

Transition (by Iain Banks)

Well, that was an enjoyable romp. He can be quite disgusting, though, Iain Banks. Well, he could. Though perhaps he's still scribbling away somewhere in a different parallel world.

The fractured narratives are initially a little bewildering. One has faith that all will come together in the end. And it does. Banks is (was) no intellectual dilettante to frustrate the reader with a mere facade of cleverness. It's all to a purpose, as in the best science fiction (though here missing his self-nominated middle M).

We delight that the baddies get their comeuppance in poetic fashion. Adrian crushed to death by his property, The Philosopher force-flitted into the body of his own previous victim, and Mrs d'O blown away by Mrs M. Most satisfactory. Though I worry what havoc the loose cannon, Bisquitine, might wreak next.

Great name, Bisquitine. Great character. Bug eating as indicative of careless psychopathy. Nice.

An interesting use by Banks of female-on-male rape. I refer, of course, to the Mrs d'O multiple orgasm episode. It *was* non-consensual on his part, after all. Not often that sex is used to villainize a woman (though common enough for a man). And how different from the positively sensual Mrs M. (I presume the use of "Mrs", on Banks's part, is to indicate authority. Or did he just have a thing about married women?).

Actually, on the technical writing side, Banks uses the sex (with Mrs M) as leavening in episodes which would otherwise be rather obvious bits of Mrs M conveying required information.

There are some glitches in the transition concept. At some points the author has the host bodies being mere 'husks' when they are not occupied by one of the Aware. At other times, though, he has ordinary people being the hosts. Or did I miss something?

It's pretty clear that Banks based the idea on the 'Many Worlds' interpretation of quantum mechanics, due to Hugh Everett. Every time there is the smallest interaction between sub-atomic particles anywhere in the universe, the world fractures into several new worlds which subsequently diverge from each other in subtle ways. Amazingly this is a perfectly respectable theory amongst physicists.

The correct interpretation of quantum mechanics is even less clear now than it was nearly a century ago when it was first developed. There are six or seven different interpretations which enjoy some level of support amongst professional physicists. Most surveys put 'Many Worlds' in the most popular two or three. And amongst cosmologists, 'Many Worlds' is now the clearly favoured interpretation. I'm not a true believer myself, though only last week I was assisting a PhD student with his work on 'Many Worlds' so active is the persistent interest in it.

RAWB, 2/6/15