

‘Our close but prohibited union’: Sibling Incest, Class and National Identity in Iain Banks’s *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*.

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The work of Iain Banks has been prominent in exploring the crossings of different kinds of borders: national, aesthetic and generic, ontological, gender and class to name but a few. Banks has also been part of a wider preoccupation in contemporary Scottish writing to do with inhabiting border zones, where the border ceases to be an idealised geometric line with almost no width or physical extension, and instead broadens to become a site that one can reside in, the ground against which the figure emerges.¹ The clearest example of this in Banks’s work is probably *The Bridge*, in which the unnamed hero Alexander Lennox is injured in a car crash on the Forth Road Bridge and in his coma is transported as an amnesiac into the fantasy world of the Bridge, a huge structure which stretches across water in both directions as far as the eye can see and which is home for thousands of inhabitants.² *The Bridge*, along with another Banks book set in contemporary Scotland *The Crow Road* will form the background to my analysis of Banks’s novel *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*.^{3 4} This essay will illuminate how *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*’s continuation of, and departure from, the border explorations and reflections on national identity of his earlier books is rendered through the crucial deployment of the motif of sibling incest in the novel.

Before exploring in detail the profound significance of sibling incest within the novel, it is worth considering where *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* fits into Banks’s *oeuvre*. Grouping it together with *The Bridge* and *The Crow Road*, one is struck by how even the books’ titles signal an interest in travel and connection. Unlike novel titles typical of nineteenth-century fiction that identify a person or a town or house, the titles of these novels by Banks offer no reference to people and suggest liminal places on the road between

different locations rather than a single geographical site. *The Bridge* denotes the Forth rail and road bridges and also the fantasy world of the Bridge, while *The Crow Road* signals both a road to the west of Glasgow and the passage between life and death, ‘away the Crow Road’ serving as a euphemism for death in the novel. However in Banks’s work these in-between places themselves become important locations that define the characters that populate them, and that embody complex networks of affiliations and pressures. His novels feature many episodes of characters travelling from the cities to the highlands, often at the wheel of powerful vehicles. As Cristie March notes, Banks often uses the geography of Scotland to both delineate and connect a jet-setting and cosmopolitan lifestyle on the one hand with a more down-to-earth rural one on the other and *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* is no exception, beginning as it does with a touch of misdirection as the reader follows the wealthy Fielding Wopuld driving his Mercedes into a Perth housing estate so down-at-heel that even the graffiti is ‘poor quality’.^{5 6} It is not Fielding that is to be the novel’s protagonist however, but his cousin Alban who despite his wealthy background is a guest in a council house there. Alban’s journey will be to return to Garbadale, the grand Wopuld family home in the Scottish countryside, and to discover the secret of incest hidden within his wealthy family. The unearthing of incest will transform Alban’s sense of his own identity and throw into question the Wopuld’s problematic status as family/nation.

In its playful opening migration between different points of view, from Fielding’s snobbery, to Alban’s laconic enigma to his host Tango’s working class domestic scene, *Garbadale* echoes *The Bridge*’s play with downward class mobility on the part of its often disaffected protagonist, as the ambitious and accomplished Lennox of the real world who has left his West coast roots to become wealthy and middle class is transmuted, in the fantasy world of the Bridge, into the bourgeois Orr, who then proceeds to slide down the hierarchy of the bridge society until he ends up in a cramped room on a small allowance. Alban McGill

has spent a period away from the Wopuld family firm literally in the wilderness working as a forester and after developing a long-term work-related injury has moved into Tango's house spending his money on alcohol and drugs. Both books project sensitivity to class within a Scottish context and the plots of both novels act to intertwine the lives of middle-class and working-class characters, while the narrative also intertwines Standard English with non-standard Scots. The Scots-speaking Barbarian who haunts *The Bridge* shares certain similarities with Tango, the uneducated character whose first person narrative (full of misplaced apostrophes) begins and ends *Garbadale*, bookending the adventures of the middle class protagonist and perhaps broadening the context and import of Alban's decisions beyond the scope of the bourgeois and incestuous Wopuld clan. In this sense, Tango is also reminiscent of *The Bridge*'s Lynchy, a working-class neighbour who helps down-on-his-luck Orr when almost all of Orr's former friends have shunned him. Of course, the linguistic differentiation also has a national resonance: as Thom Nairn has pointed out in relation to *The Bridge*, the fact that the semi-literate Scots-speaking Barbarian is shackled to his RP-speaking familiar has as much to do with that state of the Union as it does with the inside of Lennox's head.⁷

The Steep Approach to Garbadale is perhaps closest to *The Crow Road*, published fifteen years earlier, in its portrayal of large families and their various disputes and secrets. The Wopuld family of *Garbadale* and the McHoans of *The Crow Road* both have skeletons in their cupboards, and Alban's mother's mysterious suicide by drowning in a loch recalls the disappearance of Prentice's uncle Rory in *The Crow Road*, who has been murdered and his body dumped. Both Prentice and Alban are drawn to the enigma of the missing body in the lake, a scenario heavy with mythic resonance, and both protagonists struggle to find out why their relatives are gone, and also very significantly, why they wanted to leave their life behind. Prentice and Alban are disaffected, youthful characters, who seem at least initially

uninterested in their family's aspirations for them 'to get on' and both are drawn to relations (Rory, Alban's mother) who were themselves disaffected, and drop-outs of a kind. The troubled heroes of *The Crow Road* and *Garbadale* are both poised between different worlds and are struggling to find their place, while simultaneously trying to discover the truth about the fates of their precursors, contributing to the strong bildungsroman aspects that have been a feature of Banks's work since *The Wasp Factory*.⁸

While the perception of a profound duality within Scottish literature and culture, the so-called Caledonian antisyzygy, has continued to be both an important focus and a site of strong disagreement, there seems to be more consensus within scholarly discussions on the importance of being between to Scottish literature and culture. This has been articulated widely within critical circles, most influentially by Cairns Craig whose *Out of History* has a chapter entitled 'Being between': 'The condition of "being between" is not the degeneration of a culture but the essential means of its generation... Culture is not an organism, nor a totality, nor a unity: it is the site of a dialogue, it is a dialectic, a dialect. It is being between.'⁹ Eleanor Bell, although pursuing an approach that is apparently antipathetic to Craig's, concurs with him on the importance of betweenness for Scottish literature, claiming that 'it is imperative that we view Scotland comparatively, as existing *between* cultures rather than as an isolated unit'.¹⁰ While academics have been wary of applying postcolonial theory to Scottish literature, the essays collected in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* marks a closer connection between these domains than has perhaps previously been admitted.¹¹ The heated revisionism debates that took place within Irish Studies in the 1990s are a good indicator of the difficulties of regarding contemporary Scottish literature as postcolonial, so it is not surprising that a cautious approach to these issues has been prevalent. Nonetheless it is clear that there are significant connections between the Scottish between-ness of Craig and Bell and important areas of postcolonial theory, especially in work

on cultural hybridity and on rhizomic structures. While Banks's previous novels are bursting with the crossing and re-crossing of borders and divisions between nations, regions, classes, dialects, realities and genders, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* is distinct in its attempt to situate this Scottish sensibility of between-ness within a new national and global context and marks a significant exploration of Scotland's post-devolution political and economic choices through its ambivalent treatment of family and business connections.

Garbadale tells the story of Alban McGill, mid-30s member of the wealthy Wopuld family that has made its fortune from a board game that involves conquest and trade. The plot involves Alban participating in the debate over whether the family shareholders should sell their firm to the American company Spraint Inc, and coming to terms with his feelings for his cousin Sophie, with whom he conducted an adolescent romance, and for his current girlfriend Verushka, a professor of mathematics and game theory. Alban is also haunted by his mother's suicide when he was just a baby and one enigma that the novel sets out to resolve is why she took her own life, a resolution that has profound consequences for Alban's sense of identity. The board-game the Wopulds own is called *Empire!* and involves several players competing to conquer the world. Banks has some fun with how the game has been renamed over the Twentieth Century, from *Empire!* to *Commonwealth* and finally to its American incarnation *Liberty!* As this makes clear, there is a strong sense of national allegory at work here, with the British (royal) family that brought the world Empire guided by an ageing matriarch in the person of Grandma Win now ceding global control to the American corporation who is bringing the world Liberty. The names of Grandma Win and her deceased husband Bert signal how closely the spectres of the widowed Queen Victoria (Victory) and Prince Albert hang over the fictional proceedings, encouraging the kind of political reading frequently solicited both by Banks's mainstream output and by his science fiction published under his Iain M. Banks imprimatur.¹²

Alban, whose name's closeness to Alba (the ancient name for Scotland) is another strong nod towards national allegory is, despite his age, similar to the university student Prentice in *The Crow Road* in being 'between', experiencing arrested development and being suspended between adult and pre-adult status. As Craig has observed, temporal suspension and suspended animation are important motifs in much contemporary Scottish literature:

Such suspended animation [in ref to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*] will become a regular image of the changeless and paralysed condition of modern Scotland... in Iain Banks's *The Bridge*, as in Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, the narrator is immobilised in his hospital bed.¹³

Alban exhibits the same of kind of stasis that we see in the realist strands of *Lanark*, *The Bridge* and *Marabou Stork Nightmare* where the young Scotsman struggles with the task of defining his goals and ambitions.^{14 15} Part of the reason for Alban's 'suspension' may have to do with his predicament regarding how he should regard the sale of the family firm, and here we come to the central, politically resonant conundrum of the novel. Alban is caught between a matriarchal, hidebound, secretive, semi-feudal, incestuous clan on the one hand and an American-dominated, Middle-East meddling, global capitalist system on the other. He must try to balance his loyalty to his family members with his distrust of their motives and methods while being faced with the imminent demise of their status as share-owning decision makers at the hands of an American corporation.

Banks emphasises this political aspect of the Wopuld family's situation in Alban's attempt to describe it to his half-Czech and very cosmopolitan girlfriend Verushka Graef: 'I feel like a UN Observer or something,' he tells her. 'I'm going to watch them tear themselves apart, for money. Or stay shackled together, in some dubious spirit of solidarity. Which we are not, frankly, very good at.'¹⁶ The supposedly neutral United Nations observer status that Alban describes does not quite do justice to his own sense of involvement and identification with the participants, signalled by his switch from 'them' to 'we' in describing his family and its shortcomings and this quote neatly expresses scepticism about both options the family face: whether to sell up and start arguing about the price or to remain locked in 'dubious' solidarity within a secretive and incestuous clan.

In describing the Wopulds as an incestuous clan, I am being literal in that Alban discovers at the end of the novel that he is the product of brother and sister sexual union. His biological father is his uncle Blake who has been exiled to Hong Kong for seducing his sister Irene (Alban's mother) who committed suicide as a result. Alban's inbred status explains why his grandmother was so keen to put a stop to the burgeoning romance with his cousin Sophie, given the high probability of birth defects if they were to have children. The revelation of paternity is important for *Garbadale's* plot in that it acts to resolve a number of the novel's mysteries but it is this introduction of the sibling-incest theme that I think is especially significant in shedding light on Banks' treatment of trade and family, and by extension of post-devolution Scotland's status and future. The title of this essay 'our close but prohibited union' comes from Banks's novel *A Song of Stone* and is the narrator Abel describing his incestuous relationship with his sister Morgan.¹⁷ *A Song of Stone*, which takes place in the confused aftermath of a civil war in an unnamed place, details the humiliations experienced by the aristocrats Abel and Morgan at the hands of a female Lieutenant with her gang of outlaws who takes over their castle as a military base and Banks had earlier used

sibling incest in *Walking on Glass* and one his Culture series of science fiction novels *Use of Weapons*.^{18 19}

Approaches to sibling incest have generally been dominated by psychoanalysis on the one hand and sociological or anthropological work on the other, the former represented in most detail by Otto Rank, Freud's disciple, and the latter by Edward Westermarck. For psychoanalysts like Rank, author of the encyclopaedic *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend* first published in 1912, the patriarchal taboo against both maternal and sibling incest was the necessary control against something we all (unconsciously) desire, and which contributes to the subject's growth into the post-Oedipal phase of development:

Despite all these taboos, restrictions, and threats of punishment, the tendency for sexual intercourse with one's closest relatives, deep-seated in human nature and barely kept in check by education and culture, not only appears in our dreams, in the creations of literary fantasy, and in neurosis, but also expresses itself in forbidden acts still frequent to this day. ²⁰

Westermarck by contrast claimed the exact opposite, that the incest-taboo was merely an expression of something we naturally found repellent. He coined the so-called Westermarck effect, where those who grow up in close proximity to each other are naturally disinclined to be sexually attracted to one another, whether they are genetically related or not. The Westermarck effect, elsewhere called natural avoidance, posits that people who grow up as siblings, even if they are not related, will not grow to regard each other with sexual interest.

Westermarck's work possibly supplies some support for Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA) that emerged as a term in the 1980s and is probably the converse of the Westermarck effect, where people who are related grow up apart but when they meet they find themselves sexually attracted to one another. There have been recent cases in America and Scotland and media interest has ranged from the predictably prurient 'Siblings' Sick Fling Not a First' headlines to more sympathetic accounts.^{21 22}

For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the incest taboo is so fundamental to human society that it almost defies analysis:

The prohibition of incest is in origin neither purely cultural nor purely natural, nor is it a composite mixture of elements from both nature and culture. It is the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished. ²³

Here Lévi-Strauss almost struggles to articulate the importance of the incest taboo and positions it as the simplest building block of human society. According to this analysis the need for exogamy is crucial to human development and so for the structuralist anthropologists, the incest taboo enforces the patriarchal exchange of women as a means of developing social networks and affiliations without which the community cannot develop and thrive and the move from nature into culture cannot be achieved. What if the family does not need these economic and social ties however? What if the family is aristocratic and wishes to conserve its wealth? This is part of the long association of sibling incest with the aristocracy,

from the Ptolemy dynasty in Egypt to the Hapsburgs of Europe. Elizabethan and Jacobean drama registered sibling incest as fed by pressure within noble families not to mix their blood with families of lesser status and this is the scenario in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* where Ferdinand's incestuous desire for his sister the Duchess is encouraged by her marriage to her steward, a marriage beneath her according to Ferdinand. In fact so common was the sibling incest motif in English Renaissance drama that even the energetic and meticulous scholar of incest Otto Rank was forced to concede its 'tiring monotony' in the works of Beaumont and Fletcher.

This connection between sibling incest and nobility is a particularly strong one in the work of Iain Banks and in *A Song of Stone* Abel and Morgan's incestuous sexual relationship is a sign of their feudal aristocratic status, rather than any putative backwoods immorality. Having been disgusted by the democratic 'equality' of the sexual act, Abel addresses Morgan and vows to render himself distinguished by his sexual deviance as much as by conventional markers of social distinction:

[T]o be worth anything at all I – we – must evade such mundane pursuits and set ourselves apart as much in the staging of that customary act as in our dress, habitation, speech or subsidiary manners. Thus have I degraded both of us in order to set us equally as far apart from the lowly as my imagination can devise, hoping – by these indiscretions – to make us both discrete.²⁴

The hesitation between ‘I’ and ‘we’ in Abel’s account anticipates Alban’s move from ‘them’ and ‘we’ discussed above and strengthens the sense of families engendering a somewhat confused dual perspective in their members, both distinct from and part of a collective. As Abel’s willingness here to act on behalf of the silent Morgan shows, social supremacy and marked reluctance to mix with others goes to the heart of Banks’s use of sibling incest. When by the end of the novel the female Lieutenant has succeeded in taking Morgan as a lover, it is clear that the secluded and privileged dyad Abel tried to preserve has come crashing down among the lowly outlaws who now run the castle.

While the early English novel abounds with sibling incest, in works including *Moll Flanders*, *Evelina*, *Joseph Andrews* and *The Mysterious Mother*, the incest involved is often ‘unwitting’, as the characters only find out they are related after the fact. There are also frequent cases of ‘near misses’ where the couple think they are related but turn out not to be. In the Romantic era things change significantly, as sibling incest in literature is now read not as a perversion but as an extension and amplification of sibling love. Sibling love becomes arguably the highest form of love and devotion and in many respects forms the paradigm for Romantic love, being based on sentiment and mutual respect, and lying outside patriarchal and capitalist systems of exchange. For Romantics, sibling incest is often part of a general rebellion against patriarchal and divine law, and is connected to atheism and political radicalism, particularly in the work of Percy Shelley (*The Revolt of Islam*) and Byron (*Manfred*). Paternal incest, so common in gothic fiction, is evil and tyrannical, whereas sibling incest speaks of equality and mutual devotion. Editorial changes to key Romantic works also show the sensitivity to sibling incest: Laon and Cythna in Percy Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam* were originally brother and sister but Cythna then became a foster sibling. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the narrative of which is framed by letters from Walton to his sister, Elizabeth is famously described by Victor as ‘my more than sister’ and was Victor’s

cousin in the 1818 edition before becoming a foster sibling in the 1831 edition. The ambivalence of poetic treatments of incest, and incest's capacity to embody diametrically opposed values clearly fascinated Percy Shelley:

[Incest is] like many other incorrect things, a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or hate. It may be the defiance of everything for the sake of another, which clothes itself in the glory of the highest heroism, or it may be that cynical rage which, confounding the good and the bad in existing opinions, breaks through them for the purpose of rioting in selfishness and antipathy.²⁵

The 'poetical circumstance' attributed by Shelley indicates the importance of context for our understanding of incest, and this dual nature of incest may be broken down along paternal and sibling lines, with paternal incest issuing from an excess of hate while sibling love issues from an excess of love. Certainly Percy Shelley's treatment of paternal incest in his play *The Cenci* is one of horror and tyranny.

In contrast to these Romantic treatments of sibling incest, American literature has tended to focus on the destructive consequences of such relations, most notably in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' that describes a family collapsing in on itself due to sibling incest. For James Twitchell, this marks out the American presentations of the motif as significantly different in tone and outcome to Romantic projections:

[T]he centrifugal forces placed in a usually motherless family as the male sexual violation of daughter/sister is no longer threatened, but often realised, caused a catastrophe so complete that finally nothing of the family remains. Let the English mythologize incest as did Byron, or metaphysicalize it as did Shelley, the Nineteenth-Century American experience is uniformly horrible, irrepressibly gothic, maybe even characteristically pragmatic.²⁶

Twitchell here however seems to be underplaying the extent to which Romantic plots involving incest also tend to end horribly for the characters involved. As Alan Richardson points out, while the Romantics may have gone out of their way to valorise sibling incest and see it a special intensification of sentimental sibling attachment, they did not go out of their way to supply the characters with a happy ending in *Manfred* or *The Revolt of Islam*, thus preserving the association of sibling incest with destruction.²⁷

As Twitchell notes above, the absence of the mother seems a common feature of sibling incest narratives and *Garbadale* is no exception. Some psychoanalytic approaches suggest that sibling incest proceeds from the same source as maternal incest, and may be a strategy for the brother to preserve the mother and vicariously experience oedipal fulfilment. That sibling incest might stem from a desire to ‘preserve’ the family in absence of the mother is something that Richard McCabe hints at in his comments on John Ford’s *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore* claiming that ‘psychologists have long regarded relationships with siblings as substitutes or replacements for relationships with parents’ and certainly Ian McEwan’s treatment of brother and sister incest in *The Cement Garden* (1978) follows this pattern.^{28 29} Having said that, the absent mother is not an ostensible factor in Blake Wopuld’s incestuous

desire for his sister Irene in *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* so we are drawn back to Blake's significance as a greedy criminal, who is originally believed by Alban to have defrauded the Wopuld company only for him to discover later that Blake's crime was more moral than financial. This linking of financial and moral deviance in the figure of Blake attests to the ways in which *Garbadale* both draws from and contributes to a literary tradition of sibling incest that has been notable for its emphasis on both social class and sibling incest's destructive outcomes, anti-patriarchal potential notwithstanding. The link between sibling incest and social privilege is clearly important for Banks's fiction but *Garbadale* develops this further in exploring the connection to trade. If the social structure of so many patriarchal societies has been historically defined by the exchange of women, by a 'trade' between families, then sibling incest might be read as the biggest resistance to trade. Viewed from this perspective the refusal of exogamy or marrying outside the family is the refusal to interact with others for mutual benefit, not to enter into social alliances and extended family networks of interdependence but to keep everything for oneself. Sibling incest might therefore signal the arrogant refusal of the need to trade, and a disavowal of the need to become involved in exchange.

As Sander Gilman has shown, anti-Semitic thought in the nineteenth century often conflated sibling incest and economic consolidation:

The Jews, in their refusal to marry beyond the 'inner group', were understood as incestuous or inbred, and their practice of perpetual endogamy, or marriage within specified segments of a society, was harshly condemned by conservatives as well as liberals. If the Jews are an incestuous people, it is because they demand that their children

marry one another and the reason for that was assumed to be to perpetuate their economic power.³⁰

Garbadale does not seem to code any of its characters as Jewish, and as discussed above the novel through its pattern of character names offers some strong pointers to national resonance. What Bank's novel does adopt and adapt from the literary tradition of sibling incest is the conjunction of economic, status and sexual issues within a family scenario. If we read *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* as at least partly about the choices facing post-devolution Scotland, then while the national 'family' of the UK may offer shelter from an existence exposed to the pitiless actions of the free market, it may also, like the Wopuld family, be a place of conflict, deception and potentially sinister secrets. Banks's careful treatment of the mechanics and politics of shareholder voting and financial negotiation in the novel also signals the extent to which economic interests may be heavily imbricated within the fabric of a democratic voting system. Alban as a (Scottish) subject attempting to navigate his way through complex relationships is placed in a position often found in Banks novels, that of the game player, and *Garbadale* shows Banks's continued fascination with games and how they are played.

Alban gradually realises that he has been a pawn in his grandmother's game: by fomenting resistance to the sale of the family company among its shareholders, he has been driving up the selling price to be extracted from Spraint Inc. while not being allowed to ever threaten the sale taking place. Once he has accomplished this, Grandma Win takes steps to prevent Alban disrupting the shareholder meeting by arranging for his boat to be sabotaged. Having used him to drive up the asking price, she no longer needs him. As Craig has asserted in relation to previous novels by Banks: 'For many of Banks's characters, the solution to the

discovery that they have been trapped in such a game is to accept, themselves, the very role scripted for them – to play consciously and better the game which they did not realise they had been playing.’³¹ Craig’s description perfectly anticipates *Garbadale*, as once Alban has realised his grandmother has been playing a game with him he decides to trick her into revealing the truth behind his mother’s death and ultimately the secret of his paternity. So the ‘dupe’ of the game learns from his experience and becomes a better games player, playing the game to his advantage. This movement deeper into the structure of the game is however not an unalloyed triumph. True, one can play the game better, but should one accept that the rules of the game cannot be changed? *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, while following the pattern of increasingly sophisticated game-playing on the part of its characters, also meditates on the extent to which the framing of human beings as self-interested game players may have undesirable consequences particularly for collectives, whether national or familial. Game theory both in relation to the board game *Empire!* and to economics looms large in the novel. Alban meets Verushka at a game theory conference and she exhibits strong signs of pursuing her professional and romantic goals in single-minded, game-playing mode. When his uncle Blake tells Alban “Remember, Alban; always look out for number one. Be selfish. Every other bugger is” this is a classic summary of game theory applied to social situations, that by everyone behaving selfishly, the market will even things out and equilibrium will be established, recalling Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” metaphor where society as a whole benefits from each individual trying to do the best for himself or herself.³²

Money’s status as a fetish, as being on the one hand a set of mathematical signs and on the other access to tangible goods, finds its way into Banks’s treatment of the negotiations at Garbadale. Having been told by his uncle Blake that measuring oneself against others in terms of wealth is unrewarding when you discover richer people are often pillocks, Alban is

later informed by Larry Feaguing, Sprint Inc.'s chief negotiator, that money is only part of the picture:

'You know,' Larry said, sitting back, frowning, 'this might sound like a strange thing to say, but in a way money is kind of irrelevant.'

Alban widened his eyes. 'Really?'

'What I mean is, it's just how you keep score. Like a ball game. The scoreboard, the numbers on it; they're just things. It's what those numbers buy you, what they get you that matters; not the numbers themselves.'³³

Feaguing, whose name recalls the archaic verb 'to feague' meaning to cheat or to fake, offers a rather strange account of how 'the numbers' are both part of and not part of a game. His emphasis on money as buying power is met with some scepticism by Alban because Feaguing's account of money as a way of 'keeping score' ostensibly signals the triviality of its pursuit while simultaneously outlining a games-playing approach to the acquisition of wealth that can be found elsewhere in the Wopuld clan, not least in the destructive and self-destructive Blake. Feaguing's suggestion that because 'the numbers' are part of a game they can consequently be read as insignificant is a proposition that the novel works to undermine by its treatment of people as goal-oriented game-players who must learn to play the game more effectively in order to survive. The fact that Alban stands to make very little money from the sale of his small amount of shares reinforces his status as both a family insider and

an outsider who does not share his relatives' financial concerns but whose opposition to the firm's proposed sale proceeds from a rather obscure desire for family solidarity in the face an American corporate takeover.

At the Wopuld family meeting, only Alban votes against the sale of the company, everyone else voting in favour of a price significantly higher than Spraint's first offer, much to the dismay of Feaguig. Grandma Win's plan of increasing the asking price of the company has worked and Feaguig's perception of the family as unsophisticated throwbacks has led to him being outmanoeuvred. Alban had already hinted at his family's capacity to make hardnosed business decisions in a revealing passage toward the end of the novel:

'Maybe we're both getting this the wrong way round,' Alban suggested. 'Perhaps you're right about the character and morals of Spraint Corp, but you're giving the Wopuld clan way too much respect for their beliefs and collective character. Maybe all *we're* interested in is money.'

'Do you really believe that, Alban?' Feaguig asked quietly.

Alban looked around the room at all his many, many relations, this widespread but, for now – briefly – concentrated family, which he had loved and hated and served and exiled himself from and longed for and come to an accommodation with and still half loved and half hated sometimes, and then he looked back at Feaguig with a small smile. 'I don't know,' he said. 'But if I were you I'd treat it as a decent working hypothesis.'³⁴

As a picture of a national family, half-loved and half-hated, this is filled with disappointment: the only thing to be decided is how much the members want to sell up for. Alban's complicated feelings about his family are shot through with a degree of cynicism regarding their capacity for acting only in their individual economic self-interest and the democratic exercise of shareholder voting becomes a rather hollow event. While the Wopuld clan are 'winners' as far as Feaung's ball-game of numbers goes, family sentiment has been revealed as a very weak force without the potential to withstand integration into global capital. The family that brought the world *Empire!* has not lost its game-playing skills or capacity for subterfuge.

The novel ends surprisingly with Alban inheriting lots of money from Blake and starting an adventure centre for disadvantaged urban youth with the help of Tango, whose friendship with a victim of domestic abuse at the start of the book has become a romantic relationship by the end. Having benefited from help and hospitality from his working-class friend when he was down on his luck, Alban sets out to be a generous benefactor and changes his surname to Wopuld, acknowledging his true heritage and forsaking the good Scottish name of McGill to Tango's mystified disapproval. The turn to altruism and community action echoes of the end of Banks's earlier novel *The Business* where the heroine Kate Telman leaves behind an important role in a powerful global conglomerate to work for the improvement of the lives of the subjects of a remote Himalayan monarchy.³⁵ Alban has profited from the fruits of *Empire!* but chooses to share his new-found wealth with those less fortunate.

Alban's path to the truth behind his mother's death and to a wealthy bequest follows Prentice's progress in *The Crow Road*. As Duncan Petrie describes 'in retracing Rory's

footsteps, Prentice also functions as a kind of double for his uncle, revealing then confronting the guilty Fergus and ultimately driving him to suicide.’³⁶ This is the same path followed by Alban, whose investigations into his mother’s death leads to the discovery of his true paternity and his villainous ‘uncle’s’ subsequent suicide. Incest’s association with the production of ‘monstrous’ offspring positions Alban as the monster at the centre of the labyrinth. *The Crow Road*’s treatment of game-playing also anticipates *Garbadale*’s interest in board-games, with Prentice as a boy playing a board-game based on trade created by his father called the River Game. Prentice and his brother however soon developed their own version called the Black River Game, which involved warships, much to the displeasure of their father. While playing at trade may not be as exciting as playing at military conquest (to little boys at least), trade is no doubt far preferable in the real world. One key question however is the degree to which trade is inevitable. In these novels the characters who do not ‘trade’, the incestuous Blake, Irene, (even Rory from *The Crow Road*) end up dead, permanently, as Jean Baudrillard would say, outside exchange.

Ray Ryan in the introduction to his study *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, Nation and State* discusses comments by Alex Salmond, made when he was leader of the Scottish National Party, about Ireland and its economic success during the 1990s.³⁷ Salmond’s argument that Ireland’s prosperity issued from its political independence acts to support the SNP’s ultimate goal of Scottish independence and in this analysis the Republic of Ireland unconstrained by British hegemony is free to pursue its economic national interest (if we’re game theorists we might say self-interest) in a European and global context. The significance in post-devolution Scotland of the economic argument in favour of full independence forms the sociohistorical context of *Garbadale* and the novel continues Banks’s explorations of class and national identity in *The Bridge* and *The Crow Road*, combining them with a more globally oriented focus. The (Scottish) subject must now

negotiate both national and class structures in Scotland/Britain *and* Scotland/Britain's relations with the wider world, especially the United States. This is the difficult path to tread between paternalistic power and vested and inherited interests on the one hand and USA-led international capitalism on the other. The protagonist is trying to leave behind the inbred and incestuous world of sheltered privilege and stagnation while seeking to remain particular and distinctive by resisting complete assimilation into the neo-liberal machinery of international finance. However *Garbadale*'s exploration of relationships that are not primarily defined by money, often associated with family and national affiliations, tends to show how deeply wealth can affect these systems of supposedly non-economic relation. Although Alban's predicament may at first blush look like a balanced dilemma, the novel irresistibly moves towards the necessity of trade and the qualified rejection of the family in favour of new class and national connections between people, most clearly represented by Verushka and the children Tango brings to Alban's large house at the end of the novel. This movement towards exposing the dangers of narrow national and family identification is helped in no small part by the sibling incest motif, and in fact the importance of this motif in the novel is that it acts to stigmatise the (national) family by rendering it incestuous, offering an alternative to global exchange that is not an alternative as it only leads to inbreeding and monstrosity. Sibling incest therefore serves to underline the unavoidability of trade and exchange, by coding the refusal to trade as an act of abusive and self-destructive aristocratic perversity.

Stefanie Lehner concludes her discussion of the work of A.L. Kennedy and James Kelman by claiming that both Scottish writers exemplify a 'subaltern aesthetic' that sensitively registers the local action of global capital:

By mapping their characters' specific experiences of subjugation and oppression onto the socio-political and economic processes that implicate Scotland's devolution within a global capitalist network designated as the 'end of history', both writers [Kennedy and Kelman] produce what I would like to term a 'subaltern aesthetic'.³⁸

The Steep Approach to Garbadale can be read as partaking to a degree in this 'subaltern aesthetic' given its allegorical presentation of Scottish devolution within a globalised economic context and the challenges this creates. The novel's turn away from the incestuous world of the (national) family however is shot through with feelings of profound ambivalence, particularly in relation to the apparent 'end-of-history' inevitability of international capitalist trade, a future Alban reluctantly accepts principally it would seem due to the monstrosity of the alternative. The narrative's culmination in Alban's embracing of cosmopolitan and cross-class Scottishness from his privileged social position offers a counterweight to the world of Spraint Inc. The charitable impulse to run a scheme for disadvantaged children however is something of a throwback to the plot resolutions of the 'industrial novels' of the nineteenth century so memorably and perceptively critiqued by Raymond Williams.³⁹ The challenge of modelling relations 'outside' systems of exchange is perhaps a recurrent feature of both Banks's mainstream work and science fiction, although as this essay has shown the novel's treatment of sibling incest projects the independent subject as better off outside the national family and integrated into globalised systems of exchange and circulation, despite the possible/probable injustices such systems may generate. The perverse preservation of the family, however attractive, always seems to lead to stagnation, stasis and entropy.

¹ For a discussion of how Banks's science fiction explores space and sovereignty, see Robert Duggan, 'The Geopolitics of Inner Space in Contemporary British Fiction,' *Textual Practice* 27, no. 5 (2013), 899-920 and Robert Duggan 'Inside the Whale and Outside Context Problems,' in Nick Hubble, Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Joe Norman (eds), *The Science Fiction of Iain M. Banks* (Gylphi, forthcoming 2017).

² Iain Banks, *The Bridge* (London: Little Brown, 1986).

³ Iain Banks, *The Crow Road* (London: Little Brown, 1992).

⁴ Iain Banks, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* (London: Little Brown, 2007).

⁵ Cristie March, *Rewriting Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 103.

⁶ Banks, *Garbadale*, 2.

⁷ Thom Nairn, 'Iain Banks and the Fiction Factory,' in Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds), *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 133.

⁸ For more on Banks and genre see Robert Duggan, *The Grotesque in Contemporary British Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁹ Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 205-6.

¹⁰ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 47.

¹¹ Michael Gardiner and Graeme MacDonald (eds), *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

¹² For more on the significance of the Gulf War for Banks's science fiction, see Robert Duggan, "Iain M. Banks, Postmodernism and the Gulf War," *Extrapolation* 48, no. 3 (2007): 558-77.

¹³ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 132.

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- 14 Alasdair Gray, *Lanark* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981).
- 15 Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).
- 16 Banks, *Garbadale*, 253.
- 17 Iain Banks, *A Song of Stone* (London: Little Brown, 1997), 232.
- 18 Iain Banks, *Walking on Glass* (London: Macmillan, 1985).
- 19 Iain M. Banks, *Use of Weapons* (London: Orbit, 1990).
- 20 Otto Rank, *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend*, trans. Gregory Richter (1912; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), 355.
- 21 Kenny Angove, 'Siblings' Sick Fling Not a First,' *The Sun* 7 September 2011. Accessed 26 April 2013, <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/scottishnews/3799322/Siblings-sick-fling-not-a-first.html>.
- 22 Alix Kirsta, 'Genetic Sexual Attraction,' *The Guardian* 17 May 2003. Accessed 26 April 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2003/may/17/weekend7.weekend2>.
- 23 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 24.
- 24 Banks, *A Song of Stone*, 71-2.
- 25 Percy Shelley quoted in Richard McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 228.
- 26 James B. Twitchell, *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 196.
- 27 Alan Richardson, 'Rethinking Romantic Incest: Human Universals, Literary Representation, and the Biology of Mind,' *New Literary History* 31, no. 3 (2000): 553-572.
- 28 McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law*, 233.
- 29 Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978).
- 30 Sander Gilman, 'Sibling Incest, Madness and the "Jews."' *Social Research* 65, no. 2 (1998), 404.

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- 31 Cairns Craig, *Complicity: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2002), 20.
- 32 Banks, *Garbadale*, 240.
- 33 Banks, *Garbadale*, 319.
- 34 Banks, *Garbadale*, 320-1.
- 35 Iain Banks, *The Business* (London: Little Brown, 1999).
- 36 Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 123.
- 37 Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, Nation and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-2.
- 38 Stefanie Lehner, 'Subaltern Scotland: Devolution and Postcoloniality' in Berthold Schoene (ed.) *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 300.
- 39 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).