barbarian bashes his head on a doorway, gets blood in his eyes and can't see much, and realizes that the knife missile is still around when it starts rhyming again. He throws it and that's it for Medusa.

So the barbarian finally finds Sleeping Beauty's chamber, expecting to wake her up with something more than a kiss. (The original Sleeping Beauty story actually had Sleeping Beauty raped by the Prince; she wakes up when one of the children she's given birth to from the rape tries to suckle and accidentally sucks out the poisoned needle that's keeping her asleep. The old European stories were expurgated considerably when they were written down in their current form as "fairy tales".) But it's not Sleeping Beauty, it's the guy in the hospital bed.

Andrea appears on a TV screen in the wall and tells the barbarian not to kill the guy on the bed "Because he will become you; you will kill yourself and he will live again, in your body." Andrea warns him not to look at the Medusa's face and tries to tell him not to take something, but gets cut off by static. So the barbarian takes a gold frog statue sitting nearby and leaves. And as soon as he gets across the Styx (drinking some of the water, too), the gold frog turns into the familiar, who has called the barbarian there with Sleeping Beauty dream-telepathy to rescue it. The familiar makes a few remarks about

the rocks looking metamorphic, not igneous, jokes about the barbarian being Orpheus, and that's it.

So what does all this mean? Most is pretty good comedy, but the last two paragraphs above have lots of extra symbolic meaning. The narrator is Sleeping Beauty; he's in a coma, waiting for his beloved (Andrea) to kiss him so that he'll wake up. We already started to get the idea that this whole crash thing involved her in some way. Anyways, he's waiting for her affection before he'll make the effort to rouse himself.

The bit about the barbarian killing himself and the narrator living again in his body suggests one of those near Eastern death-rebirth myths where the god is killed and reborn each year as a symbol of the harvest. At any rate I already had the barbarian figured to represent the narrator's body, as well as his class background, so this fits. Andrea's comment is still a bit confused, but maybe I'll come back to it later. It seems significant that Andrea was (probably) trying to tell him not to take the familiar back. Why? The familiar is education, in a sense -- after all it knows about rocks, just as the narrator does from his Geology courses. If the barbarian is Orpheus, then the familiar is Eurydice, and Eurydice is dead after all.

The bit about the rock in the Greek Underworld looking metamorphic, not igneous, is probably a joke about the anachronisms and so on -- the place is composed of reworked, not original, material.

(Intermission)

This part of the book is particularly densely grained. As is common in Banks' better works, there are sections where each sentence means something else in addition to its obvious meaning. At this point I really should step back and go over what I'm doing by writing this and why it's taking so long.

What kinds of books does Banks write? One answer might be that he writes the kinds of books that it's possible to write lots of critical study about. Unless you want to descend into the uttermost depths of postmodernism, where anything can mean anything, and you can write at book length on, say, any issue of Spider-man, it's necessary that such a book have a lot of complexity in it. But what kind of complexity? They are not books like Joyce's *Ulysses*, which make manifold references to other literature. They aren't like Tolstoy's longer works, where a lot of the complexity has to do with length of plot and number of characters (at least, Banks' *good* books aren't like that; *Excession* might qualify). They aren't brilliant philosophical pieces, and they certainly aren't books that capture every nuance and feeling of ordinary life. Their complexity consists of having a multitude of *internal* references.

Banks creates a symbology, keeps coming back to various parts of it at different points in the book, and produces a complicated structure, where he can finally say a whole lot with a few words, because those words have already been given multiple symbolic meanings. If his books weren't grounded in concern with the human condition, they would merely be puzzles, though

rather good ones. Sometimes he achieves a sort of triple layered cake effect; most readers appear to read them as simple adventure stories, many realize that there are puzzles going on underneath that aren't strictly required in order to grasp the high points of the adventure, and get interested in the puzzles, and a few try to interpret those puzzles as part of literature.

For example, take the familiar's remark about the rocks looking metamorphic, not igneous. Is he just showing off his erudition and annoying the barbarian? That's the obvious meaning. Does it have something to do with the differences between metamorphic and igneous rocks -- in other words that metamorphic rocks are igneous rocks that have been melted and changed, and that this is really a joking description of Banks' reuse of Greek myth in the Underworld scene? That's the puzzle meaning. There would normally be no other particular symbolic meaning attached to these words. But Banks has already referred to geology twice; once when Brooke said that there was enough just in the Bridge to keep people interested without going outside it, and talked about the rock layers supporting it, and once when we hear that the narrator went to university and studied geology. Banks has already created a host of symbolic meanings for "geology", so that his later sentences can evoke them all in just a few words.

These kind of often-used symbols range from simple images like "red on the bridge" to heavily overloaded words like "witch", which start to take on connotations of all of the narrator's various sexual fears. Plus there are entire sequences, like the chapter in *Use of Weapons* where Zakalwe tries to write poetry, or like many of the dream sequences in this book, where nearly every sentence has a coherent second meaning, producing both an obvious and a hidden narrative. Making some sense out of these things, in a way that says something important about the human condition, is what I take to be the goal of literary criticism of Banks.

Now, are these meanings arbitrary? There is every indication that Banks is putting them in there on purpose, or at the very least, that his unconscious is putting them in there on purpose. If someone wants to argue that, we can discuss individual cases, but otherwise I'll just say that while most authors' works have multiple symbolic meanings that are more or less created by the reader's history, Banks' are to a great degree implicit in the writing. There is an esthetic theory that holds that an attempt to force a single emotion in the reader is kitsch. I don't think that this is true when a more-or-less single symbolic meaning is implied, which the reader can then associate with a range of emotions. But maybe this is one of the reasons, besides genre, why Banks doesn't seem to have a big critical following. Or it could be just that my own critical sense is impaired and that I should be spending my time with better authors. But Banks combines some literary quality with at least some "ideas", whether political or social, that make his works more attractive to me than yet another great American novel of street life. And he's simply a good writer of fantasy, of which there are few.

So why is this taking so long? Well, to have any hope of pointing out some of the meanings of a work like *The Bridge*, I have to dig down to at least the

puzzle level. That means that in certain parts of the work, each sentence can be described with another sentence. And when Banks starts really using internal references, each sentence might need a paragraph or two. You could easily end up with a critical study as long as the original book. Which is silly, of course; maybe I should have re-read *Pale Fire* before this as a cautionary tale.

But this isn't a critical study, because it isn't carefully summarized, with the important parts picked out. It's a set of notes, written as I read, from a personal perspective. And because of the low-culture Usenet convention that an explanation of what happens is a "spoiler", as well as because explanations of puzzles can be spoilers for those who want to find the solutions themselves, it's a marathon of spoilers, a spoil-o-thon. It could be turned into a critical study if I cared to re-read the whole thing afterwards and re-write it, which I am most likely never going to do -- but the next guy that posts here for the first time looking for someone to help him do his homework is going to get pointed to this thread. After which I will sit back and laugh. The next post will return to *The Bridge*.

One last mention of the barbarian dream: at its beginning, the barbarian mentions how magic has grown much more common, but that people will still need non-magicians to do ordinary things like building houses or planting seeds. He figures that magic can't be all it's cracked up to be, or that everything would be wonderful and all the folk would live in harmony, and they wouldn't need people like him (plus it'd be boring). This is basically another Culture reference. It also reinforces that the barbarian represents the lower class, and hints again at his death later.

Orr wakes up and looks outside "It was early spring when I was washed up here; now the summer is almost over." Yes, it is, as we'll find out by the end of the chapter. He looks for the library again and can't find it. I think that not being able to find the library is a clearer representation of what may be actually organic damage causing the narrator to lose his memory; having a disaster occur as the library was about to be found always struck me more as an expression of the narrator not wanting to find it. Orr finds a man hitting golf balls near the top of the bridge, and doesn't recognize what the game is, so perhaps the narrator's memory really is damaged to some extent.

Orr sleeps again and has a quick run-through of his recent dream images: being chased by trains into tunnels, being chained to the wall of the Greek Underworld as the barbarian lopes by, running on the revolving iron bridge.

Arrol comes by again; Orr asks where she disappeared to yesterday, but she's unconcerned. She's been at a party. She quickly takes steps to seduce Orr; getting wine, showing off her dress, starting a fire, etc. Her lipstick is smudged and he uses the handkerchief that she had monogrammed to wipe it. That precipitates them kissing each other. After a bit of feeling each other, she tells Orr that she didn't think he would be so passionate; a remark that doesn't seem intended to be ironic, but which is, from someone who has initiated each stage of contact.

They have sex. She's still wearing stockings, a corset, gloves, all sorts of strapped and ribbed silk things. He thinks of the barbarian's tower, where some of the mutilated women were wearing similar things. The straps form lots of X's, which remind him of the structure of The Bridge. She's on top. They both climax, but his is almost negligible, a "brief beat", and his first self-description afterwards is "I ache. I am exhausted." This is hardly great fantasy sex, it seems to me, it sounds more like he's had to get more in contact with the true state of his body. He says that he feels like he's just had sex with the bridge, and in a way it's true; no-one else is involved except part of his fantasy world.

They have sex again, and again though everything seems to ostensibly go well, the narrator feels horrible. A few sentences: "Its climax chills me though; something makes it worse than joyless, makes it frightening, terrifying." "My orgasm is nothing, a detail from the glands [...]" Orr feels a gripping, a pressure, as though he's the body to be dressed, strapped, enfolded, etc. It sends a memory crashing through him:

"Ancient and fresh, livid and rotten at once; the hope and fear of release and capture, of animal and machine and meshing structures; a start and an end. Trapped. Crushed. Little death, and that release. The girl holds me, like a cage."

OK, we already know that the narrator does not exactly have a happy sexual life. But what's all this? Well, first, the narrator is flashing back to the car crash. In the description of the car crash in the first chapter, he describes how he's squeezed inside the crushed metal, trapped in a definite meshing of animal and machine. Second, his sexual fantasy just isn't working, his real body is just too trashed. Third, there's the interesting reversal of his clothes/bondage fetish from his partner to himself -- after all he really is the one who needs to be dressed and strapped to things in the hospital.

But mostly you get the feeling that this is part of what he feels about sex all the time. He really seems to fear sex because he feels that it will give his partner control over him.

If you want my opinion -- and you do, I would guess, because you've read this far -- one of the reasons he's messed up is because his leftist ideology tells him that jealousy is a result of his cultural programming, and one that he should reject. From Triassic: "he was appalled to find himself jealous when Andrea slept with somebody else, and cursed the upbringing that had told and retold him that a man should be jealous, and a woman had no right to screw around but a man did." Well, he's right about different standards for men and women being wrong. But jealousy is a lot older than our culture. It's like blaming capitalism for the existence of anger, or patriarchy for the existence of sorrow.

Jealousy is actually a highly functional emotion. Who you sleep with generally has a pretty good correlation with who you spend time with and who you

spend resources on. Relationships tend to hold together longer when the people involved are jealous, and don't want to hurt the other person by doing something that would give them good reason to be jealous. Let's even ignore all the economic/sociobiological stuff and imagine a relationship in the Culture. What is the most precious thing to a 200 year old resident of the Culture (male, let's say)? He has no possessions or need of any. No health problems, no mortality problems, no need to work or accomplish anything. In fact the most valuable thing that he has is his 100 year relationship with someone else. Shared experience is the one thing that can't be replaced. Sure, his partner may leave for months at a time, may sleep with other people, but what if they get interested enough in someone else so that they don't spend real time with him? You bet there will be jealousy, blazing jealousy, because the other person is doing things that are threatening what could be the only real value in the first person's life.

The narrator in this book is in the same position as our imaginary person in the Culture. He's found a woman (Andrea) who is intelligent, beautiful, uninhibited, etc, and he really likes her. Well, if she leaves, he can't just find someone else, like a replaceable part. You bet he should be jealous. The more she "screws around" as he puts it, the greater the chance that he will be merely one of a number of replaceable people to her. She *is* "holding him, like a cage" because he needs her and she seemingly doesn't need him. So he has power fantasies where he is in complete control, and victimization fantasies where she is a witch with evil power over him.

So. One last thing, "the hope and fear of release and capture". Ostensibly this is just about sex. But remember the end of his dream where he's running on the rotating iron bridge. He decides to run to death, and the witches who have been sexually tormenting him are crying, he is free, they are trapped. We have started to get the idea that maybe that's why he had the car crash, to force her to give him affection again. I'm sure he didn't plan for this to happen, but he's been "released" -- he's free to wander around in a dream world where in theory he can do or be anything -- while she's hopefully been "captured" by guilt.

After sex, Orr brushes Arol's hair, then she takes off, claiming that her family will be expecting her. She'd stay if she could she says, but really, why can't she? It seems more likely that she just stopped in for a quickie and now doesn't want to hang around. Orr reassures her that it's OK that she's leaving, but he would like to say more and can't. He has that fear of being crushed, being trapped, still -- i.e., the fear that if he comes out and tells her that he wants her to stay, he'll be admitting his vulnerability, putting himself in her power.

Once she leaves, Orr sees a TV in the next room, an old library with shelves bare. It's turned on, but blank. Something dark closes over the view, then withdraws, it's a hand. He sees the man on the bed again; a woman moves away from the camera and goes to brush her hair, staring at "what must be a mirror on the wall." A chair has been shifted and the bed is not quite as neat. The woman looks down at the man, then kisses him on the forehead,

smooths some hair away from his brow, and leaves. Orr doesn't get a good look at her face. He turns off the TV, picks up the phone, and the beeps are not quite regular and a bit faster.

It's clear that the woman is Andrea, visiting the narrator in the hospital. The guy in the hospital bed, Sleeping Beauty, has finally gotten his kiss. There is an equivalency between Orr brushing Arrol's hair in the dream and Andrea brushing her hair in reality; was the narrator's fantasized sex with Arrol sparked by Andrea's presence?

I'm still not quite sure of how the hospital room is supposed to be set up. Now at least it's confirmed that there is a mirror in it. But I don't really understand how the view works out.

So what's the next thing that happens after Sleeping Beauty is kissed? Orr walks outside, the bridge shudders, there's another disaster. His legs and chest hurt, he tries to think of Abberlaine to make himself feel better, but it doesn't work. "It was in a haunted apartment; the ghosts of that mindless noise and that nearly unchanging picture were there all the time, a hand's motion away, a switch-turning away, probably even when I first kissed her, even while her four limbs gripped me and I cried out in terror." Note the quick return to all the recently introduced images: the static and unchanging picture of the TV, Andrea's hand, switching off the TV -- all make it obvious that the experience with Abberlaine was indeed false. Orr is dissatisfied with this new "distraction", as well he should be.

Orr tries to remember how the room looks, but sees it in black and white, from up in one corner -- is he seeing the room through one of those corner-placed mirrors that let nurses see around corners as they pass by?

Thinking this, Orr approaches a train wreck. He gets drafted to haul a stretcher. He helps to bring a seriously wounded man to an express train, and has to stay there, gripping a torn piece of skin in the man's neck to compress the wound. The man is "unconscious but still suffering", "reduced to something pathetic and animal in his agony." The doctors bandage the man, and Orr is left on the express train as it leaves. He also sees an injured woman giving birth.

Orr realizes that he can just stay on the train and, perhaps, escape The Bridge. Should he get off the train? He thinks that Joyce, Brooke, and Arrol would want him to. But he feels that all he's doing is playing games. He refers to the "echoing horror" that happened during sex with Arrol ...

He thinks "Here I am in a thing become place..." (the train). He thinks of the train explicitly as a phallic symbol, poised between the limbs of the bridge. He's tempted just to stay on the train and therefore go, "to voyage out bravely leaving the woman at home." "Is a woman a place and a man just a thing?" he wonders. He feels there's something to this idea because he's offended by it. "So what do I represent then, sitting here, inside the train, within the symbol? Good question, I tell myself. Good question."

Well, there is only one thing that's symbolically inside a phallic symbol, and that's sperm. Orr is moving towards a new conception and a second birth, a rebirth, like the injured woman who is the last victim of the disaster that he sees.

Otherwise, note that Orr's symbolism is not quite symmetrical. Women are "a place" and men are "*just* a thing". Is being objectified as a place supposed to be better than being objectified as a thing? This sounds a bit defensive to me; after all, things get to move, to do things, while places just sit there. Places get conquered -- a bit of an expression from *Inversions*, by the way. Orr's symbolism, seemingly denigrating both sexes equally, conceals a lot of wished-for male dominance within it.

Orr rides off. He takes off his hospital identity bracelet, "a little circle of plastic with his name on it", which identifies him as someone who isn't supposed to leave his neighborhood on the bridge. Symbolically, he is leaving his identity as Orr, the man defined by the circular injury on his chest. He feels naked without it.

This is the last part of the novel set on The Bridge. It marks a sea change; the rest may still be set within a dream world, but the surroundings are different. It's worth while to think about the characters on the bridge, who we're never going to see again. What was their point, now that we've seen as much of them as we're ever going to? We've gone over Joyce's and Brooke's purposes; Joyce has seemingly won, since Orr has completed Joyce's rejection of his high status with a rejection of the bridge entirely. Arrol did her best to give Orr a reason to stay, but failed, for the reasons discussed above. The only other named character that I can remember Orr exchanging words with is Lynch. Apparently the narrator really needed a complete lower-class stereotype who is never anything else.

Eocene

This is the separating chapter before the last "meta" group of chapters. It starts with the usual stream-of-consciousness from the narrator. He seems to feel that his body is being moved, he doesn't know where. He defiantly thinks that though they can do anything to his body -- turning him over, repairing bits, etc. -- they can't catch/find/get through to him, because he's in charge, in command, invulnerable. Of course he's wrong, a bit later when he's being moved he's bumped around, and it hurts.

But right after saying he's invulnerable, he starts railing against "a typically dirty piece of underhand undercover unclothed misunderstanding by the evil queen herself." (Andrea, clearly -- who else?) After another double-entendre "how could she stoop so low?" he says she tried to rouse the barbarians against him; a bit later, that she tried to "raise a rebellion." "No chance, of course, but there you go." he assures himself.

What is all this about? Well, it seems likely that Andrea has tried to wake him

up by actually having some kind of sex with him, there in the hospital bed, and that his mind turned this into his fling with Arrol in the dream. A rather unpleasant mental picture, but all the evidence seems to fit -- in the last chapter, the narrator's view of the room is whited out, until Andrea turns the camera back towards him after the end of the Arrol scene (is there an actual camera/monitor directed at his bed? I can see why she'd want to turn it away during that bit), and the chair is moved and, most significantly, the bed is messed up a bit. Thus all the "rousing the barbarians", "raising a revolution" language; she's tried to pull him out of his dream by involving his body directly.

The evil queen in the first barbarian dream survives by appealing to the innermost fantasies of young men and causing lust in them, while the familiar is going to get rid of all of all that. I originally identified the barbarian with the body and the familiar with the mind; it appears that they may be even more specifically the narrator's body and mind -- his mind wants to stay in the dream, and therefore perceives Andrea, who appeals to him physically in the real world, as an enemy. In the second barbarian dream, Andrea, this time as herself, told the barbarian not to kill the narrator, and she appeared to be about to tell him not to bring the familiar with him before she got cut off.

Anyways, he's moved physically, it hurts, and he ends up in a new place. He jokes about how he hears voices and that's an "impregnable defense", then says he's been raped -- in the alternate meaning of the word, of being looted and carried away, ostensibly. But this also refers to what Andrea has done, for he says "I'll stitch her up. No, sorry, that's not funny, but I mean! What a dia-fucking-bollockal liberty, eh?" In the second barbarian dream, the barbarian says that if a kiss will wake Sleeping Beauty up then what he's going to do will make her really lively; Andrea has basically done the same thing. Maybe his fears about being sexually dominated weren't so far off.

The narrator assures himself that it meant nothing to him, or her, probably, then goes on to express what seems like resentment about her being "a woman of letters"; the demanding sentence at the end of the stream-of-consciousness is "she got her degree". Note that this is the first time the repeated, demanding sentence at the end hasn't been a location, first it was "the dark station" then "ghost capitol".

The rest of the chapter continues the story of the narrator's real life. Andrea got an advanced degree. Their relationship becomes long-term and he thinks of asking her to marry him -- but he doesn't want the state or church to be involved, and he admits that she'd say no anyway.

He gets his degree a year later; she has started studying Russian. She gets on well with his parents and he's ashamed of having been ashamed of them.

Then the calamity (from his point of view): she wants to go to Paris for three years to study Russian. He just got a good job in power station design so he doesn't want to go. He feels it difficult to be supportive, but "He was anyway powerless, and she determined." I guess he's starting to discover why people

get married, and why it has nothing to do with the church or the state.

On her last evening there, they go out, she takes him to the Forth railway bridge. "The Tallahatchie Bridge fell down", he tells her, quoting a song. He thinks about the old tradition of people throwing coins from trains going over the bridge -- the same custom that the narrator has created within the dream Bridge. On the way back, she drives on the road bridge, he looks at the railway bridge and sees the long, dotted row of lights on a passenger train, flickering as they pass through the girders of the bridge; they look like "meaningless Morse" to him. I agree with a previous suggestion that these are probably his inspiration for the airplane signals (puffs of smoke) in his dream, and it may explain why the airplanes are completely silvered over (so that they look like trains). It doesn't explain why there would be three of them.

He tells her that the railway bridge takes three years to paint. It's obvious that he's peeved that she's going.

He moves up in his career and starts to buy one car after another, each more expensive than the last. He travels around the world; there's a mention of him being 25. He always finds excuses not to visit Paris, but goes on vacations with Andrea. He knows that she's seeing someone else in Paris and feels jealous. After that, there's the first actual mention of him sleeping with other people -- there's a six month relationship with someone he gets bored with, and he sleeps with an old school pal of Andrea's. (That last is a bit sad.) The girl he stays with for six months is called Nicola; people make jokes about their names, calling them imperialists, and asking when they were going to claim Russia back. That last is undoubtedly a clue towards the narrator's real name, but one I can't be bothered to figure out; feel free to post it anyone who knows it.

His mother dies, and when he tries to call Andrea about it a guy picks up the phone, then when he gets to talk to Andrea she apparently hangs up. He's angry and hurt, he goes to the funeral; stopping by the bridge and thinking that it's the same color as her hair. She meets him as he's leaving the funeral, says that she got cut off and couldn't get back in touch with him, though she tried all sorts of things. He's relieved and grateful, he turns to his father and cries tears "for his mother, for his father, for himself." Though I get the impression that they were mostly for himself; he didn't start crying until finding out that Andrea still loved him after all.

She is staying in France a fourth year; again she asks him why he won't come to Paris. He sleeps in the same room as his father because his father has been sleepwalking and he doesn't want him to hurt himself in his sleep. (Like father, like son I guess.) She tells him that the guy who answered the phone was Gustave, and that he'd like him.

He gets along well with Andrea's father, wondering why when the guys an upper-class conservative, and thinking that it's because neither of them take anything entirely seriously. He now refers to revolutionary socialist orthodoxy as "theological". He starts sleeping with a lot of women and drinking a lot. He

steadily gets richer. Andrea says she's coming back soon but he's doubtful.

Andrea's father dies of a heart attack while driving; he thinks that isn't such a bad way to go as long as you don't hit someone. He goes to the funeral and somehow expects Andrea not to be there, but she's there. He's moved at the oration and thinks that ten years ago he'd have sneered at being moved by words spoken by a minister about an upper-middle class barrister.

(A question for Brits; is Andrea's father really upper-middle class, or upper class? Based on the way he describes her lifestyle, I might have guessed the second. I wonder whether he's supposed to be setting the bar for being upper class higher now that he himself is getting uncomfortably close to it.)

Andrea's mom tells him that he'll be the closest person to Andrea now. He and Andrea go on vacation together and find a big hollow round tower called Penielhaugh; he pushes boulders away from the door and they climb it. At the top they finally talk about her future plans, he asks that if her asked her to marry him, would she say yes. She says that she thinks she wouldn't. She says that she's marry him, if anyone, but it just isn't her. He says that he doesn't suppose it's him either (ha!) but finally gets the courage to tell her openly that he doesn't want to be away from her for so long again. She says that she doesn't think that they'll have to, that she's attached to both Edinburgh and him, but that she'll always need her own place, and that she's easily seduced by other people. They have sex -- again she initiates each stage -- and she gives him a silk scarf to mop up with, because she's having her period. Now we know where the handkerchief in the dream of the Bridge came from.

Finally she asks if he really loves her, he shrugs and says he does, and she says that he's a fool, and that she's fickle and selfish. He says she's generous and independent. The problem is that her stated opinion of herself can be wrong, and his opinion of her can be true, and that their relationship can still be screwed up because of their power imbalance and his reaction to it.

Metamorphosis: Oligocene

In the third and last "meta" section of the book, the chapters are labeled with geologic era names instead of with a simple One, Two, Three, Four. So this seems like the best time for a disquisition on the chapter names.

Metaphormosis, the first section, is mainly concerned with the extended metaphor of The Bridge. Metamorpheus, the second section, is named after Morpheus the Greek god of dreams. In this section, Metamorphosis, the narrator will finally change.

The first and last chapters are Coma (the starting car crash) and Coda (the passage at the end of a composition that brings it to a formal close); those have obvious enough meanings. The remaining chapter names are all geologic periods of time: Triassic and Eocene are the first two separating chapters; the four chapters within Metamorphosis are Oligocene, Miocene,

Pliocene, and Quaternary. So why these names?

The geologic time scale is hierarchically broken up into the following divisions of time: eon, era, period, epoch, age. The Triassic Period was the time between 245 to 208 million years ago (henceforth "mya") when the dinosaurs evolved; it's the first of three periods in the Mesozoic Era, the "age of the dinosaurs". From this you might expect the next separating chapter, Eocene, to also be a period, but it's not: it's an epoch -- the second of six epochs in the Cenozoic era. It extends from 54 to 38 mya.

So, let's say that Banks wanted to symbolize changes in the narrator with changes in geologic era. Triassic begins the age of the dinosaurs, that's fine. But why Eocene rather than, say, Tertiary, the first period of the Cenozoic Era, or Paleocene, its first epoch? It may just be because of the sound and other connotations of the names. But the Eocene is the first geologic period when fossils of all the major orders of modern mammals are found (specifically, it's named after horses). If Banks wanted to go from dinosaurs to mammals it's not a bad choice, since the first primitive mammals were actually found in the age of the dinosaurs, which would get confusing.

The first three sub-chapters of *Metamorphosis*, Oligocene (38 to 23 mya), Miocene (23 to 5 mya), and Pliocene (5 to 1.8 mya), are the next three epochs after the Eocene. That makes sense; Banks wants to make his chapters go forwards in time, and though he could have used the names of ages -- the last smaller division of time than epochs -- most of them have odd-sounding names, like Rupalian or Messinian, that would not be recognizable to people as the names of geologic time periods. So Banks has to use these three names if he wants three more names after Eocene; they are the only ones available. The last of the sub-chapters, Quaternary (1.8 mya to 11,000 years ago), is the name of a period, not an epoch. Why did Banks suddenly go back to the name of a larger time unit, a period? Probably because the Quaternary period contains only one epoch, the Pleistocene, so they are both the same length, and both start after the Pliocene. Banks had the choice of whether to use Quaternary or Pleistocene, and he chose Quaternary -- why? Well, I'd guess it's because Quaternary means fourth, and this is the fourth sub-chapter, and also because Quaternary sounds like more modern period of time.

Why geologic periods of time at all? Because the narrator thinks in terms of geology, that's one reason. Second, because it is evocative of a recapitulation of evolution back to the present, and mirrors the slow awakening of the narrator back to real life.

Lastly, why should the four sub-chapters of *Metamorphosis* have geologic names when the subchapters of the earlier "meta" areas don't? Two reasons that I can think of: first, because it makes the list of chapters look like a geologic time chart, which always has more divisions of time grouped together at recent time than at times further in the past. (Roger Gray also pointed out that the chapter list looks like the supports of *The Bridge* itself). Second, because all of the chapters named after geologic time periods are largely

about the real life of the narrator, as opposed to the others, which are largely about The Bridge and other dreams of the narrator. And these four sub-chapters are much more about the narrator and less about his dreams.

Well, that's taken long enough so that I'll save any actual discussion of the contents of Oligocene for another post.

The chapter begins with musings by the narrator on eyes silting up, pretend snowflake globes, how we are igneous in youth, metamorphic in our prime, and sedimentary in dotage, and how we are the gathered silt of ancient star explosions.

The narrator's half awake, he thinks "Cities and Kingdoms and Bridges and Towers; I'm sure I'm heading for them all." Note that I haven't been able to find anywhere an indication of which direction this last train that the narrator takes to escape is going in. Maybe the City/Kingdom symbolism no longer matters so much now that he's decided to leave.

Then, with the narrator half awake, he sees the three planes come, flying alongside in the same direction. Now the Bridge has anti-aircraft defenses, a hail of shells is fired at the planes and bursts of smoke explode all around them. The planes look invulnerable, but after a while one is hit in the tail. Its tail disappears, consumed by smoke, it drops back till it's flying evenly alongside the train. The gray smoke eats its way up the plane; the plane still flies along, though it shouldn't be able to, until it's a flying engine, then a propeller, then gone.

Why the symbolism of one plane being destroyed? I'm not entirely sure, but I have an idea, supported by something I remember from a later part of the book; there are three men in Andrea's life -- her father, Gustave, and the narrator. In the last chapter, her father died. Therefore the first of the planes has been shot down. An alternate symbolism might be the division of a person's life into youth, adulthood, and dotage that the narrator made earlier. In this symbolism, his decision to leave The Bridge indicates that he's finally growing up, that his youth is gone. Threes are such common symbolic numbers that it's possible to come up with many other meanings -- such as, as someone else suggested, it represents him dealing with his id, leaving his ego and superego to continue -- but I like my first interpretation best.

On the journey, Orr has recurring dreams of a life lived on land (i.e. the sections describing the narrator's life), and wonders if those are reality. He has stowed away on an empty train, drinking from the washbasins but having nothing to eat for days. It gets warmer and sunnier as he goes, the skins of the people he glimpses outside become darker. Then one night, he realizes that he has reached land, a forest. The train enters a sprawling town the next day (the City?) and Orr hides in a cupboard, but he's found the day after that. He's locked up, but fed, they clean his clothes and he gets back the handkerchief that Aroll had monogrammed, and "on which she had left a smudged red image of her lips" quite clean. Orr has other dreams besides "the recurring one of the man in the severely beautiful city" -- i.e. the narrator -

- there are also brief allusions to the two carriages facing each other, and the two ships firing on each other, the first two dreams that he made up for Dr. Joyce.

Orr is brought to a cold, concentric place, a circular island in the middle of a circular sea, with a causeway dividing the sea, called The Eye of God. Here he's going to be put in a dormitory with a hundred other men.

And here is where I would think that Banks' editor would have raised some strong objections. He's bringing us into another dream realm, similar to The Bridge, but not actually it. Why? We are three quarters of the way through the book, and most of the remainder of the pages will be about the narrator's real life or about continuations of previous dreams, the scenes in the new setting really take up only a few pages. In my opinion, none of the succeeding non-Bridge Orr sequences are worthwhile; they add little and detract from the symbolism of The Bridge itself. After all, Orr's left The Bridge, you'd think he'd have reached reality. But instead we have to go through more little bits and pieces full of newly introduced, unnamed dream characters, none of them the ones that we already know something about. Ostensibly, as we find out later, this new dream area may be there because they moved the narrator and they are trying out new drugs on the narrator's physical body, but this seems like a very weak rationale; you'd think that drugs that affect his mind enough to keep him from dreaming about The Bridge coherently would keep him from dreaming any coherent dream world. And Banks didn't have to write these new drugs into the plot in any event.

I think this is the weakest part of the book, one of the elements that keeps it from being a first-rank masterpiece, and possibly a reason why I've seen other people write that the book is so hard to understand; these parts don't need to be there and never really gell. They have every appearance of being written when Banks was first thinking of the book and not excluded later when he'd figured out what structure the story should actually take, rather like various parts of *Excession*, or the bit of a following story grafted on to the end of *Use of Weapons* (a much better editing job there since it only suggests another story, rather than actually being one). Maybe they are supposed to make the book less of a neat puzzle and more like messy real life, but I don't think they succeed in this regard; after all they aren't real life. But they are there, so I suppose I have to go through them, though if any part of this series of posts feels dutiful rather than fun, this is it.

The Eye of God contains the Republic, it seems both run down and full of energy, and there are immaculate palaces and temples of an earlier age among gray buildings, and a cemetery of millions of identical white pillars. Orr is put to sweeping leaves from the paths of a part even when there are no leaves to sweep; it's the law. He can speak to few people, but those who do understand him are delighted to find someone else speaking their language. Everyone seems like a prisoner or a guard. Then he dreams that he's lost half his weight during the night and that the city is being bombed. When he wakes he finds that everyone in the city has such dreams, they may be sparked by such an attack in the past that he sees signs of on the buildings. Orr talks too

much about the Bridge and the secret police pick him up and beat him, they take him to a prison headquarters where the chief explains that the prison is a bunch of rotating cylinders sunk into the rock, like a lock. Orr blacks out and wakes up on another train.

See what I mean? Pretty utterly worthless if you ask me; who cares about a completely new dream context at this stage?

Metamorphosis: Miocene

This time the dream that starts the chapter is Orr's dream of part of the narrator's real life. There has been an inversion of reality and fantasy, or a double negative; a dream character's dreams are actually reality.

A brief scene starts with the narrator reading a political poem to his friend, to see if he likes part of it. His friend asks if it's new. The narrator says no, it's ancient, but that he was thinking he might try to get some printed. A funny scene, and one which subtly equates the narrator and Banks himself. After all, Banks was the one who wrote the poem in the book, probably a long time ago by the time he wrote *The Bridge*, and now he has gotten it printed -- in *The Bridge*. I wonder whether the narrator (first name Alexander, last name unknown at this point in the book) is sort of an alternate Banks, a path that he didn't take. I can easily imagine that Banks might be good at engineering, and that he might have started his education with something like it; if he had stuck with that, and not become a writer of fiction, is the narrator the person he imagines he would have turned in to? I've previously commented that a lot of the narrator's past sounds like thinly reworked autobiography; if this idea is psychologically true, then the narrator would share Banks' personal history up to a certain point. In fact, this point may be almost precisely locatable; on pg. 85 of my edition, in Triassic:

"He decided to drop Geology; while everyone else was doing Eng Lit or Sociology [...] he would do something useful. Some of Andrea's friends tried to persuade him to do English [...] No, he was determined to do something which would be of real use to the world."

The road not taken, eh? I seem to recall that there is a Banks novel that focuses heavily on this theme; I can't recall which at present.

At any rate, Orr wakes up and tells us that he's now with a Field Marshal and his bandits; he raids his dreams for stories that he can tell them for a living. They burn books for warmth, they are cannibals and casual killers. Orr tells them the story of a boy whose dad had a pigeon loft and a man who was never happier than when his marriage proposal was turned down at the top of a pigeon-loft folly. (Yeah, sure. Incredibly happy.) The Field Marshal isn't impressed, so Orr tells them/us the story of how he got there, starting with his swoon at the end of the last chapter.

After the swoon, Orr wakes up on a new train; he aches in various places, including the old circular pain in his chest. "I was to be a waiter; one who

waited" he says. The train contained officials from the Republic on a peace mission; he was drafted as an assistant to the head waiter, there because he can't understand their language and therefore can't reveal their secrets. Of course there is an obvious second meaning of him being forced to wait for something else to happen; maybe he's given up on the dream of The Bridge and wants to wake up, but his body has not yet recovered enough. The train has cars with anti-aircraft guns; they are going towards a war, and more and more of the train starts to be replaced with armored carriages holding troops, artillery, anti-aircraft guns, and the like. Orr now served only military officers.

They are attacked by planes; the anti-aircraft guns drive them off or they drive the train into tunnels. They start going through an area with many active volcanoes and lava flows. They are attacked in the midst of an avalanche of boulders, probably set up as an ambush; the Field Marshal's men loot the train and kill everyone but Orr. "Language saved me again"; Orr speaks the same language as the bandits, and the Field Marshal laughs at him and decides that he'll keep him alive as a valet and to tell stories. The Field Marshal takes his handkerchief. They set out on the bandits' smaller train.

(I should point out that language was a complicated issue on The Bridge as well. There, Orr spoke the general language that everyone spoke, the language of administrators, but most people had a second specialized language for their profession, and Orr understood none of them. That was why he couldn't understand many of the answers to his questions about The Bridge.)

The Field Marshal is sort of a third-world cliché; he wears garish uniforms, throws captured soldiers into boiling mud for sport, or ties them to the front of his train and runs them down, and keeps a dozen pigs in luxurious state carriages while keeping his human captures in cattle trucks. Later he drags a guy out of the boiling mud, lets the mud harden, and makes a statue out of him. He likes to ask Orr if Orr likes their little games, knowing that Orr has to lie and say that he does, or be killed. Three medium bombers (an allusion to the three planes of The Bridge) bomb the train; the Field Marshal, Orr, and then men survive in a ruined city, where the men hunt and eat the inhabitants. This brings us back to the beginning of Orr's part of this chapter.

The Field Marshal decides to play a sexual game with Orr; he has Orr put on a black dress, and gives him a machine gun that he says is loaded. The Field Marshal wants Orr to poke the machine gun up the Marshal's bum while the Marshal mounts a pig. Orr figures that the bullets in the machine gun have been emptied of powder; he thinks that the Field Marshal is waiting for Orr to pull the trigger, after which the Marshal will have the fun of killing him with some weapon hidden under the pillow. So Orr crushes the Marshal's skull with the machine gun instead. Then he escapes, taking various valuables including his handkerchief.

End of chapter. Well, what was this for? The Field Marshal and his milieu never return; the whole episode is contained within this chapter. In the final conflict with the Marshal, Orr narrates: "I detest this man. But neither of us is

stupid." A rather out-of-character sentiment, wouldn't you think? I can imagine Orr thinking "I detest this man" but "neither of us is stupid" has rather a James Bond quality that seems unlike the Orr of the rest of the book. In fact, Orr has no real personality whatsoever in this chapter. In theory, this is supposed to be because he is totally focussed on survival, in fact, I suspect that it's because this little chunk of story could be about anyone, and it's just stuck here with Orr as the protagonist because Orr is in the rest of the book. This is, in fact, the Obligatory Deadly Vengeance scene in this book.

Nearly every Banks book has an Obligatory Deadly Vengeance scene (ODV, for short). The ODV has the following invariant structure:

1. The protagonist is presented as, ordinary, a good guy.
2. But there is a villain. We know he's villainous because he does exaggeratedly villainous things, far worse than most real-life evil people do.
3. After we've been regaled with stories of how bad the villain is, the protagonist kills the villain, often in some "poetic justice" fashion, often with torture.
4. But the protagonist's murder or torture/murder is fine, justifiable, and good - - because the bad guy is such a villain.

I have no idea why the ODV is there, really, but Banks loves it. It exists in *Use of Weapons*, *Excession*, *Inversions*, *Look To Windward*, and in lesser form in *Player of Games* and *The Crow Road*. *Complicity* is based on it. It's probably in more Banks books that I haven't read.

What are the consequences of the ODV? Well, Banks has political goals for his work, and the ODV directly detracts from those goals by making Banks' readers feel like torture and/or execution are the right way to handle these kind of people. In real life, people with Banks' politics don't go on lone killer vengeance sprees. They start human rights groups. And by doing so, they win at least limited victories. Those who do decide that killing the kulaks is the way to go end up, if they happen to win, by creating regimes that are worse than the ones they overthrew. Does anyone think that South Africa would be in better shape now if, instead of having a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they had a lot of firing squads?

But who could argue with killing people like the Field Marshal? Well, the reason you can't argue is because Banks has written them that way. They have no humanity whatsoever, and are furnished with over-the-top atrocity stories designed to elicit exactly the feeling that this person must be destroyed at any cost. Remember, none of these people ever really existed, so their purpose within the book is simply to elicit this feeling.

So why does Banks do this so regularly? Well, the only answer would involve guessing at motives from a distance, which is of course difficult and dicey. I'd guess that he writes these scenes for the same reason, whatever that is, as

he writes all of the male characters who are dealing with power-fueled sex fantasies in his books. Surely he can't believe in this kind of thing for intellectual reasons, or that these are simply fine dramatic scenes, or really think that putting in an ODV helps his readers confront these issues in some way. The ODV exists to present only one reasonable solution; they are not there to cause the reader to think about "these issues", because they don't cause the reader to think.

In any event, the ODV is the biggest thing holding Banks back from really top-class writing. Here it's caused him to drop irrelevant material into a perfectly good, even efficient story structure; in other books it destroys the work entirely. I suspect that a fondness for the ODV is what causes some people to inexplicably put *Inversions* at the top of their Banks book list; that book is one long, twisted fantasy in which the female characters exist mostly to be raped or threatened with rape. Banks' later Culture books, *Inversions* and *Look To Windward*, both show an increasing fondness for the ODV and are among his worst as a result; his best book, *Use of Weapons*, works in part because the protagonist and the writer and the reader all *know* that the ODV is wrong even as it's being committed, yet understand in some other than comic-book way the flaw in the protagonist's character that causes him to do these things.

I really hope that when Banks returns to writing from his vacation that he will have thought about this. If any of the people out there who say that they know him are reading this, ask him about it, would you?

Metamorphosis: Pliocene

Now that the ODV has been gotten out of the way, Banks can return to the story. This chapter again begins with the narrator's history, presumably as a dream of Orr's.

Andrea moves into her mother's house; it's a good time in the narrator's life. She gets him to like some classical music. He forgoes hang-gliding and goes parachuting. He goes into partnership with two other people and they start their own business. His politics are getting less radical, too; he joins the Labor Party and writes letters for Amnesty International.

His friend's wife catches his friend in an affair; the narrator tries to smooth things over. It seems strange to him to try to persuade her not to leave him over sleeping with another woman "almost unreal, almost comical at times." After all, both he and Andrea are still regularly sleeping with other people. "Was it the slip of paper that made the difference, the living together, the children, or just the belief in the vows, the institution, in a religion?"

What pathos. His friend and his friend's wife are certainly not described as the kind of people who have much belief in institutions, religion, slips of paper, or any of the other bogeymen that the narrator throws up. Hidden in that list are all the life experiences the narrator doesn't have: the living together, the children, the acknowledged commitment to each other. Still, he thinks that it shows "how fragile even the most secure-seeming relationship could be, if

you went against whatever rules you'd agreed." In other words, it scares him off of trying to change the rules with Andrea.

We finally find out the genesis of the handkerchief. He's cleaning out his car and he finds the silk scarf she'd given him to use that day at the tower; it has a blood stain dried on it in a rough circle. He tries to clean it but can't, offers it to her, she tells him to keep it, changes her mind, takes it and returns it, cleaned spotlessly, with his initials monogrammed on it. She wouldn't tell him how she and her mother cleaned it: it's a "family secret". He keeps it carefully ever after.

This is a potently symbolic scene; Banks is back to writing excellently once again. The circle of dried blood is an O, the same as the wound on Orr's chest that defines him, the same O that Arrol monograms on the handkerchief in the dream of *The Bridge*, the same O that her lipstick leaves on that handkerchief. In real life, it's the mark of sex, a female mystery, a lunar mystery, a female "family secret". She knows how to wipe it away as if it had never been. He can not. Therefore, she has control over his identity -- his initials -- he has no control over hers. She calls him a fetishist for keeping it so carefully. Meanwhile he's thinking of it as a symbol of their past history, their love, their unstated commitment, like a knight's favor -- but it's also a symbol of his fear of a woman using sex to trap or confine him, to control him; the wound that takes away his strength.

Anyways, I could go on for pages about that handkerchief -- one probably could write a Ph.D. thesis on it -- so I'll just stop.

I'll resist writing more about that O and the she-was-a-woman-of-letters thing on pg. 156 that equates his anxiety over her education to his amazingly primal anxiety over a part of her anatomy, and how both give her more power over him ... anyways, the narrator finds out that Andrea is writing articles about Russian literature, he feels "confused, almost dizzy" and hurt that she didn't tell him. She joins a feminist collective running a bookshop; hers is a "partnership, of sorts" unlike his own descriptively unqualified partnership; he feels uncomfortable there especially after one of them criticizes her for kissing him goodbye in public.

The Tories win: Maggie Thatcher is in power. He reacts to this as a good reason to take his accountant's advice to buy a bigger house and another car, otherwise the Tories (and not the government, presumably) will get the tax money. She helps him decorate the house, and he feels *deja vu* over the time a year earlier when he'd helped her decorate her house; he is enormously happy. If this were a story or a film, this is where he'd want it to end.

Unfortunately there is a saying of some Greek philosopher (Plato, perhaps?) that you can't count any man as having a happy life until you know how their life ends. Something can always happen later that makes you so miserable that it seems to invalidate what went before, or even destroys what made you happy before. This theme is also one that Banks picked up on in *Excession*, where one of the Minds wonders whether entities Sublime simply to end their

story so that they can finally evaluate it without fear of adding anything else; to metaphorically calculate their score.

But he can't freeze their moment of togetherness and life goes on. People ask if he's related to the lead singer who is one half of the new hit group, the Eurythmics; he says no. This is a clue that his last name is actually Lennox.

So now we know that the narrator's name is actually Alexander Lennox. Does this tell us anything? No, not really; all I can think of is that it means his initials on the monogrammed scarf that Andrea gives him are "AL", which doesn't mean anything to me. I've never really liked the way that people refer to him as Lennox when discussing the book; the word "Lennox" never actually appears in it. I'm going to continue to call him the narrator, though perhaps protagonist would have been more accurate.

Andrea continues to have flings: "he tried not to be jealous. It isn't jealousy, he told himself; it's more like envy. And fear. One of them may be a nicer, kinder, better man than I am, and more loving." Not to mention younger, or more exciting, or richer, or smarter, or better in bed, or... In fact there is a name for this mixture of envy-and-fear; it's called jealousy. But it does sound like the narrator is starting to be a bit more honest with himself.

She has a tempestuous love-at-first-sight relationship with a young lecturer; he takes off for the hills in the second week of it. When he gets back, it's over, but she's reluctant to see him; a week later he sees that her eye is still bruised. She tells him not to do anything to the lecturer, if he does she'll never speak to him again. His answer is illuminating. "'We do not all,' he told her coldly, 'resort to violence quite that quickly.'" Instead of saying something like "I wouldn't do that" or "You should know that I wouldn't resort to violence that quickly" he's defending men as a class against a remark that he interprets as an insult, not to him as an individual, but to him as a member of the group of men. His first concern is to differentiate himself from a stereotype, one that the lecturer has reinforced by being quick to resort to violence. In some way, he feels that he and the lecturer are in this together; what they do reflects on each other in some gender-linked way. If Andrea had been struck by a female engineer with whom she was having a fling, and told him not to hit her back, would he have said that "We do not all resort to violence that quickly" ?

He realizes that just as he has never been to Paris, Gustave has never to Edinburgh; he feels curiously close to him.

Andrea and her mother start having less well-off intellectuals over; he tells her that "you're starting a salon; you're becoming a goddamned blue stocking!"

He goes to Yemen on business, and stands in the ruins of a place called Mocha n the desert on the Red Sea; now we know where the imagery for that dream comes from. (He tried to remember the name of the statue and guessed "Mock? Mocca?" I'll come back to this later.) The Tories and Thatcher win again. So does Reagan. The narrator fumes about how Reagan has the power to destroy everyone in a nuclear exchange, so why doesn't the

narrator get a vote to elect him or not? His friend says "Still, on the subject of unelected reactionaries, what d'you think the Politburo is?" "A fucking sight more responsible than that gang of gung-ho shitheads" the narrator answers about the opposing gang of completely unelected gerontocrats with their finger on the button. Thus proving that the religion of one's youth is never easily given up, even when one has a big house and lots of expensive sports cars.

The narrator's father dies of a heart attack, like Andrea's father had. He asks Andrea not to come to the funeral. (Why, exactly?) His company expands, he argues with his partners about their employees' salaries, saying they should all have a share. His partners, SDP supporters, say "a workers' collective? Why the hell not?" They say no, but start a bonus scheme. I have to admit; I found this to be very funny. A bonus scheme is one of the classic tools of capitalist motivation; tell people that the harder they work, the bigger a bonus they will get, a token sharing-out as the carrot that is supposed to make people think that oh no, they are not generating excess profits for the bosses.

Then we go from comedy to tragedy. Andrea returns from Paris and looks sad. He wonders about calling Gustave but doesn't; finally Andrea's mother finds out that Gustave has MS. He asks Andrea why she didn't tell him, she says she doesn't know, and that she doesn't know what to do, Gustave doesn't have anyone to look after him properly.

A chill settles in the narrator. And well it might. Having someone to look after you properly during severe illness is, in our societies, not a given. Ideally, it takes one-on-one care from someone else who loves you or at least personally cares about you. It is in fact one of the big things that people who get married commit each other to do ("in sickness and in health..."). It's not the kind of thing that you can really do well for more than one person at once. Therefore it is one of those zero-sum-game economic entities; Andrea taking care of Gustave necessarily means Andrea not taking care of the narrator. If Andrea, Gustave, and the narrator were in some kind of functional communal family, this might not be the case, but our societies don't support such arrangements well. And the narrator and Gustave certainly haven't tried to remedy this lack by getting in touch with each other.

Andrea spends more time in Paris; when she comes back, he feels that their sex is less fun but more tender, with a sense of how impermanent such moments are, as if it has become in itself a kind of language. He feels self-pity but then thinks about how many people are worse off than he is. He finds out with "righteous dismay" that the bridge was not painted over a neat three-year period (i.e. the period over which Andrea was originally going to stay in Paris), it's done piecemeal in a cycle lasting from four to six years. He tries to assuage his dismay at this messiness of human relationships by his usual remedy; he buys a fantastically expensive new car.

It's now 1985; Andrea's thoughts are never really all with him; he tries to talk about Gustave's MS but she won't. "It was his own fault; he had never wanted to talk about Gustave. You couldn't change the rules now." Rather, she can

change the rules, but he can't.

He dreams about the dying man, and sometimes thinks he can see him lying in a hospital bed, surrounded by machines. This line is the main thing that I can find to support a suggestion that when Orr turns on his TV, he's really seeing Gustave in his hospital bed, not the narrator. I don't think this really works; the TV image is too detailed, the correspondences between the man in the bed and the narrator are too great (the man in the bed looks beaten up initially), there is interaction between the dream narrative and when Andrea appears in the TV, and later the narrator and the man on the bed are explicitly identified with each other. But symbolically the two are being equated; first the narrator sees Gustave in the hospital, in dreams, later he will, from dreams, see himself in the hospital in reality. And we can take this as evidence that Gustave's situation is certainly known to the narrator's unconscious.

The narrator starts to get disgusted with his situation -- something which never struck him as incongruous while he was happy with Andrea, though it certainly struck me often -- he makes money for oil companies, he's a boss, he employs. He gives up drinking and starts doing coke, quitting when he sees African famine pictures and realizing how much money he's throwing away. (I note that he never seems to think this about his car, however.)

Finally, Andrea tells him that she's going to stay in Paris, to look after Gustave. "They might have to get married, if his family insisted. She hoped he understood. 'I'm sorry kid,' she said, dull voiced." This is the crowning blow; she turned his proposal of marriage down, and now she's going to get married to Gustave. Because he's sick. The family insisting on it is an obvious excuse; if they were that interested, they could look after him themselves. Now the narrator's car crash is pretty much inevitable; he's going to beat Gustave at this competition, damn it, even if it kills him.

The last half of this chapter has the third barbarian dream. Note that this is one of times when formal structure tells you something. One of the good points about formal structure is that when you break it, even slightly, it puts sudden emphasis on that section of the work, which can be used to great effect. On the other hand, sometimes you just break it because you can't think of anything to put there that fits the structure. This feels like one of those times.

The "meta" chapters have a certain structure: dream first, then Orr's experiences. In *Metamorphosis*, Orr has been dreaming about the narrator's real life, so the structure is inverted: (dream of) narrator's real life first, then Orr's experiences. So this part should be about Orr. But it's not; it's a barbarian dream. Why?

Well, absent some insight by somebody else, I suspect that the truth is that there really isn't much left for Orr to do. Once Orr decides to leave the Bridge, his purpose for existence is really over. Yet his lifetime was extended so that Banks could fit in the ODV. Now that that's over, all that is left is the wrapup -- but Banks has more of the narrator's life he wants to write about first. So,

rather than create some other Eye-of-God-like new dream place for Orr, Banks gives us more of the barbarian. I'm glad he did; the barbarian was always pretty interesting. Still, this screams editing failure to me.

So. Now the barbarian is 300 years old, but he still wants to live. He's still with the familiar; the familiar is still trying to save him, because when the barbarian dies the familiar will vanish into a puff of dust.

When they got back from the Underworld, the familiar had a big battle with the sorcerer who had sent the barbarian there. The barbarian was frozen by a spell that the familiar cast during this battle, just as he was frozen by the witch. The familiar won, but found that he couldn't take over the sorcerer's body like he wanted to; he could be brought out of the Underworld, but had to stay in an inanimate object. From this point on, the barbarian and familiar really were stuck with each other. (I think this means that when the narrator wakes up, i.e. leaves the Underworld, his mind and body are no longer going to be able to be separate.)

The familiar had advised the barbarian to get back together with the young witch who gave him the knife missile, Angharienne. She was suspicious, but the familiar made an agreement with her, and told the barbarian that they were going to have a trial troilistic arrangement. The barbarian said OK, as long as there's nothing dirty involved. (A troilistic arrangement is not simply a menage a trois, but a relationship in which one of the participants is dependent on observing their partner having sex with a third person. This describes the familiar, barbarian, and witch pretty well if the relationship is really between the familiar and the witch. If the familiar represents the narrator's mind, the barbarian his body, and the witch, obviously, Andrea, then this could be an allusion to the time on the hospital bed, where his mind had to just watch his body.)

That was long ago, the barbarian and familiar are now in their flying castle (space ship), with lots of mixed magic-technological things like enchanted submachine guns, video screens and invisible platinum, the familiar has dismissed the guards, sent off the grandchildren, and given away half of their gear, giving people the impression that they were about to die. It found new batteries for the knife missile and put it in charge of security.

The barbarian is trying to get it up, to see if he can anymore; he asks the familiar to magic up a houri or put in a dirty video, but the familiar won't because the barbarian might die of a heart attack and the familiar still has a few irons in the fire. The barbarian was really attached to his wife, the witch Angharienne; she stayed young till the end but she was really about 1000 years old, and she died some time back. She became a small wooden statue and left instructions to be planted in a forest near where she was born; the statue will become a small and shrivelled tree, grow big, and then shrink like it's going back in time until it becomes a seed. I'm not sure what this story means.

The familiar is sad, telling the barbarian about the witch's tree, because when

it dies it'll just be gone. When the barbarian dies, he probably won't be allowed in the Underworld because after he destroyed Charon down there last time they had to put in a whole new regime and a couple of characters named Virgil and Dante took over. So he's worried about showing up at the pearly gates and having them let him in but with something really nasty arranged for him.

Anyways, the familiar says "Ah-ha", and the old barbarian sees a young, strong barbarian in the video screens, coming towards the castle. The young guy is really impressive looking, and the old barbarian is scared; he's all stiff now, and his hand shakes, and he needs glasses. (Note: the narrator complained that he was getting old at the end of the first half of this chapter; his needing glasses was one of the signs.) The young barbarian is wearing a wolf helmet.

Anyways, the new guy walks through the flying castle's defenses (most of which are used as Culture pseudoscience in later books); a total exclusion field fails to put him to sleep because it's screened by the helmet, a laser is blocked by some sort of mirrorfield in the guy's sword (he has some sort of limited prescience, from the helmet or something, that lets him know that the laser's about to fire on him), he cuts through monofilament reinforcement in the airlocks with blade-fields in his sword, the knife missile won't attack him because it's not a real (Culture) one that can think for itself, it has an IFF circuit that the helmet feeds a fake Friend signal. The barbarian is yelling at the familiar for letting all the guards go. Now the barbarian is in the exact same position that all of the people that he used to attack were in, he's an old guy, surrounded by the treasure he's built up, and a young guy is marching through all his defenses and coming to kill him.

The old barbarian really doesn't want to die, he wets the bed, screams "Mammy, Daddy!", and tries to promise the young barbarian anything he wants. It's an oddly affecting scene, actually. But the young barbarian just walks up and kills him in a really impersonal way, the old barbarian has asked "Wh- wh- what's yer problem, big filla?" and the young one says "Now problem moy son" and raises his sword.

But the familiar has planned for the whole thing. As the sword comes down, a transference (machine, probably) goes into action, reading what would in the Culture be called the familiar's and old barbarian's mind states and putting them into the wolf helmet and the young barbarian's brain respectively. Basically, the familiar has arranged to lure a young barbarian here so that they can steal his body (and the helmet for the familiar) and avoid death.

The barbarian's confused about the whole thing, but the familiar gets him going, the castle's circuits won't accept that the barbarian is the rightful owner of the place because he's in a new body, so a thermo-nuclear explosion is going to be set off, and they have to leave. (These "fidelity circuits" are just like the ones used later in *Consider Phlebas*.) The barbarian feels great, like he's had a dream about being an old man like the one in the bed but had just woken up. They didn't get any treasure, but he's sure that there will be more

castles and magicians and old barbarians -- "What a life, eh? This is the gemm!".

Parts of this are just a fun story, like parts of the Underworld one, but there are some symbolically important ones too. The old barbarian being killed, and then being reborn young again, is exactly like any one of lots of death-and-resurrection, cycle-of-life, harvest legends that you can find in any Joseph Campbell book; I'm sure that there were Scottish variants of it. They used to put the old king to death so that the earth would be renewed, and the young king would mystically be the same person reborn; later the custom became more symbolic and less literal. Banks very typically takes an ancient myth form and dresses it up in Culture pseudoscience so that nothing literally mystical happens, everything is "rational", but that the myth itself is reenacted. This is a good storytelling technique for someone who insists on strict rationalism and atheism, because the ancient myth forms still resonate better as stories than most others.

The symbolism for this book is less clear; significantly, the barbarian feels that his time as an old man in the bed has been a dream, just like the narrator's time in the hospital bed has been spent in dreams. Something about the vigor of youth renewed is going to be critical in getting the narrator out of bed later, as we'll see. The barbarian will appear one more time in the book and I'll try to go into this further then.

Metamorphosis: Quarternary

Actually, I'm going to briefly go back to a couple of things I missed in the last chapter -- as references pile up on each other, the layered meanings get denser, and I have to decide what to leave out. But these couple of things I probably should have put in.

First: in the story of the narrator's life in Pliocene, the narrator starts exercising, he starts playing squash but doesn't like it because "he preferred to have his own territory in a game". "Besides, Andrea kept beating him." This is a comment on his relationship with Gustave; each has their own territory, neither will venture into the other's, and Andrea is the one with real control in that game.

Second: I had been wondering about the story of the witch turning into a tree that starts out old and ages backwards. It struck me today that this is probably one of the stories from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, which has very many stories of women turning into trees. I don't remember it well enough to remember which story is most similar, and I'm not going to take the effort to read through it just for this, but if anyone does remember, feel free. Anyways, someone else here previously suggested a connection to Ovid, and this seems like a clear one.

The chapter starts with the narrator talking with his friend about all sorts of then-current stuff, all of which has relevant story overtones. First the narrator mentions that (Revillos band singer) Fay Fife's name is a pun: "Where are you

from? Ah'm Fay Fife". Another thread here discussed the symbolism of being from Fife: it's rural, the lower class, the narrator's past, the Kingdom of Fife that is the Kingdom which is one of the directions on the Bridge (the other being the City, or the city of Edinburgh, or the upper-middle class, the narrator's present.)

They talk about the Sandinistas and SDI. About parapsychology and lucid dreaming (The Bridge is in some ways a lucid dream, a dream that is consciously controlled by the dreamer). They talk about the hypothesis of causative formation, a theory by a British guy named Sheldrake which struck me as being a big pile of crap -- it's the theory that once someone, somewhere, does something, a "morphic field" makes it suddenly easier for everyone everywhere to do that same thing. Immediately after they discuss what the reader realizes is a candidate for morphic field emulation; a Russian engineer living in France who crashed his car in England, they found a lot of money in the car and suspected him of crime, but he was in a coma which the doctors thought he was faking. "Devious bastards we engineers" the narrator says. And yes, this is quite an idea for the narrator it seems.

The narrator's drunk, and he thinks about taking the train back to Edinburgh from his friend's place. He could take the train over the old bridge, throw out a coin and wish that Gustave would kill himself or that Andrea would get pregnant and want to raise the baby here. He wonders how Andrea could leave Scotland, this was her home, where her mother lived, her earliest friends, where her character formed etc etc. -- he would willingly leave himself out of the equation (yeah right, I must interject) but how could she do it? "Self sacrifice; the woman behind the man, looking after him, putting herself second; it went against all she believed in."

The narrator is working himself up, obviously, but let's stop for a moment and ask if that last sentence is true. First, the narrator is as usual conflating the problems of ordinary humanity with the problems of patriarchy; although women are called on to sacrifice for men in certain ways in our societies more than the reverse, this is hardly a case where patriarchy is driving the self sacrifice. The fact is that in any lifetime, patriarchal society or not, there are times when people are called on to make sacrifices for other people. In fact, whenever someone gets sick, someone else must make the sacrifice of looking after them. If Gustave had asked or even implied that Andrea should look after him because she was his woman, she'd have been out of there like a shot, but that isn't what's going on. The problems of human existence can't all be blamed on the capitalist/patriarchal/whatever bogeyman.

So, putting aside the bit about "the woman behind the man", does self-sacrifice go against what Andrea believes in, or her character at any rate? Andrea previously said that she was selfish and fickle; the narrator said that she was generous and independent. I implied before that I thought that she was wrong and he was right in that case. Well, now's really the best time to decide; we have all of their back story that we're ever going to get.

It seems to me that there is nothing particularly selfish and fickle about

Andrea. Fickle people don't get Ph.D's in Russian literature; selfish people don't start salons and support artists. Yes, she sleeps around, but that isn't being selfish by her standards, and she is capable of maintaining long term relationships, so she isn't that fickle. On the other hand, generous and independent seems fairly accurate. She's generous with her time and affection, and certainly independent. If she's making self-sacrifices for Gustave, it seems likely that it's because she sees a need on the part of someone who she genuinely likes, and that her generosity outweighs her need to be independent.

The narrator's basic problem with Andrea is that he loves her and she doesn't love him; or rather, she loves him, but not in the same way or with the same strength. In the Intermission to this series of posts I wrote about Banks books being about the human condition; well, this novel is basically a story of unrequited love. I'll get into this in more detail later, I'd better stop for now.

So, the narrator is worked himself up. He feels like he should Andrea everything about how he feels, about Gustave and her and himself. (If only he had done that a decade or so ago.) But he can't through to her on the phone. So -- he decides to drive home. Why not, everyone does it, he drives better drunk than most people sober, etc. He tries the phone again: still busy. (Like the time when his mother died, when he got disconnected from her and got angry; the metaphorical dangers of his inability to communicate.)

He resolves to drive carefully. "What am I doing this for? he though. Will this really make any difference? I hate people who drunk-drive; why the hell am I doing it?" We know why he's doing it, but he doesn't have the self-knowledge to know why. Largely, I think, because his ideology doesn't permit him to admit that he has every right to feel an honest jealousy and thwarted love, so he has to do a revenge/guilt trip scheme worthy of an 17 year old -- though, to give him credit, worthy of an 17 year old in an operatic or Shakespearian romance.

He drives towards the bridge; the rail bridge's hollow metal bones look like dried blood. He thinks, about the bridge. "One day, though, even you'll be gone. Nothing lasts. Maybe that's what I want to tell her." (No, of course not. He wants to tell that *he*ll be gone, that *he* won't last, because she's left.) "Maybe I want to say, No, of course I don't mind; you must go. [...] Go; we'll all survive." (Of course, he actually wants to say that if she goes he *won't* survive. Isn't fooling yourself wonderful?)

A truck pulls out from in front of him; there's an abandoned car there in the near side lane on the bridge, he crashes into it. His seat belt holds but the steering wheel pistons into his chest.

Did he really plan for the whole thing to happen? Well, he hardly can have, you can't plan a crash that will be exactly bad enough to send you into a controllable semicoma but not kill you. So things worked out this way at least partially by chance. On the other hand, it seems clear that he was unconsciously looking to have a bad crash that would send him to the hospital

and call her back to take care of him. If it hadn't been the abandoned car, maybe he would have contrived something else. He could have died, sure, but when you're that pissed off and drunk, your unconscious is willing to take some big risks. Anyways, she *really* would have felt bad then, wouldn't she?

But once it did happen that way, it all makes sense; recall his dream where he decides to run to death on the rotating bridge and get back at the unattainable witches who keep sexually teasing him; "They are caught, bound [...] but I am free." He can lucid dream whatever he wants in his coma, while she must come back and take care of him for a change; didn't that work out well?

Metamorphosis: Quarternary (part 2 of 3, not 2) This is the last chapter in which the formal structure says that Orr needs to appear. So in this chapter he can indeed appear and wrap up his existence. Orr walks along the railroad track away from the city where he escaped from the Field Marshal. Every night he dreams of the same man and city (i.e. the narrator's real life), he starts to believe that these dreams are the genuine reality, and expects each morning to wake up into a new life, "just a nice clean hospital bed would be a start" -- but he doesn't. He walks onto a battlefield, where he meets a man from one of his dreams, the man who used to be whipping the waves with his flail. Note: this time they don't meet in Orr's dream, but in Orr's reality -- which is still the narrator's dream, but the guy has shifted up one level closer to reality. The man is dressed in rags. Orr thinks "we last met in ... Mocca? (Occam? Something like that)". Mocha is the place where the narrator saw a ruined city by the sea in reality, in Yemen; Mocca was one of the names that Orr guessed at for the scornful (mocking) statue in his dream of the place, now we have a third variation of the name, Occam. The likely association for Occam is Occam's Razor, "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily." This is commonly taken to mean, in science, that when you have two theories that make the same predictions, the simplest one is best. Atheists often use it to mean that it is not necessary to postulate the existence of a god in order to explain anything; events can be explained more simply without one. The man is now whipping dead bodies that lie everywhere, not waves. He beats each body exactly 100 times. Orr talks to him; the man says he's not the same person as the man by the sea. He hands Orr a playing card, the three of diamonds, that he says he was told to give to Orr. He doesn't know what it's for, he won't say who gave it to him or why. Orr asks him what happened to all the dead people. The man says that they didn't listen to their dreams. Orr walks off, and wonders if he should have lain down and let the man lash him to death, maybe death is the only way to wake up from this "terrible, enchanted sleep". But that would require faith and he can't risk it. So what does this sequence mean? I'm tempted to write "you've got me" and go on, but pride insists that I at least give it a shot. OK, the original dream was about the futility of power; it combined elements of the Ozymandius poem ("look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair" -- but his works are all crumbled) and the King Canute legend (whipping the waves won't cause the tide to go back). Orr was a phantom in that dream. This time he's real and can really interact with the man. The man himself is a lower-class symbol, dressed in rags and hired to whip away at a meaningless job; he's a diligent workman who doesn't ask questions. Let's see: these people died because they didn't listen to their

dreams, and now they've been incorporated into a symbol of the futility of power. I believe that this is a warning from the narrator to himself. He stuck himself into this situation because of power; he wanted power over Andrea, to get her back. But that is futile, and stupid; it really doesn't do him any good to get Andrea back if he's in a coma anyway. Now his dreams are telling him that he really wants to wake up. He can keep whipping away at his dreams indefinitely, or he can leave, wake up, and do something worthwhile. Something like that is my best guess. The three of diamonds? Well, three planes, three men of whom the narrator is the third. No idea why diamonds, except that they are valuable; maybe the narrator is telling himself that he values his life too lightly. I have no idea why Occam's Razor. You've got me. Having written a partial analysis longer than the original scene, it's time to go on. Though actually, Occam's Razor is telling him that all of the people in these dreams, and specifically the man with the whip, are actually himself, which is true. Orr goes on to walk through a desert. He still has the handkerchief, "like a [knight's] favor". He also still has the waiter's jacket, he's still waiting. He falls on a dune, dehydrated. Then he sees the young barbarian come towards him, with the wolf helmet. He looks transparent, insubstantial. He sways, put a hand to his brow, talks to the helmet, walks closer. He doesn't seem to see Orr. He stands "too close to me, too close to my feet, as though his own feet were somehow inside mine. Then he falls, the helmet cries out, he's apparently dying of exposure. But he doesn't fall onto the sand; when Orr looks again there is no trace of him or his helmet. In fact, it's obvious that he's fallen into, or merged with, Orr. Orr uses the last of his strength to peel open his coat, that attracts two buzzards that spiral down like DNA, Orr chokes them, he drinks their blood and that gives him the strength to get through the desert. That's it for the barbarian and the familiar. In Underworld dream, Andrea said that the narrator would become the barbarian, the barbarian would kill himself and the narrator would live again in the barbarian's body. Well, the barbarian did kill himself once, he killed his old self and awoke in his new self. The first and third parts of Andrea's prophecy are really the same. In this case, the barbarian and familiar have both merged with Orr, who is the narrator's alter ego. Note that neither of them really die; there are no bodies left. Also, no one has called Orr by his name for a while, the last person to do so was the Field Marshal, who called him Ore (i.e. the ore from which metal, the narrator's real identity, is extracted), so he's really becoming more and more the narrator and less a separate dream self. All of the narrator's various identities are joining; when the narrator wakes up, he will indeed live again in the barbarian, who was a symbol of his physical body all along. Finally, Orr sees, ahead of him, The Bridge. It is in ruins, just like the ruined city of Mocca. The main sections are still intact, but the linking sections, the bridges within bridges, have been destroyed. Everything is deserted; old carriages are rusted to the rails. He finds Dissy Pitton's, where he drank with Brooke, and Dr. Joyce's office, and the Arrol's summer apartment. At that apartment, "The fire is buried beneath the waves of sand, so is the bed." This is getting too long, so I'm going to post it and have this chapter take up three posts instead of two.

Metamorphosis: Quarternary (part 3 of 3) So Orr has traveled along the railroad tracks all the way around the world and returned to where he started.

(He once thought the bridge might go all the way around the world; it doesn't, but the rails do.) Now that he's returned to where he started, I now know why it was never indicated whether Orr left The Bridge in the Cityward or Kingdomward direction. The truth is that he hasn't really left it, so the direction that he set out in was immaterial. Orr passes out and wakes up in a hospital bed, hooked up to a catheter and so on. But he's not in the real world. He realizes that he's inside The Bridge, inside its metal bones. Dr Joyce is there, as his doctor, he's seen Arrol there, dressed as a nurse, later there is a mention of a sallow-faced lad who might be the narrator as a child. They've taken away the card he was given, "and the scarf...I mean the handkerchief" if we needed any more confirmation that the scarf that Andrea gives him and the handkerchief he gives Arrol are one and the same. (Though, come to think of it, part of his dream fantasy may have been the role reversal of him giving her the handkerchief instead of the other way around. If so, it didn't hold, Arrol was still the one to monogram it with his initials, not he with hers.) Dr. Joyce says that they have a new treatment that might make him better. This time Orr eagerly agrees to it. The treatment turns out to be that Orr has to tell everything he remembers to a machine. It takes a while. All the people have gone, there's only Orr and the machine left. Again, no one has used the name Orr in quite a while, so it might be just as good to say that there is only the narrator and the machine left. The machine tells him that his dreams were right in the end, that his last ones after he left The Bridge were of his real self. The machine says that he will believe it because he trusts machines, he understands them and they don't frighten him, while he feels differently about people. In other words, the narrator has constructed an entity within his dreams to present himself with what he remembers, and he's made that entity in the form of something he trusts. The technical term for this kind of entity is "spirit guide", and at this point one should realize that the narrator has been undergoing a variant of the type of experience known as a shamanic journey, or a spirit quest. This kind of thing is why I find it funny when people, or even Banks himself, say that he doesn't have religion in his books. The drones and Minds of the Culture are Hindu style gods, guardian angels, and other mythic entities dressed up in a bit of pseudoscience. They are these entities not because of their powers, although their powers are certainly worthy enough, but because they function mythically and symbolically in the exact same fashion. I've always felt that, extraordinary mental constraints aside, an intelligent machine would probably get just as tired of looking after people as other people do. One can certainly postulate that they wouldn't, but absent evidence, it seems more correct to say that they don't because of their mythic function within the story. The machine tells him that his real body is in the Neurosurgical Unit at Southern General Hospital in Glasgow, he was moved from the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh some time ago. He asks why the machine doesn't know exactly when he was moved, and the machine replies that *he* doesn't know -- in other words, the machine only knows what the narrator does. The machine tells him that he doesn't know when it was because they have been trying treatments and drugs on him that have scrambled his sense of time. The machine tells him that he's been under for seven months, because last time Andrea was there she said it would be "her birthday in a week and if [he] were to wake up it would be the best --" time, presumably. So we know that some part of the narrator can hear what his

visitors say. The machine tells him that his choice is to stay under or surface, and asks if he's going to wake up. The man asks how he'd do that, and says that he tried before, before he reached the desert. The machine says it doesn't know how, but it knows that he can do it if he wants to. But neither of them know if he wants to. This is perhaps the explanation of the otherwise mysterious earlier narration: "Let's get one thing absolutely straight: it's all a dream. Either way, whatever. We both know that. I have a choice, however." The "I have a choice" bit refers to the narrator's choice of whether to wake up or not, and the "both" could be him and the machine -- but it could also be Orr and the narrator. The narrator/Orr wakes up again in an armchair in a small room with one door and a screen. His body image has changed to one more closely matching reality: no beard (they've shaved it), a bald patch, and he's thinner. The door leads to another similar room with just a hospital bed in it; the bed has a "blanket pulled back at one corner, as though in invitation." He half expect to find an old guy who looks just like him, like Keir Dullea does in 2001: A Space Odyssey. But he doesn't, the screen turns on, this time in color (previous times with the TV have all been in black and white). He's sees the man in the hospital bed again, this time he's on his stomach. There a plastic hospital bracelet on the man's wrist, just as Orr had on The Bridge. Two nurses turn the man over but the narrator can't hear what they are saying. Visitors start appearing for other people in the ward, but "Nobody for my man yet. Doesn't look as though he cares." But of course he does care! Banks is great at these narrative self-deception statements... Andrea shows up. She's pretty. She kisses the man in the bed and takes his hand. The narrator thinks "Why is she here? Why isn't she is Paris?" Then she lowers her head to the sheets, and her shoulders shake a couple of times; it's unstated, but she's crying. The screen goes dark. The narrator suspects his subconscious is trying to tell him something. The narrator undresses and goes to sleep in the hospital bed in the next room. Note the sequence of settings in this part. He returns to The Bridge, it's wrecked. The fact that he returned there, even though he was travelling away from it, indicates that there is no where else in his dream world for him to go; it's really all the same place. From then on, his settings become more and more constricted, all the people gone except his machine, until all he has left is two small rooms, then only one, really (since the screen in the other is dark) with a hospital bed in it. He's systematically closing off the idea that he has anywhere that he could go to escape waking up. As for the actual waking up itself, the final impetus is given by his proof that Andrea actually cares for him, when she cries. Of course this is all a little bit vicious and childish too: he has to see that he's hurt her, to get revenge for her hurting him, before he'll wake up. If the sequence with the Field Marshal was supposed to be justified as him confronting and destroying the power-seeking, sadistic side of himself, it didn't completely work. There is one short chapter left -- plus I plan a conclusion or two after that.

Coda

Hey, I should take up a collection here. Who wants to read the fascinating conclusion, all secrets revealed! please send five dollars to ... never mind. The last chapter starts with the narrator arguing, apparently, with himself. First he goes through the reasons for staying in a coma, saying "What the hell do

you think you're doing? You were happy there! Think of the control, the fun, the possibilities!" This seems like a very bad tack to me; the narrator wasn't having much fun in the latter part of his Bridge experience. Perhaps sensing this, the narrator goes on to say that he'll be chucked out of the partnership, tried for drunk driving, no more flash cars, getting older etc. Then he mentions his resentment of Andrea: "You always did what she wanted [...] it was role-reversal all right, and you got screwed." "she rejected you, [...] if you show signs of recovery she'll be off again." But, the narrator replies that if he does nothing they might just turn his life-support off, isn't self-preservation supposed to be the most important principle? He goes on to say that he and Andrea have left their marks on each other, helped to shape each other, even if they never saw each other again they'd be a part of each other. That doesn't mean they belong to each other, but it means that in some sense they already have each other. (Note: I mentioned before that shared experience was the only thing that can't be replaced. This is a variant of that sentiment; it's also a variant of the ideal of selfless and eternal love, that you can be happy just having known the other person, even if you never see them again.) The narrator says that if he wakes up she may go back to Gustave, but says that "You had decided you didn't grudge him that, or was that just the drink talking?" A heated exchange with himself ensues until he says that he meant it, he meant it. "Damn it I did, too." he replies. All right, why the heck is the narrator arguing with himself? Who are these two people, has he suddenly gotten split personality disorder? No, I think that he's just sort of abstracted his Brooke side, the part of himself that wants to stay in a coma, and his Joyce side, the side that wants to wake up. It sounds funny, but they both really are him. The narrator says "And another thing: she still thinks things happen in threes. There was her father, dying in the car; then Gustave, under sentence [...] then me." He says that no doubt he and Gustave are very similar, and that they might like each other, and that he's sure that Gustave would have got on with Andrea's father the same as he did, and for the same reason ... but if he can stop the similarities there, he will, "I will not be the third man!" This is the strongest symbolic reason why there are three planes, three diamonds, I think. Note that the narrator thought he got along with Andrea's father because he thought that neither of them took anything entirely seriously. Even at this dramatic moment I have to wonder about the narrator's self-knowledge; he's certainly taking *this* seriously. He probably got on with Andrea's father because they were very similar in most ways; educated, smart, upper-middle class. Just as we might be starting to think that he was getting pretty unselfish, he thinks a "slightly sneaky" thought; now that he realizes that he and Gustave are alike, he knows what *he'd* tell Andrea if he was the one slowly dying and she wanted to martyr herself looking after him... Of course we may wonder if he really does know what he'd tell her. And lastly, the final burst that seems to end the argument, a burst of youthful desire for experience and lust for life. First he says that he wants to go to that other city and meet Gustave, then "Damn it I wanna *do* things!" He wants to go to India, stand on Ayers Rock, get wet in Machupicchu, surf, hang-glide, see the aurora borealis, etc. etc., ending with "I want to be in bed with three women at once!" The final thing that decides him on waking up is, symbolically, his body's desire to do things. The barbarian has ended up saving him; he will live on in the barbarian's body. And just like the barbarian this list is pretty much

pure Id. And guess what one of those things he wanted to do was? "I want to walk inside a lava tunnel", yes it's an image later used in *_Look To Windward_*. It seems like all of the Culture was floating around in Banks' head at this time. Next he grouches that he's going back to Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's world, a sign that he's apparently decided to wake up. He says that at least the Bridge was safe, but then he says maybe not, he doesn't know. (We've already seen that it wasn't really safe, he probably would have died if he had, for instance, lain down under the lash of the guy who was lashing bodies, because it would have been a signal to his body to give up.) Then there is a curious part. He says he doesn't need the machine to tell him the choice, the choice is not between dream and reality, it's between two different dreams. One is his own, the bridge and all he made of it, the other is the collective dream, our corporate imagery. Well, highly amusing as it is to think of Banks (or the narrator, whichever) as a Bodhisattva or an ascended yogic master who knows that the material world is an illusion, the Veil of Maya -- I think that this is bollocks. Banks is an atheist, the narrator is an atheist, no matter which one of them is really saying this, in their own terms they are wrong. You simply can't say that reality is comparable to a dream you're making up; if someone dies in *The Bridge*, nothing has really happened -- they might even be alive again later -- but if someone dies in the real world, they are gone, and if you're an atheist of Banks' type, you have to think that they are permanently gone. You can't compare the effect of our culture on how we perceive events, and on how we act, to a situation in which nothing is real. This just sounds like a formula for rejecting responsibility, as if the narrator was saying "Hey, the real world is a dream too, so it doesn't really matter that I crashed my car and spent seven months in a hospital in order to make my girlfriend feel guilty." But the narrator does think that at least no one else was hurt or killed in the crash, he's not sure if he would have wanted to come back then. The narrator makes more Bridge metaphors: a thing become place, a means become end, a route become destination, and equates this with the three of diamonds. It's "vast and ruddy frame forever sloughing off and being replaced" -- i.e., it's like a living creature -- "like a snake constantly shedding, a metamorphosing insect which is its own cocoon and always changing" -- both common metaphors for personal transformation. There's a bit where he remembers a drug experience, then a little two-columned section in which part of the writing says "Brahma wakes". Brahma is the Hindu god who created the universe, as the narrator created *The Bridge*. Hell, maybe the narrator picked up some fashionable Hindu from Andrea and that explains the world-is-a-dream bit earlier. Finally, he actually seems to be in his body. He has a tough time ("Lie back and think of Scotland") and realizes that he's going to have to learn how to control his body again, but he starts by smelling Andrea's perfume, then feeling things, then he sighs, then opens his eyes. Andrea is sitting there, she sees him waggle his toes. He's hungry. He clears his throat and Andrea relaxes, just like that. He - who has remembered his name -- is almost embarrassed. (He should be.) She nods slowly, and says "Welcome back," smiling; he says "Oh yeah?". And that's it. Next, my conclusion. If anyone remembers an unanswered question that I said I'd get to later and haven't gotten to by now, please remind me of it.

The Bridge is a fantasy about unrequited love. I say fantasy because it is one by the classic definition: "imaginative fiction featuring especially strange

settings and grotesque characters" according to a rather unsatisfactory Merriam-Webster, or even the alternate definition "the power or process of creating especially unrealistic or improbable mental images in response to psychological need ; also : a mental image or a series of mental images (as a daydream) so created". I noted at the beginning that this was a basically optimistic book, and so it is, no permanent harm is done, and the protagonist keeps his lover -- really, she's likely to come back to him eventually, the crisis with Gustave won't last forever. The symbolism is generally excellent, the writing occasionally inspired, the formal structure interesting. So what is the book about, really? This is a complicated enough book so that this question could be answered differently by different people, but I'm going to address a couple of the general themes that I see: 1. The modern style of unattainability

In previous times and other places, there were many ways in which people fell in love but could not be with each other. The whole idea of Western romantic love started, according to Joseph Campbell anyway, with the medieval troubadours, who celebrated those who loved each other outside the formal economic business of marriage. Lovers historically were kept apart by class, clan, previous engagement, distance ... with the crowning problem, of course, being that one of the people did not love the other, and had the power to resist the other's desires. Note that many fantasy writers, such as America's best, James Branch Cabell, seem to have believed that unattainability is a necessary part of romance in fantasy. In general, when a couple in romantic fiction finally get together, the book is over. Now we come to modern Britain. Is Andrea unattainable? Why, how could that be, clan, class, previous engagement, distance present no problems -- she has sex with the narrator quite often, doesn't she? And she likes him, doesn't she? What more is there to attain? By a curious poverty of thought, the narrator can't even *understand* what the problem is. First of all, he's obsessed with sex, and her imagined use of sex to control him; in some strange way he seems to think that the problem of her not being with him is sexual. Of course it isn't. He has sex with other people when she isn't there, which he seems to find quite satisfactory. Sex with her can't be so much different than sex with his other partners that that is what he misses so much when she isn't there. No, this has to do with love. It is his love that gives her power over him, because she is not replaceable to him, while he is replaceable to her. So she gets to decide how much time they spend together, and he doesn't. This is the real source of all of his hunger for power and fear of being trapped. The truth is that he's in love with her, he wants her near all the time, he isn't really happy without her. But these seemingly simple statements can not be expressed in the tired ideologies that he's grown up with. If he wants her to always be with him, then he must want power over her -- bad. If he isn't happy without her, he's not being independent -- bad. And if he's in love with her, and wants *an exclusive, life-long committed relationship*, well, that doesn't bear even thinking of. In a sense, this is a curiously politically conservative book, because it makes it seem as if leftism constitutionally can not deal with these questions -- which is not really true. But back to Andrea. So, what can she give him? She obviously doesn't feel in quite the same way about him, she likes him, but she's content enough to spend half her time with other people. He can't even express what he's feeling without an ironic shrug. She might come to think about him in the same way if he really expressed his feelings,

but he can't. Normally, sheer proximity and its concomitant intimacy would cause her to eventually fall in love with him, but she doesn't stay in one place long enough for that to happen, and by the time they do get really used to having each other around, she's also used to having Gustave around. She may not be fickle or selfish, but she does seem somewhat blind to her effect on him. One can imagine that some elements of their relationship were set when she was a slightly older, sophisticated, upper-middle class woman and he was a lower class young guy just in the big city and looking to move up in the world. Things might have settled down with him remaining content with half a loaf, rather than none, but then humanity strikes. Suddenly he discovers that people need other people for more than just sex and occasional companionship, that they actually *depend* on other people, and that maybe that's part of why people keep inexplicably getting married. And guess what, he can't depend on Andrea, because other people have claims on her that are as great as his claim. Since he, according to his politics, can't possibly admit to being in a jealous rage, he can't do anything about it when he falls into a jealous rage, and he goes for an gesture matched in its adult brilliance of execution with its adolescent poverty of conception -- she doesn't want me, so I'll hurt myself and make her feel bad, then she'll come back. I've written far too much about this. To say what I should have said from the start: what Banks does is create a love that is unattainable *because the lovers have no valid way to interpret their emotions*. They are free to say anything they like to each other, but they have no acceptable concepts that would communicate what must be said.

2. The fantasy of demiurgy A lot of the book is about a common fantasy: what if I could create the world as I liked? The word Demiurge means artisan, and is probably most well known from its use in Gnostic Christian thought. The Gnostics thought that the world was created by a Demiurge, a sort of inferior god, whose bad workmanship explained all the problems in the material world. The word also has the meaning of "one that is an autonomous creative force or decisive power". The fantasy of creating a world is often referred to as the fantasy of Demiurgy. The Demiurge is generally not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnibenevolent. In this book, the narrator creates a world -- an interior world, it is true, but one with apparently complete and coherent existence. He rejoices in his supposedly complete control over this world. But, we see that in fact his power is not complete. It can be broken by external events -- such as when his body is moved or treatments are tried -- and it also can be the subject of a sort of competition between different parts of his mind. We see this in the scene where the narrator's alter ego is being cast down in social class; part of the narrator's mind evidently wants this to happen, part does not. But there is a more interesting problem with his created world. It shares his mental as well as physical limitations. The narrator is a political leftist who would like to see a classless society. Yet, when he creates a world seemingly from his desires, it is a Victorian, class-bound society. The narrator's power fantasies might be seen as a major reason for this; what that part of him really wants is a power structure with himself at or near the top. Yet he didn't create a Roman Empire with himself as Emperor; the society is still recognizably modern. Basically, his subconscious seems to have been limited to the creation of a society of a type that he thoroughly understood. This, again, is rather a discouraging, conservative idea -- the idea that we carry an image of our society around

with us, even into our most creative endeavors, and that we really can't transcend the cultural values that we've grown up with. But there is a curious subtext at work. Writing a work of fantasy is a form of demiurgy. The author creates an imaginary world that they generally try to make complete and coherent, or at least interesting. So the problem faced by the narrator in this book is a metaphor for the general problem faced by the fantasy author. Banks, as we know, is an author who, in books published after this one, *did* create a well-known, coherent fantasy of a classless society. In fact that fantasy bubbles up in all sorts of places in this book -- the bit of narration by the barbarian, where he talks about magic getting so prevalent that the lower class is no longer needed, the knife missile, the intelligent machine, even some scattered images that recur in later Culture books. So this book is sort of a precursor to the Culture, a demiurgy that fails to express Banks'/the narrator's (the two are interchangeable in this instance) politics. As such, it falls apart by the end of the book, while the Culture continues. The Culture is a second demiurgy, once that transcends the limitations of the Bridge. But I'd have to say that the Culture shares, more subtly, some of these problems. In particular, the creation of a world in this kind of fiction requires drama, Banks once commented about something like needing to find the Culture's dark side (presumably, to make it interesting). So we hear very little about the presumed daily utopia of the Culture and a lot about the presumedly rare cases where things go wrong. The Culture starts to slip from classless utopia to dystopia just because Banks has to keep finding things wrong with it, or the readers will get bored. The classic Christian problem of evil is perhaps best explained, if you're looking for theological explanations, by the need to make the world dramatic to whoever is watching the show. That's about it, I think. I could go on about what a multivalent symbol the Bridge is -- between life and death, the narrator and Andrea, youth and adulthood, the lower class and the upper, reality and dreams -- but this is long enough. One last note about love and power, vaguely applicable to the problems in this book. I'll leave you with a highly out-of-context quote from Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

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