

#24

THE CULTURE
AGAINST
PATRIARCHY:
DJAN SERIY
ANAPLIAN, PARIAH
AND DEFECTOR IN
IAIN M. BANKS'S
MATTER

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Resumen || Djan Seriy Anaplian es, posiblemente, el personaje femenino más completo creado por Iain M. Banks para su serie sobre la Cultura (1987-2013). En *Matter* (2008) [*Materia*, 2010] Anaplian comparte protagonismo con sus hermanastros Ferbin y Oramen pero ella es la verdadera heroína. Como mujer, Djan Seriy es una paria en su patriarcal país natal, y eventualmente se convierte en tráfuga en la utopía de Banks, la Cultura. Nacida princesa en el anticuado reino de su padre, el Rey Hausk, Djan es criada para ser usada en una alianza matrimonial según decida el rey. La Cultura rescata a Anaplian para transformarla en ciudadana libre posthumana y, más tarde, en agente secreto de Circunstancias Especiales (convirtiéndose así en paria interna). No obstante, la singular trayectoria de Anaplian, su empoderamiento personal y su ambigua actitud hacia la Cultura no han sido abordados por los estudiosos de Banks pese a demostrar su posicionamiento anti-patriarcal. Este es el tema que se examina en este artículo.

Palabras clave || Iain M. Banks | la Cultura (serie) | *Matter/Materia* | Djan Seriy Anaplian | Paria | Tráfuga

Abstract || Djan Seriy Anaplian is, possibly, the most accomplished female character created by Iain M. Banks for the Culture series (1987-2013). In *Matter* (2008) she shares protagonism with her step-brothers Ferbin and Oramen but she is the real hero. As a woman, Djan Seriy is a pariah in her patriarchal homeland, and eventually becomes a defector to Banks's utopia, the Culture. Born a princess in the backward kingdom of her father King Hausk, Djan is raised to be used in matrimonial alliance at her father's convenience. The Culture rescues Anaplian to transform her into a free posthuman citizen and, later, into a Special Circumstances secret agent (thus, a sort of inner pariah). Anaplian's singular trajectory, her personal empowerment, and conflicted attitude towards the Culture have, however, been overlooked by scholarship on Banks' work, despite being the most positive example of the author's own anti-patriarchal stance. The article seeks to fill this gap by examining the latter.

Keywords || Iain M. Banks | Culture series | *Matter* | Djan Seriy Anaplian | Pariah | Defector

Resum || Djan Seriy Anaplian és, possiblement, el personatge femení més complet creat per Iain M. Banks per a la seva sèrie sobre la Cultura (1987-2013). En *Matter* (2008) [*Materia*, 2010] Anaplian comparteix protagonisme amb els seus germanastres Ferbin i Oramen però ella és el veritable heroi. Com a dona, Djan Seriy és una pària en el seu patriarcal país natal, convertida en tráfuga en la utopia de Banks, la Cultura. Nascuda princesa en l'antiquat regne del seu pare, el Rei Hausk, Djan és criada per a ser usada en un enllaç matrimonial segons decideixi el rei. La Cultura rescata a Anaplian per a transformar-la en ciutadana lliure posthumana i, més tard, en agent secret de Circumstàncies Especials (convertint-se així en pària interna). No obstant això, la singular trajectòria de Anaplian, el seu apoderament personal i la seva ambigua actitud vers la Cultura no han estat abordats pels estudiosos de Banks malgrat demostrar el seu posicionament ant-patriarcal. Aquest és el tema que s'examina aquí.

Paraules clau || Iain M. Banks | la Cultura (sèrie) | *Matter/Materia* | Djan Seriy Anaplian | Pària | Tráfuga

Exceptionally in these times fundamentally interested in dystopia, Iain M. Banks (1954-2013) is known mainly for the nine novels of the Culture series dealing with the eponymous utopian civilization. The Culture is a socialist anarchy composed of a gathering of pan-humanoid species, efficiently run by its superlative AIs (known as the Minds). Culture citizens live in a post-scarcity, hedonistic society, which allows them to do as they wish with their bodies, minds, and lives. They need not conquer any planets since they live either in their colossal spaceships or in the orbitals and planetoids built by the Minds. Most Culture citizens are pacifist and decidedly anti-interventionist but a segment runs the inter-species organization Contact, and its decidedly interventionist branch, Special Circumstances. Their intervention in the affairs of less advanced civilizations, avowedly for altruistic reasons, is the central motif in Banks's plots, and also a source of controversy about the Culture's implicit imperialism. Most critical analyses of Banks's science fiction focus, then, on whether the Culture's utopia must be taken at face value or not, taking into account the author's wit and sense of humour. This runs from his droll names for the spaceships (the *Lightly Seared on the Reality Grill of Matter* is one among many examples) to the bitterest sarcasm (expressed for instance in the creation of the digital hells in *Surface Detail*).

The Culture can be said to be a 'critical utopia' following the concept coined by Tom Moylan (in relation to works by Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, and Samuel Delany): "Whatever the particular set of images each text sets forth, the shared quality in all of them is a rejection of hierarchy and domination and the celebration of emancipatory ways of being as well as the very possibility of utopian longing itself" (Moylan, 1986: 12). The Culture, Kulbicki notes, "is literally a utopia" because it occupies a "no place" consisting as it does of "a grouping of restless like-Minded cells, unfixed and in continuous, nomadic motion" (2009: 39). The Culture is not really an "interstellar nation-state" (Garrison, 2012: 57) since it has no institutions of Government, though it is correct to regard citizenship as its main socio-political organizing principle. The Culture's main foundations are the three pillars of "an Enlightenment liberal society: individual liberty, equality, and reason as the source upon which actions are grounded and in terms of which actions are ultimately justified" (Jackson and Heilman, 2008: 239), though it is a matter of dispute whether this is a positive stance. There is, likewise, much hesitation, sometimes expressed in the same sentence, about which real-life political model—capitalism or communism—inspires Banks's utopia: the Culture "is drawn up from the 'best self', and ideal image, of the *West*, a *communist* utopia of plurality, tolerance, and plenitude" (Brown, 1996: 71, my italics).

The Culture novels do not deal with life in this civilization but, as noted, with the conflicts caused by Special Circumstances' attempts to lead less advanced societies towards utopia. Banks's stories, Kerslake complains, "may be set within a frame of *putative* utopia, but they are not utopian in themselves" (2012: 214, original italics). In the novels the Culture operates just "as a theatrical backdrop" for "acts of extravagant violence and conflict" (214). Nevertheless, Banks, "a tricky writer, always playing games" (Jones, 2008: online), often subtly questions SC's risky interventions. In fact, his protagonists are outsiders (either because they are not Culture citizens or because they are inner dissidents) who keep a sceptical, judgmental attitude.

Banks's scholarship has so far missed, though, how that critical stance is affected by gender when the protagonist is a woman, as happens in *Matter* (2008), the novel analysed here. Banks is usually (and unfairly) perceived as an author who addresses mainly men and who has little interest in women characters. Exploring the three novels most often examined—*Consider Phlebas*

(1987), *The Player of Games* (1988) and *Use of Weapons* (1990)—Roberts asserts that Banks “considers the vulnerability of the masculine body,” frequently subjected to great violence, “as the foundation of the masculine subject” (2014: 46). Banks, he adds, “does not explore these concerns in relation to the position of women, and in this way perpetuates the exclusion of the feminine” (59). However, this only applies to the novels he studies and just partially, as they feature significant female characters. Other novels such as *Inversions* (1998), *Surface Detail* (2010), *The Hydrogen Sonata* (2013), the non-Culture novel *Against a Dark Background* (1993), and indeed *Matter* focus on women protagonists in plots that highlight their resilience despite their self-acknowledged vulnerability. This is for Banks a human and not just a gendered, masculine concern.

The protagonist of *Matter*, Djan Seriy Anaplian, a woman “strong and distanced and yet not a caricature of the Strong Female Character” (Jarvis, 2009: online) has attracted very limited interest despite the fact that, as I argue, her biography offers the most extensive commentary on the Culture’s anti-patriarchal ideology in the whole series. Banks’s wide-screen baroque space-opera novels, to use Brian Aldiss’s coinage, require at least two readings to fully grasp what is going on but *Matter* may require even more. Kincaid feels that in this novel “Banks’s attention has wandered away from the Culture” to the point that it is “missing the nuances he had so effectively created before” (2017: 124). Actually, the critics have mostly missed many of the novel’s nuances. Robert Duggan, among others, discusses *Matter* without mentioning Anaplian, disregarding thus her contribution to Banks’s “key theme,” namely, “the interaction of civilisations at different stages of technological power and the politics of interference (well-meaning or otherwise) in the affairs of other social formations” (2013: 901). Nick Hubble argues that since Anaplian is a royal princess, her story can be read as a fairy tale (2018: 62), a perplexing proposition in view of her actual narrative arc. To be fair, Hubble adds that Banks’s borrowing of the fairy tale formula “seems perverse or even cynical” unless we suppose that “he was attempting to subvert its conservative function for more radical ends” (63), namely, transforming patriarchal worlds into democracies.

The aspect of *Matter* that has attracted most attention, to the detriment of Anaplian (and the other main characters), is Banks’s prodigious worldbuilding, particularly as regards her home planet, Sursamen. This is an artificial construction, one among the thousands of Shellworlds built by the long vanished Veil millions of years before for an unknown purpose. Like its sibling planets, Sursamen consists of a core—where an alien, worshipped as a WorldGod, has taken residence—and sixteen concentric spheres, each with its own atmosphere, communicated by means of towers. Two non-humanoid species with a deep mistrust of each other, the Aultridia and the Oct, tutor the many other species that live on each level, many of which they have invited to migrate into Sursamen.

The humanoid Sarl, the society to which Anaplian belongs, are refugees from a civil war on their home planet. They occupy the eighth level, under Oct responsibility, whereas their former enemies, the Deneys, live on the ninth level, under Aultridian tutelage. Octs and Aultridians respond to the Nariscene, a superior civilization, under supervision of the Morthanveld, a non-humanoid civilization similar to the Culture in power and influence. The Culture is trying not to upset their delicate relationship, even though the Morthanveld have failed to notice—mostly because the Nariscene are inattentive surveyors—that the Oct are aiding the Sarl in their still ongoing war against the Deneys for suspicious reasons.

The original book cover, showing Anaplian alone, proves that she ‘matters’ in the interspecies conflicts which *Matter* narrates. This is the story of “her progress as a moral entity” (Caroti, 2015: 190) and of how Anaplian’s personal choices save Sarl, her native patriarchal civilization, and all of Sursamen. Despite being King Hausk’s supposedly privileged daughter, Anaplian is actually disempowered because of her gender. She is partly aware of her oppression but, once she is rescued by the Culture, Anaplian realizes that Sarl is a barbaric society. Partly, she joins Special Circumstances to alter the fate of similar patriarchal civilizations, though her allegiance to Sarl is not totally severed. When her father dies, Anaplian decides to return home. She soon finds herself involved in the efforts of her step-brother Ferbin to avenge the King but also in the Octs’ reckless unearthing of an ancient machine intent on destroying Sursamen. *Matter* asks the question of how a woman liberated from patriarchy would behave once she could enjoy complete freedom. The answer Banks provides is that she would follow down to the last consequences her own moral and ethical values rather than what her native or her adoptive ideologies dictate for her.

I read here Anaplian’s evolution applying the notions of the pariah and the defector (*transfugue*) developed by Marine Leibovici and Eleni Varikas following Hannah Arendt. Up to her teenage years Anaplian is an ‘unconscious pariah’, unaware of her disenfranchised position as a woman (albeit a princess) in Sarl. The Culture’s intercession transforms Anaplian into an accidental defector given an unexpected chance to abandon Sursamen and enjoy freedom. Thanks to her Culture training and self-education Anaplian understands her pariah position in her father’s kingdom but also that she occupies a new liminal position best defined by Leibovici’s notion of the ‘insideroutsider’. Once Anaplian joins Special Circumstances, she becomes again a pariah, at least for the Culture citizens who declare themselves pacifist non-interventionists. A problematic point is that even though Anaplian’s heroic actions are backed by the immensely powerful Culture, they are kept secret for fear of destroying the unstable alliance with the Morthanveld. Anaplian’s heroism may be acknowledged by the readers but her original status as a pariah is not altered either in the Culture or in Sarl, newly transformed into a democratic republic with no place for aristocrats like her.

1. From Unconscious to Conscious Pariah: Anaplian’s Rescue from Patriarchy

The pariah, Varikas explains,¹ enters the political vocabulary of Europe in the late Enlightenment period, when human rights were being defined by effect of the French Revolution and the very notion of humanity redrawn. It is in the 1790s, marked by the “débats passionnés” about the emancipation of the Jews, the non-white slaves, and the women, when “les premières oeuvres littéraires et dramatiques qui diffuseront la figure du paria et la problématique qui l’accompagne au sein d’un large public” (2003: 91) appear. ‘Pariah’ is used by early feminism, particularly in France, to question why the female half of the population are treated as outcasts with no political rights. Although Mary Wollstonecraft does not use this concept in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1790) she had already asked in England a similar question in relation to education.

The pariah, Varikas notes, is not just a figure of political exclusion since s/he is placed in “une position d’altérité hétérodéfinie qui le prive simultanément de l’humanité qu’il partage avec les autres membres de la communauté politique et de sa singularité, de ce qui le différencie de tous les autres individus” (2003:

100, original italics). Nineteenth-century science, from anthropology to psychology passing through physiology, attempted to prove that women were social pariahs not because of the brutal patriarchal pressure they endured but because their bodily and mental alterity made them 'naturally' inferior. This manoeuvre was accompanied by the construction of the 'separate spheres' doctrine, designed to persuade women that their 'natural' place was in the home, where they could enjoy true womanhood. Women were in practice 'unconscious pariahs', a notion introduced by French anarchist intellectual Bernard Lazare in *Le Nationalisme Juif* (1898). In his view, the false promises of emancipation had transformed the Jews from unconscious into conscious pariahs² with a clearer but also bitter awareness of their oppression. Early feminism had the same effect on the women who acquired a distinct awareness of patriarchal oppression.

The word patriarchy is never used in the Culture novels but it is evident that all the civilizations inimical to this utopia are patriarchal. The first scholarly analysis of the Culture, by Simon Guerrier, calls these other societies "'masculine' communities" (1999: 33), confusing, as is habitual, patriarchy and masculinity. His claim that the Culture is a "feminine organization" (33) defined by caring must be, therefore, read with caution for Banks's utopia is not primarily feminist but anti-patriarchal. Palmer also noted that the hedonism and tolerance of the Culture "has a dark shadow" in empires which are "violent, masculinist and competitive," and, thus, similar to real-life Earth (1999: n.p. online). This key aspect of Banks's science fiction, however, remains unexplored because, as I have noted, Banks is misjudged as an implicitly patriarchal writer who only interests men.

The plot of *Matter*, nonetheless, hinges on Banks's firm rejection of patriarchy. Shellworlds like planet Sursamen are "dangerous" because the tightly controlled, multilayered environment allows smaller civilizations to be "manipulated by their more powerful neighbors. This is a resonant image of an inherently destructive hierarchy" (Pattie, 2013: 22), rooted in patriarchal notions of power. Thus, disaster strikes when the Oct exploit Sarl for their own ends. King Hausk is fully aware of the subordinated position he occupies in Sursamen's planetary hierarchy and, so, his political plans are modest. His Wars of Unity aim at making the eighth level politically homogenous and stable for Sarl's budding technological revolution to progress. These plans, however, are upset when his heir Elime is killed in a skirmish with the Deneys and Hausk himself is murdered by his trusted second-in-command, Tyl Loesp. This pathetic villain is unaware that he is just a pawn in the Oct ploys to take the mysterious Nameless City from the Aultridians. The snobbish Oct claim to be the true descendants of the Shellworld builders, the Veil, and, spurred by that unfounded belief, they have the Sarl dig up from a vast city vault one of their ancestors. In fact, the object is a murderous machine built by the Iln, a species that devoted itself to destroying Shellworlds. Since Anaplian's timely intervention saves Sursamen, *Matter's* lesson is transparent: only a woman who understands patriarchy because she has become a conscious pariah (thanks to the Culture) can undo the damage done by the rigid hierarchical structure of her planet and of her home civilization.

Anaplian's narrative arc is conditioned by "the contrast between the topmost Culture and the bottommost of her home, between a society that allows her to explore her full potential and beyond, and one that would have a hard time with the idea of a female on the throne" (Jarvis 2009: n.p. online), or in any socially relevant position. In comparison to the masculinist reigns in novels such as *The Player of Games* or *Surface Detail*, King Hausk's patriarchy is mild but still blatantly sexist. The King has four children by different concubines, having

chosen to stay single in case a matrimonial political alliance might materialise. As Anaplian tells her step-brother, Hausk was “a king before he was a father, Ferbin. He was not intentionally cruel to us and he loved us in his own way, I’m sure, but we were never his priority” (466). He has raised his three male children to occupy key offices: manly Elime to be the next monarch, fun-loving Ferbin to run the diplomacy, and scholarly Oramen to manage learning (obviously, restricted to men). Djan, frail Lady Anaplia’s daughter, is snubbed by her father because, given the choice between mother and baby during the dangerous childbirth, he opts for the baby, convinced it is a boy. Embittered by his concubine’s death, King Hausk leaves the baby girl nameless for a month, calling her eventually Seriy, which means ‘fit to marry a prince’ and describes her mission in life. “Second in age, her gender and the circumstances of her birth had fixed the King’s only daughter firmly last in his affections” (88), the adult Anaplian concludes.

Since Banks constantly plays games it is hard to understand how age functions in his novels, in which standard years are not necessarily Earth years. Djan is seemingly a teenager (perhaps the equivalent of an eighteen-year-old) when her father uses her as “payment,³ if you wished to be brutal about it” to the Culture. Hausk believes that he has contracted a “debt of honour” (92) for the services of Xide Hyrlis, a Culture envoy who has been secretly helping to modernize his kingdom (a type of intervention actually forbidden on Sursamen by the Morthanveld). Anaplian is not sent away as “insurance” or to return as “an even more fit bride for some foreign prince” (92) but to serve the Culture. Far from being upset, King Hausk “had made it perfectly clear that he did not expect ever to see his only daughter again” (92).

Hausk apparently suggests the “bargain” (92) expecting either Ferbin or Oramen to be chosen, and is mystified that Hyrlis prefers Djan. The King feels that all Culture representatives are “*effeminate* fools” (93, my italics) and loses the high respect he had for the envoy. When Anaplian is ordered to do her duty (though Hyrlis insists it is her choice), she feels proud of playing “such an important role” but also “anguish at experiencing a rejection even more final and complete than all the other rejections her father had made her suffer” (92). Hausk finally sees the benefits of getting rid of “his troublesome, discontented, discounted daughter” (93), as Anaplian realises but she feigns the reluctance expected from a marriageable princess, hoping that Hyrlis will understand this is “an act” (93). Anaplian keeps her elation to herself:

At last! At last she would be free of this idiot backwater, at last she could develop as she wished, not as her father and this female-fearing, woman-demeaning society demanded. She was accepting an obligation she might spend the rest of her life fulfilling, but it was one that would take her away from the Eighth, away from the Sarl and the constrictions of the life she had gradually realised—with increasing dismay through her girlhood—she would otherwise have been expected to lead. (93)

As this passage shows, Anaplian was already an unhappy conscious pariah, perhaps by effect of a comparison of her life with that of her privileged step-brothers. Hyrlis’s choice possibly acts as the catalyst of feelings and ideas she had been entertaining for some time.

When Anaplian is welcomed into the Culture, the events connecting the Oct with the *Il*n destroyer are still many years away in the future and not even the Minds anticipate the heroic role which Anaplian will eventually play. This is not, then, a case of the Culture intervening in advance of events but just the rescue of one oppressed woman by a caring man who belongs to an anti-patriarchal civilization. Hyrlis sees in princess Anaplian either a damsel in distress—an

unconscious pariah beginning to understand her own oppression—or a potential defector suitable for future Special Circumstances recruitment. His act can be read either as ideological anti-patriarchal subversion against Hausk or just patriarchal gallantry towards a dispossessed young woman. Of course, Anaplian's rescue is not a pro-feminist intervention, since Hyrlis makes no attempt to persuade the Sarl men to grant their womenfolk equal rights. Only Anaplian is singled out to receive the benefits of the Culture's utopian enlightenment. Anaplian herself never thinks of returning home to free the other Sarl women. Instead of a feminist mission, Banks gives her a hero's mission to save her whole planet. First, however, Anaplian must overcome the culture shock that her becoming a Culture citizen entails, a process to which I turn next.

2. A Patriarchal Defector: Remaking Body and Mind as a Culture Citizen

The Culture education that Anaplian receives does not include a specific feminist course in anti-patriarchal awareness. Yet, by studying history in depth, as required to join Contact, she understands that instead of a great leader her father was “just another strong man, in one of those societies, at one of those stages, in which it was easier to be the strong man than it was to be truly courageous” (84). The lessons about how power works, which any native Culture citizen imbibes since childhood, reach her, an outsider from a society “profoundly different and frankly inferior,” with “the impact of a blow” (85). Once she gets a correct grasp of her homeland, Anaplian grows sceptical about the effect that her eventual return might produce. She keeps her Sarl memories in the background, as they seem “simply not relevant” in her new life as an enhanced posthuman citizen (Agar, 2014: 70).

In “Between Pariah and Parvenu,” a chapter in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes that “As long as defamed peoples and classes exist, parvenu- and pariah-qualities will be produced anew with each generation with incomparable monotony, by Jewish society and everywhere else” (66). Pariahs remain marginal figures but parvenus try “to conform to society” (66) by concealing at the cost of betraying themselves the features that make them potential pariahs. By making citizenship absolutely inclusive in the Culture, Banks makes it impossible, however, for anyone to be categorized as a pariah or a parvenu (though, arguably, the categories still apply to the civilizations that fail to meet utopian standards). Anaplian is fully welcome into the Culture and she has no need to hide her Sarl background. Her adaptation problems are generated instead by her own “discomfiture” with “the more self-congratulatingly clever Minds (not in itself an underpopulated category)” who believe that the Culture is not only “marvellous and a credit to all concerned” but “a sort of climactic stage for all civilisations” (173-174). Her mistrust of the Minds' view of utopia is not incompatible with her later work in *Special Circumstances*; what irks Anaplian is that the Minds have no personal experience of living in any of the worlds they wish to ‘civilize’.

As an accidental defector from patriarchy, Anaplian occupies the liminal position that all ideological dissidents occupy. Following Georg Simmel, Pierre Bourdieu, Alfred Schütz and Norbert Elias, Leibovici refers to “formes de socialisation caractérisées par une relation *insideroutsider*, où l'*outsider* est à la fois extérieur et inclus, alors que l'*insider* se représente l'*outsider* comme un être menaçant les positions qu'il considère devoir lui revenir par nature” (2011: 91). Anaplian is not at all a menace for the Culture but she does occupy the *insideroutsider* standpoint that allows her to develop “des capacités d'analyse inaccessibles aux membres des groupes bien en place” (92). She is, in short, better situated than any average Culture citizen to understand how their utopia works. At the

same time, citing Sarah Ahmed, Anaplian becomes the 'outsider within' whose assimilation allows the receiving society, here the Culture, "to *face* the 'limit' of the multicultural nation," which is open to strangers willing to integrate, but not to "stranger strangers, who refuse to be 'native' underneath" (2000: 106, original italics).

Despite implicitly siding with Anaplian's judgement of the Minds, Banks was a defender of utopia. In conversation with fellow author Kim Stanley Robinson he replied to Robinson's assertion that "Utopia is boring, we tried it" by counterarguing that "none of us have, not properly." Banks maintained that a "true utopia" needs to be open to everyone. Since, so far, utopia has been limited to the very rich and the "rest was the immiseration of multitudes" we cannot conclude that "it's boring" (Banks in Nolan, 2014: 69); we simply don't know how it would work. I am personally a defender of Banks's supposition that the way to utopia is the development of AI to the point of their taking control over human life (surely, they can do better than us) but I am aware that I am a minority of one among Banks's scholars (his readers are another matter).

Actually, recent analyses of the Culture are mostly negative, particularly those produced by women scholars, for reasons connected with the posthuman bodies of its citizens. The homogeneity of these bodies is often condemned, even though the choice of bodily shape is extremely open in Banks's novels. Anaplian's mentor Jerle Batra, for instance, "had his brain and central nervous system transferred into a variety of different forms" (80) until he found himself happy as an Aciculate, "a small, rootless, spherical bush made from tubes and wires" (80). Homogeneity in the Culture, Garrison asserts, is not at all negative; it "emerges from a vast constellation of difference, thereby creating opportunities for expanded notions of democracy" whereas "traditional claims to essential, discrete identity categories that are becoming blurred even in our contemporary global society" are denied (2012: 57).

This view, however, is contested by Sherryl Vint. She argues that the Culture's "very mode of embracing contingency and multiplicity and change has ironically become an embrace of homogeneity" (2007: 88). By this she means that all these "infinitely malleable bodies" constitute a way of "suggesting that the body does not matter, as its matter can be formed to suit the desires of the mind" (92); the bodily diversity is, thus, conditioned by "uniformity—of values or ethics, or human nature grounded in universal reason" (92). Vint certainly has a point. Anaplian herself notices that, unlike what she was used to in Sarl, no bodies in the Culture show signs of deformity or disease: "Everyone was, or could be if they so desired, beautiful in both form and character" (165). Later, she learns that some "embraced ugliness and even the appearance of deformity or mutilation" (165). Once she overcomes her "irritation and exasperation" with these choices, Anaplian realizes that the "deliberate adoption of unsightliness displayed a kind of societal confidence, a thumbing of the collective nose at the workings of crude providence and the ancient tyranny, now itself long overthrown, of genetic aberration, gross injury and transmissible pestilence" (165). Vint worries that natural bodily difference, and the differences caused by disempowerment or privilege, are erased but this is Banks's whole point: given a generally available ability to choose our bodies in a prejudice-free society, why should that choice be rejected?

Following Vint, Leach stresses that "Whilst each individual augmentation, such as an optimized immune system, clearly resolves some problem experienced by a human, it also promotes a bodily homogeneity" (2018: 71). This, she complains, "is most obvious in the Culture-human's ability to change sex at will"

(71). To back her view, Leach cites a key passage from Banks's "A Few Notes on the Culture," which, in my view, suggests the complete opposite:

A society in which it is so easy to change sex will rapidly find out if it is treating one gender better than the other; within the population, over time, there will gradually be greater and greater numbers of the sex it is more rewarding to be, and so pressure for change—within society rather than the individuals—will presumably therefore build up until some form of sexual equality and hence numerical parity is established. (1994: 7)

I grant that Banks's gender discourse is limited by binarism and I grant that his conception of the posthuman body is Cartesian, since he thinks of human minds as transferrable to different bodies. Yet, Anaplian's experience of being a man for one year is approached as an experience in a different kind of proprioception, that is, of embodiment. Indeed, the novel is called *Matter* because as Xide Hyrlis argues, although all living things are information, human beings are "lucky enough to be encoded in matter itself, not running in some abstract system as patterns of particles or standing waves of possibilities" (340). This, incidentally, agrees with N. Katherine Hayles's main thesis (and critique of cybernetic transhumanism) in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999).

When Anaplian learns that Culture citizens can choose their gender, she judges this "highly satisfactory, and a kind of vindication" (171). During her transition, Anaplian keeps "a couple of intermittent, unbothered lovers even as she changed, then, as a man, took many more, mostly female" becoming s/he says, "a better, more considerate lover" (171). Anaplian feels tempted to return to Sursamen as a man, once the heir Elime has been killed, and claim the throne as the second-born child. Yet, Anaplian thinks, "that would be cruel at best" (170). Since being Sarl's King "no longer seemed like the greatest thing a soul might aspire to" Anaplian becomes a woman again, knowing first-hand that in the Culture there is no special privilege for men. Incidentally, this is when Princess Djan Seriy Hausk'a yun Poursich fully embraces her Culture citizenship becoming Djan Seriy Anaplian. Her chosen name honours her dead mother and still includes Seriy, "kept for a laugh" (171).

In her fifteen years (whatever this means) as a Culture citizen Anaplian undergoes a process of radical bodily modification. Still, playful Banks makes it hard for readers to fully envision her original looks and the subsequent changes. Describing her skin "as the colour of pale agate" (2), a mineral with an enormous colour range, Banks refuses to place Anaplian in any racial group. "By most human standards" she looks "tall, slim and well-muscled" (2) though anyone in Sarl would find her "somewhat short and bulky" (3). The first treatment she takes, before leaving Sarl, thickens her bones and reduces her height. During her first two years on the Orbital Gadampth, Anaplian chooses not to receive any further modifications. However, once she activates the gland-drug suit that allows Culture citizens to control the biochemistry of emotions, Anaplian starts collecting "amendments, treatments, as one might accumulate jewellery" (169). Apart from gender switching, further treatments enable her to control ageing, disease immunity, limb and organ regeneration, and her augmented senses. She becomes a cyborgian posthuman by having a neural lace installed in her brain, which allows her to "interface directly with machines" (171). Her modified nervous system allows her to control pain and fatigue, whereas other cyborgian interventions strengthen bones and muscles.

After five years in Contact, Anaplian is invited to join Special Circumstances and offered a set of combat enhancements powered by a small antimatter reactor inside her skull. Her advanced posthuman body, fully under conscious control, can sense "distortions in the skein of space itself" (172). No wonder she feels

“like a god” (172). The irony is that the moment when the fully empowered Anaplian feels that she can never return to Sursamen, news of King Hausk’s death reaches her. The cold war between the Morthanveld and the Culture means that any decision to return passes through her losing most of her enhancements. “You’re gelding me” (173), she complains to Jerle Batra. Perhaps it would have been more adequate for Anaplian to feel like a goddess, rather than a god, but her use of ‘gelding’ here makes the connection between empowerment and gender (and sexuality) plain. Anaplian’s complaint is not a sign of her masculinization, in any case, for Special Circumstances does not care for its agents’ gender. It is a sign of how her anti-patriarchal stance correlates with her immensely powerful body, which she wants to remain female.

This does not mean that Anaplian’s acceptance of the offer to join the “prestigious, if not entirely respectable organisation” (167) that Special Circumstances is—which she reads as a “most singular and unusual honour and almost the only worthwhile distinction the Culture had to offer” (168)—is not problematic. Anaplian herself is “instantly suspicious” (168) of why she has been chosen. One thing is being saved from being a pariah in her father’s kingdom, and quite another being singled out to be another type of pariah within the Culture at a time when she is beginning to enjoy her *insideroutsider* position. How she deals with this situation is the issue I address next.

3. A Conscious Pariah Again: Agency, Duty, and Heroism

When Anaplian hears of her father’s death, but still does not know he has been murdered, she decides to go home to “pay her respects [...], reconnect with her past a bit and perhaps lay something to rest” (380), though she is not sure what exactly. She intends to return later “if they’d take her, back to SC and the job that, for all its frustrations, dilemmas and heartbreaks, she loved” (380). Her dedication is the reason why Anaplian is an embarrassing pariah for the Peace Faction, the Culture group that renounced violence hundreds of years before at the start of the Idiran War, the main event in the history of this utopia. One of them, Quitrilis Yurke, confronts Anaplian, telling her that “We’re the real Culture” and SC “the cancerous offspring, grown bigger than the host and more dangerous than when we split, but you resemble us well enough to make us all look the same to others” (292). He is angry because “You make us look bad” (292).

Diverse scholars endorse this view, which means that Anaplian is also a pariah as a fictional female character. Farah Mendlesohn calls SC “the Culture’s KGB” (2005: 121), arguing that this utopia is decadent not because of its hedonism, which is its mainstay, but because of its foreign policy. “Its decadence,” she protests, “is not that of late Imperial Rome but of the late Soviet Union in its ‘period of stagnation’: complacent within, adventurist without” (116). In contrast, English author Gwyneth Jones sees SC as “the Culture’s CIA” (2008: n.p. online), whereas Canadian-born Sherryl Vint suggests that “the parallels between the Culture’s imperialism as guided by its Minds and US capitalist imperialism as guided by the ‘needs’ of corporations provide a useful structure for generating insights into the implications of cultural imperialism” (2007: 93), of which SC is an insidious manifestation. On his side Banks, whose socialist militancy was resolute, stresses that the Culture “isn’t after anything, save some peace of mind.” This civilization “can feasibly argue that, when it does interfere, it has the best interests of the populations it is interfering with at heart. As opposed to, say—oh—the best interests of the shareholders of Standard Oil, Bechtel, Halliburton and so on” (in Wilson, 2013: 55). Similarly, Shmilev defends

that “More often than not, civilizations which have experienced Culture interventions emerge from the transitional chaos better off than comparable Earth counterparts,” citing *The Player of Games*, *Matter*, *Surface Detail* and *Inversions* as examples (2016: 64). Anaplian herself tells Yurke that she is “constantly” ashamed, as he says SC should be, but “Still, we can prove that it works. The interfering and the dirty-tricking; it works. Salvation is in statistics” (292).

Hardesty warns that in Banks’s novels a hidden “counter-narrative [...] interrogates, problematises, and criticises the myth of good will and good deeds that the master narrative promotes” (1999: 40). Nonetheless, he notes, the Culture is not a military machine but a peace-loving civilization that “on the whole and officially [...] abhors violence.” SC agents like Anaplian “employ it reluctantly” (44) yet try nonetheless to remain “utterly dissociated” (44) in case their actions “backfire” and also because they seek “deniability” (44). There is then a mixture of benevolence and insincerity in SC’s task, which makes the Culture appear to be “devious and manipulative in ways that consistently transgress the laws of this utopia it purports to have set up for itself” and which “casts doubt on the feasibility of this, or any, utopia” (Labuschagne, 2011: 62). At any rate, none of its agents act hypocritically. On the other hand, it can be argued that their honesty is the very reason why persons like Anaplian are recruited, perhaps, as readers might suspect, even groomed for the task.

“The moral of the story” in Banks’s novels, “is that outside of the petty games of dominance and control, is a larger more complex game” (Slocombe, 2013: 148) involving personal choice. The negotiation is never easy. Anaplian impresses Ferbin when they reunite. Her step-brother sees not just a princess but “a very queen” (424), an “astoundingly powerful; unshakeable” woman (425). Anaplian, though, is not powerful within SC. Already aware that the Oct are endangering the planet in some unspecified way, SC exploits Anaplian’s wish to return home to request that she take “a professional interest in events on Sursamen” (428). Jerle Batra fulfils her demand to have her martial systems switched on again, but this is the limit of her personal agency. When Anaplian announces that she intends to arrest the usurper Tyl Loesp, Batra sharply reminds her that “It is not for you to make or remake Culture foreign policy” (431). As a Culture citizen she had assumed that this was “entirely my right and duty” (431) but Batra denies her autonomy and agency, stressing that “You are *one* Culture citizen” (431, original italics). Her being an *agent* is thus a paradox: Anaplian may represent SC’s *agency* but she is deprived of hers. Far from rebelling, Anaplian convinces Ferbin that King Hausk would reject any bloody revenge plot. The unearthing of the IIn machine pushes all political concerns to the background anyway, forcing Anaplian to save Sursamen.

She is backed in her mission by another expendable pariah, the *Liveware Problem*, an ancient Culture spaceship with no formal ties to SC whose Mind, Anaplian trusts, knows the danger they face better than anyone else. Anaplian undertakes their task knowing that, like any other Culture citizen, she can avoid death. A clone would be grown and “all her personality and memories implanted into it, creating a new her almost indistinguishable from the person she was now” (179), though with no memories of the actual experience of dying. Her eventual rebirth will not free her from being a pariah, for “It did not do to forget that, in a disquietingly real sense, to be an SC agent was to be owned by SC” (179). Her saviour Xide Hyrlis, who joins but later abandons SC, appears to be insane when he reappears in the novel, though it is not clear whether his profound paranoia is justified. It might well be the case that SC never ceases watching him or, simply, that he cannot get rid of its presence in his mind.

Anaplian's 'death' might be another of Banks's strange games. As soon as it is freed, the IIn destroyer heads towards the core of Sursamen to murder the resident WorldGod. This is no supernatural divinity, as the Sarl believe, but a member of a once powerful, ancient species called the Xinthian Tensile Aeronathours. Single individuals often take residence in the core of Shellworlds and the Aultridia, originally parasites of the Xinthia, apparently maintain these planets to serve their former hosts. No species—Aultridia, Oct, Nariscene, Morthanveld, or the Culture—knows why the Veil made the Shellworlds. When the IIn machine faces Anaplian and her human companions (Ferbin and his servant Choubri Holse) its words ring somehow true: the Shellworlds are machines made to generate “a field enclosing the galaxy. Not to protect but to imprison, control, annihilate” (565); the machine claims to be, like all its IIn predecessors, a “liberator” (565). Anaplian dismisses this boast and is brutally “eviscerated” (566). She still manages, though, to destroy the IIn monster by denoting the anti-matter reactor which powers her posthuman body. There is no indication that the IIn machine was telling the truth but the seed of a very uncomfortable doubt is planted.

In her review Gwyneth Jones observes that “there's something *funny* going on” (2008: n.p. online, original italics) in *Matter* that hints at parody but that never manifests itself as such. She is baffled by the “ridiculous Appendix,” listing characters and species, oddly placed before the epilogue. This final text, uncharacteristic of Banks's habitual “tight ending[s]” (Jarvis, 2009: n.p. online), is funny in the sense Jones highlights. Anaplian, presumably resurrected, is not mentioned at all. The focus is Choubri Holse, Ferbin's patient servant and only survivor of the clash with the IIn machine. One year after the events, Sursamen is at peace and Sarl has become a democratic republic; Holse plans to run for First Minister in the upcoming elections. Tellingly, he is accompanied by a human-looking avatar of the *Liveware Problem*, the spaceship that collaborated in Anaplian's mission. This suggests that its extremely old Mind was aware of the IIn machine and of how the crisis might give the Culture control over Sursamen on the grounds that the Morthanveld were not up to the task of protecting the planet. Anaplian's role as heroic, expendable pariah is not affected, but the avatar's presence hints that SC's interventionist policies are certainly deployed in devious ways. Either that is the case, or mine is a paranoid reading induced by Xide Hyrlis's madness—and by Banks's ingenious playfulness.

4. Conclusions: Her Own Woman

At the beginning of *Matter*, Ferbin, fearing for his life since he has secretly witnessed his father's murder, frantically searches for Anaplian, hoping that she is indeed a warrior as her later letters home suggested. “They had worried about her sanity at first, but woman warriors were not unknown” (103), at least in the mythical past of Sarl. Ferbin assumes that the Culture knows best and since life moves “in wheels of good and ill fortune, maybe woman warriors were part of some utterly strange and incomprehensible future” (103). Luckily for Sursamen, Anaplian is the champion Ferbin needs in the present. It would have been interesting to witness the meeting between the old King and his empowered posthuman daughter but Banks chose to have Anaplian reunite with Ferbin. A far less keen supporter of patriarchy than their father, he acknowledges that his step-sister has become “formidable” (427). Likewise, Banks could have shown Anaplian instead of the ship's avatar next to Holse in the epilogue but he simply did not make that choice. Readers will never know what the reborn Anaplian felt when she learned from her SC superiors what she did in Sursamen but it can be imagined.

As I hope to have shown, Iain M. Banks's science fiction does not at all exclude the feminine, as it has been assumed. On the contrary: he was not only quite capable of creating fully convincing female characters like Anaplian, but also to express through their narrative arcs a firm anti-patriarchal position. With Anaplian's deeds Banks shows that often the fate of patriarchal civilizations depends on the generosity of women. She follows her personal sense of duty when she decides to return home as a civilian but also when she accepts SC's mission to protect Sursamen. Her moral integrity demands that she guide herself by her own ethics, no one else's. I am not calling his stance feminist (or pro-feminist) because Anaplian is never seen to interact with other women. However, by making the Culture free of gendered prejudice and its rivals blatant patriarchal civilizations, Banks stressed his belief that utopia had to include women's full emancipation.

In this sense, Anaplian is a most relevant example of personal liberation. As I have argued, she is beginning to transform herself into a conscious pariah, from an initial positioning as unconscious pariah despite her high social status as a princess, when Xide Hyrlis facilitates her integration in the Culture. There, Anaplian remakes her body and her mind to become her own (posthuman) woman in a period during which she also learns to be a defector from patriarchy. Once her education is complete, she chooses to accept SC's invitation, despite knowing that this choice will turn her into a pariah among the peace-loving majority of the Culture, not because she is bored or disenchanting but because she sees SC as a way to do for others what the Culture did for her. Her 'death' might not be a final heroic sacrifice but it does lay to rest that indefinite something that impels her to return home as soon as she learns of King Hausk's death.

Reading Hannah Arendt's 1957 biography of conscious Jewish pariah Rahel Varnhagen (1771-1833), Jill Locke questions the use of shame in feminist activism. She argues that "Rahel did not ultimately become ashamed of being ashamed, nor did the anti-Semites who made her life so miserable reevaluate their worldview as a result of shame-induced self-reflection" (150). Applying this to Anaplian, her decision not to return home as a man to shame the patriarchal Sarl seems correct. As noted, she accepts that as an SC agent she should feel ashamed of her interventionist actions but, precisely, these correspond to the feminist (or anti-patriarchal) activism which Locke defends. Instead of shaming "our political enemies" feminists "might redirect their efforts toward building a world for the shame ridden and shame prone—creating counterpublics and spaces where alternative images of life can emerge" (2007: 159). This is what Anaplian does with her SC job, and what Banks did with his own utopian Culture.⁴

Notes

¹ Varikas's *Les rebuts du monde. Figures du paria* (2007) offers a comprehensive overview of the concept. Pages 15 to 51, dealing with the cultural misunderstandings between colonizers and colonized in India which generated the term, are available in English as the article "The Outcasts of the World – Images of the Pariahs" (2010).

² «Of an often unconscious pariah», Lazare writes, emancipation «will make a conscious pariah» though with no advantages since «it is neither a guarantee, nor an assurance, nor an amelioration» (2007: n.p. online). Hannah Arendt quotes Lazare in her pioneering article «We Refugees» (1943). There she develops the idea of the social parvenu as the opposite of the social pariah, applying it to the Jews who chose to remain conscious pariahs instead of becoming upstarts of doubtful social standing.

³ Winter writes that «Anaplian is given as *dowry* to the Culture by her father» (2014: 333, my italics), a noun which may mean payment but that is usually associated to marriage. There is, however, no hint that she is to be a bride.

⁴ Research for this article has been funded by the project «Tránsfugas y parias modernas: Género y exclusión en la cultura popular del s. XXI», Ref. FEM2017-83974-P, I.P. Dra. Helena González, Universitat de Barcelona (2018-2021), Ministerio de Economía y Empresa (MINECO).

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