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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to use cognitive approach in order to discuss the topic of memory in Iain Banks's *Use of Weapons*. I argue that Banks presents memory as a creative faculty of the human brain which is inherently connected with imagination, identity-shaping processes and narrative construction. In this essay, I analyse the workings of memory, as well as its social and cultural functions, as presented in *Use of Weapons*.

Key words: Iain Banks, memory, narrative, cognitive studies, storytelling, neuroscience

In 1959, C. P. Snow, a British scientist and novelist, delivered an influential lecture, subsequently published as *The Two Cultures*, whose thesis was that the 20th century is characterised by the mutual incomprehension between literary intellectuals and scientists. The split into the abovementioned "two cultures" caused, according to Snow, a major hindrance in solving the world's problems (52–54). In fact, the concept of miscommunication between sciences and humanities is not new, and the prevalence of such a belief contributes to the fact that it is easy to believe in the conflict between the matter-oriented naturalist worldview of science, on the one hand, and the humanist receptivity towards socio-cultural themes, on the other. Nevertheless, science/literature dichotomy proves to be at least partially artificial, since, literature has always grappled with major changes in scientific paradigms, questioned technological advancements, and attempted at predicting how human life can be influenced by such transformations in the future. As for the second half of the 20th century, ideas of humanness (possessed by scientists and humanists alike) were changing rapidly, due to the discoveries made in the nascent fields of bio(techno)logy, artificial intelligence, and cognitive sciences. Major discoveries made in the field of cognitive sciences led to the development of multiple new approaches applied in order to explain human behaviour, such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, or evolutionary psychology. In the investigation of the human mind, the boundary between humanistic and scientific disciplines became blurred (Miller 143). In the last few decades, mind and its products, such as science, religion, or literature, has become subject to cross-disciplinary research, while attempts at breaching the divide between humanities and science have multiplied.

As illustrated in *Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives* (2010), an interdisciplinary publication on the topic of human memory, with contributions from

both neuroscientists and humanists, literature studies may be tremendously enriched by references to neuroscience, while cognitive studies could be augmented by engaging in the dialogue with literary theory[1]. In the 1990s, cognitive science of memory has become a highly popular discipline, inciting philosophical debates, as well as serving as a "reliable basis for linking literature and the allied arts to the basic human condition" (Nalbantian, Introduction 2). In this article I shall not delve into the investigation of different scientific approaches applying to the workings of memory, since my aim is rather to discuss the ways in which fiction is imbued with the fascination with the human mind thanks to the profound impact cognitive sciences had on contemporary culture.

Therefore, in this essay I shall discuss novelistic depictions of workings of memory, as presented in Iain Banks's early novel, *Use of Weapons*[2] (1990), since Banks's works are, in my opinion, permeated by a vivid fascination with the workings of the mind. My approach towards Banks's work diverges substantially from the existing body of criticism: according to Colin Greenland, *Use of Weapons* applies the medium of space opera to "display proper moral and political complexity" (90), while Simone Caroti notes that even though much has in general been written on the topic of space opera, imperialism and critical utopia in the context of *Use of Weapons*, there are almost no recent re-evaluations of Banks's work (170–173). Hence, I wish to propose another line of reasoning, in which I will argue that *Use of Weapons* is involved in a literary discussion of the workings of the human brain, with special emphasis put on the functioning of memory, and may thus serve as an illustration of both the influence cognitive sciences had on literature, and the relationships that exist between fiction and brain studies. I am proposing a cross-disciplinary approach towards the work discussed, as Banks's descriptions of the workings of memory may be argued to go in line with the discoveries made in the field of cognitive studies. Therefore, I shall analyse *Use of Weapons* following an interdisciplinary methodology combining the discussion of discoveries made in the field of science with an application of literary theory. In addition to discussing the novel's plot, I will conduct close readings of relevant passages in order to investigate the functioning of human memory as presented by Banks in light of discoveries made in the field of cognitive sciences. I will also outline the novel's narrative structure with the aim of elucidating how Banks perceives the inherent relationships between memory, imagination, and storytelling.

1 For more information, one may refer to publications such as, for instance, Patricia Churchland's *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* (1986), Antonio Damasio's *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (2010) or Patrick Colm Hogan's *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotions* (2003), which provide a new terrain for transdisciplinary studies of human affects, consciousness and memory. Besides, works like Mary Thomas Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (2001) prove that literature is being analysed from the point of view of natural sciences, as it is now common knowledge that biological phenomena – such as consciousness, affects or recall – are involved both in the production and the reception of written works.

2 Published under the name of Iain M. Banks, which is the pseudonym used by Iain Banks for the sake of his science fiction works, as explained in the BBC interview "Five Minutes With: Iain M Banks" (2012).

Use of Weapons constitutes of two interweaving story-lines, both of which form a fractured biography of a man known as Cheradenine Zakalwe, a mercenary recruited by the Culture's Special Circumstances to work as an agent intervening in the politics of less advanced societies. The Culture itself could be defined as an ultra-advanced, self-sufficient futuristic civilisation constituting a federation of intelligent species that inhabit thousands of galaxies. It is run by technology: from bioengineering and omnipresent electronics, through sentient drones, to super-powerful and omniscient Minds having unlimited power over everything and everyone the society comprises of.

In Banks's novel, one line of narration offers a recount of the protagonist's past, while the other deals with the present. Nevertheless, the story does not develop chronologically, since it is moving backward in time, and involves scattered fragments of Zakalwe's mostly painful memories. Midway through the backward-moving narrative, the reader learns that Cheradenine grew up in an aristocratic family, and was brought up with his two sisters, Livueta and Darckense, as well as his cousin, Elethiomel. The young men engaged in rivalry, and eventually Elethiomel betrayed his adopted family in order to gain political power. Thus, Cheradenine and Elethiomel fought a civil war, and Elethiomel ultimately won due to his cruelty and cunning because he had sent Cheradenine a chair made of Darckense's bones, which consequently forced the general into despair. The second line of narration follows Zakalwe's chosen political missions, as well as his mysterious quest to find his sister Livueta and ask her for forgiveness. Not until the last pages of the novel do readers learn the whole truth about the man in question: it turns out that the person known as Cheradenine Zakalwe is in fact Elethiomel, who has assumed his cousin's identity having transformed his guilt-ridden memories into self-serving fictions.

The last decade of the twentieth century was marked by a heightened interest in the workings of memory, and this fascination permeated not only literature, but it also had profound impact on society. Nicola King argues that as the generations having first-hand experience of the two world wars were dying out, there was a growing demand for re-evaluation of history, including the need for an increased focus on "memories of oppression or trauma" (11). Furthermore, the 1990s became the background for the 'recovered memories' movement, which dates back to the publication of *The Courage to Heal* by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in 1988. This movement incited a heated debate on whether it is possible to unearth long-buried memories of sexual abuse, while hypnosis, regression therapy, dream analysis and body-oriented therapy all became popular tools used to bring recall (Draaisma 143–144). Psychologists and scientists' interest in remembrance grew, and the investigation into the workings of memory was further whetted by the booming fascination with neuroscience present in the late 1980s, and in the 1990s known nowadays as the Decade of the Brain (Nalbantian 3).

At that time, the coupling of mind and brain was in fact becoming more and more welcome, as philosophers and scientists alike began to do away with the post-Cartesian dualistic split of a human being into flesh and mind, or a division into matter and soul. Human bodies began to be perceived as purely material, with a sense of self, memories, and dreams being a product of the wildly complex biology. Such an outlook on the human being is vividly present in Iain Banks's *Use of Weapons*, where a drone

tells Zakalwe that his "brain is made up of matter" and "organised into information-handling, processing and storage units" by genes and biochemistry (256). Banks argues that if human beings are made solely out of matter, then everything has to be encoded in their biochemistry (memories included). He exhibits a view that remembrance engages human body: during a conversation with his lover, Zakalwe states that scars are "good for… remembering" (115–116), while he also believes in "cell-memory" and something he calls "boneremembered affinity" (287). Banks often presents the body, including the brain, as a container for memories: "Digging deeper, in a way that would not have been possible without the Culture's training and subtle changes, he found the little running loop of memory that took over from what his brain had already stored" (295). As Douwe Draaisma writes, prevailing ideas about the workings of memory are dominated by metaphors of "conservation, storage and recording" (2), and with the usage of words such as "digging," "loop" or "stored," Banks points to the fact that memories are essentially material data.

In fact, Banks postulates that the more advanced a civilisation is, the more space and media it needs for memories' storage. His observations stay in accordance with what Andy Clark calls a propensity to invent new technologies in order to "offload memory onto the world," be it in diaries or advanced computer databases (201). The Culture is an ultra-advanced future society in which the bulk of information has become too enormous and too complex to be handled by humans, and this is why the Artificial Intelligences called "the Minds," together with sentient drones, manage collective memory of the society. Banks's work proves at this point to be at least partially prophetic, since we have recently entered an age of Big Data, where vast amounts of information can only be analysed by computers and mathematical algorithms. Human beings have ceased to be able to make sense out of the heap of knowledge collected in various databases. In the 21st century reality, just like in the Culture, forgetting becomes less and less possible, since humans live in a continual present, where nothing is outdated, and nothing gets old. Memories are artificially supported and maintained, they cannot fully deteriorate. In the reality described in *Use of Weapons* this state finds an illustration in the widespread practices of genofixing and retroaging, which allow individuals to prolong their lives almost indefinitely, while brains continue to accumulate experiences and memories. Thanks to the rejuvenation technologies, Zakalwe has already lived for hundreds of years, and, according to Joseph Norman, "The longer he lives, the more information he will store […] The effects of this upon someone's emotional development, amongst other things, could be potentially problematic, even devastating, especially […] when combined with particularly traumatic memories" (127).

Use of Weapons illustrates a reality of "too many memories," a futuristic world ruled by unimaginably vast amounts of data recorded and never lost (22). Iain Banks feared that such a reality may bring harm to human sanity and integrity. According to the Scottish writer, it is natural for memories to be forgotten or transfigured in the human brain. The problem is that modern technologies often prevent it, supporting a common obsession with storage and conservation of remembrances. Banks's characters crave amnesia in a world which cherishes recall: "The experience of being frozen and of then being woken up had done nothing to dull his memories; they remained

keen and bright. He had rather hoped that the claims they made for freezing were over-optimistic, and the brain did indeed lose at least some of its information; he'd secretly desired that attrition, but been disappointed […]" (Banks 318). The Culture's reality is augmented by the ultra-advanced technology allowing for artificial "freezing" of memories, which further reinforces a view that absolute memory equals a fact, and total recall is possible.

In truth, non-pathological human memory is defined by change and forgetting (Draaisma 2). Undoubtedly, this might be disappointing and frustrating, as it sometimes happens in the case of Zakalwe: "There was something he'd meant to tell Saaz Insile, but he couldn't remember what that was either […]. The frustration of it made him want to scream sometimes; to tear the white plump pillows in half and pick up the white chair and smash it through the windows to let the mad white fury out there inside" (Banks 287).

Episodic memories are fragile. They aggravate, and may even be completely transformed by new experiences or information. Human brain is not a hard drive, and memories have the form of connections between billions of brain cells constituting neuronal nets modulated by chemical processes. Biological matter is very delicate, every year we lose some 30 million brain cells, which simply decay, while new ones grow (Draaisma 176). As I have already argued, memory is substantially enhanced in the Culture; nevertheless, human brains are characterised by their plastic and imperfect nature, which Banks's contrasts with the machines' stability and absolute memory. In *Use of Weapons* one of the drones reminds Zakalwe that his brain "is made up of matter" and "huge, slow cells," while "an electronic computer is also made up of matter, but organised differently" and "more finely-grained" (256). Therefore, Banks contrasts the faulty biological phenomenon of human memory with the excellence of super-advanced technologies allowing to store indefinite amount of information and to access them anytime.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the evidence that memory is a function of fragile biological matter, there exists a widespread belief in the permanence of memories (and in the potential retrievability thereof).[3] It may be argued that the prevalence of these erroneous theories is first caused by the human capacity of "materialising" memories, or, as Clark puts it, "offloading them onto the world," but the idea of memory as an archive of the past can also be traced to "one of the longest-lasting and most influential theories in neuroscience research: the consolidation theory" (Silva 41). In line with this scientific idea, the world is being inscribed in the brain via sensory experiencing, and each thing is being catalogued as "useful, interesting, distressing, and important," uncontaminated by following experiences, nor influenced anyhow by the passage of time (Silva 41). The common belief in consolidation theory does not only stem from neuroscientific misconceptions, but its prevalence is also caused by an innate human need to trust remembrance. Alcino J. Silva states that cherished memories play a crucial

3 Absolute memory and total recall are widespread myths concerning human memory. For more detail, see Douwe Draaisma's *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations* (2015) and Alison Winter's *Memory. Fragments of a Modern History* (2012).

role in life, and a deep belief in their permanence, though wrong, is in such circumstances absolutely natural (51).

There exists, however, an alternative to what is called consolidation theory, which states that the power of memory lies, paradoxically, in its flexibility and malleability. In line with this idea, known as the theory of reconsolidation, memory is something mutable and ever-changing. Thus, Attilio Favorini terms the memory process a "scripting of recollection," which does not reproduce the past, but creatively reconstructs it (318). What is more, the plasticity of memory is not understood as a flaw, but rather as a huge asset. It allows for memory to exhibit an adaptive function. As Silva writes: "the power of our memory systems may lie in their susceptibility to many internal and external factors that constantly update, change, edit, and even bend fact to self-serving fictions" (47). In *Use of Weapons*, the narrator states:

> He [Zakalwe] saw a chair, and a ship that was not a ship; he saw a man with two shadows, and he saw that which cannot be seen; a concept; the adaptive, self-seeking urge to survive, to bend everything that can be reached to that end, and to remove and to add and to smash and to create so that one particular collection of cells can go on, can move onwards and decide, and keeping moving, and keeping deciding, knowing that – if nothing else – at least it lives. (145–146)

Indeed, Zakalwe turns his memory of things past into a complex, self-serving fiction. He "removes," "adds," "smashes," and "creates," and his urge to do so stems from the need to adapt, and come to terms with his own horrific past. In the last chapter of the novel Banks offers the reader a revelation: the rueful, brave, calm protagonist is not the person we thought he was. He is Elethiomel, who steals not only Cheradenine's name, but also reworks and reconsolidates his own memories so that he may assume his foster brother's identity (Banks 363). Of course, it might be argued that throughout the whole novel Elethiomel is "merely posing as the calm, poetically-inclined Cheradenine Zakalwe" (Norman 125), but I think that it might rather be presumed that Elethiomel truly believes he is Cheradenine, ceaselessly inventing new detail supporting his belief. Confabulation is, however, a healthy process, which allows for preserving "a coherent identity over time by linking our current self to previous actions or events, to present our self to others as a unified being, aware of and responsible of our past actions" (Hirstein 218). In *Use of Weapons*, Elethiomel is obsessed about presenting, or retelling, his life as a coherent story, which would present him as a good, sensitive person. He ceaselessly creates confabulatory stories referring to his past, and shares them with machines or other humans: "The woman listened. The drone listened. The ship listened. While he told them the story, of the great house […]" (356). Banks's protagonist presents exhaustive and substantially emotional confabulations consisting of his remodelled memories, so that others may believe in him being the real Cheradenine Zakalwe. Confabulation serves here an identity-building function, and it also bears social significance. In general, people feel the need to create coherent, detailed stories of their lives, so that they can share them with others, or, in other words, confabulations form a narrative aiming at depicting an individual in a favourable way (Hirstein 230).

Already in 1987, Jeromy Bruner in "Life as Narrative" suggested that self-formation includes the (self)telling of life narratives, since such a process structures memory, and attributes logic (both reason and purpose) to the events of life (15), while King writes that "memories […] become texts as soon as we begin to describe them to ourselves and others, to put them into sequence or turn them into stories" (175). And, as Ian McGregor and John G. Holmes observe, storytelling always connotes "a certain slippage from the realities of the episodes it supposedly portrays, if not a wholesale bending of the facts to create a 'good story'" (403). According to Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, each story requires adjusting the evidence to properly fill in the contours of a skeleton theme, and this means that lies, changes and inventions are indispensible (34). Consequently, "we lose the original and keep the copy" as time passes (Schank et al. 58). The copy equals in this case a schema guiding the recollections. We believe what we tell; in *Use of Weapons* Zakalwe believes in the story he has created, and this is perfectly understandable, since storytelling has a big influence on judgment. To phrase it differently, memory tends to be biased for the evidence that makes a story coherent (McGregor et al. 403–404).

Zakalwe builds his identity while compulsively telling stories created from the fictionalised, re-modelled memories he possesses:

> And he told her, sometimes, about another time and another place, far away in space and far away in time and even further away in history, where four children had played together in a huge and wonderful garden, but seen their idyll destroyed with gunfire […]. Finally, when he had almost talked himself to sleep […], he would whisper to her about a great warship, a great metal warship, becalmed in stone but still dreadful and awful and potent, and about the two sisters who were the balance of that warship's fate, and about their own fates, and about the Chair, and the Chairmaker. (Banks 70)

Banks seems to be far from ascribing special value to the truth and adequacy of recall. According to him, fabricated and half-imaginary memories are by no means less influential than those exact and fully factual. To him, imagination and creativity supports adaptive, identity-building functions of memory, together with its storytelling potential. This outlook goes in line with the discoveries made recently in the field of neuroscience: "it was found that envisioning the future (prospection), remembering the past (recall of autobiographical memories), conceiving the viewpoint of others (theory of mind), and spatial navigation utilize this same core brain network […]. Narrative construction *is* the default mode of the brain" (Stickgold 90).

Elethiomel is shaped by the stories he tells. He is not only an unreliable narrator. It could be argued that the protagonist of *Use of Weapons* actively engages in self-communication, which may be defined as passing on identity created in a narrative. Banks's focus on such mode of communication mirrors his view on contemporary culture, which he perceives as highly solipsist.[4] Out of Banks's work emerges an image

4 It could be argued that according to Banks's neuroscientifically-influenced vision of solipsism, human existence is more or less limited to the body, and what it experiences, what it perceives, and which frame of mind it possesses. Personal feeling and reasoning is the only means of access to the world: Banks implies that it is impossible to escape from the subjective, limited point of

of a human obsessed with "communicating himself" to the world, which, in the context of the late 1980s and the 1990s, may be regarded as prophetic, as it goes strongly in line with what is being stated about the state of communication in the 21st century. According to Manuel Castells, we are living the times of mass self-communication, or, to term it otherwise, ours are the times of using media in order to share self-generated and self-oriented messages with the masses (55). These messages are nowadays not only scattered chunks of information, but they often form narratives. YouTube is a haven for countless vloggers, creating their stories and their personas by the means of thematic amateur videos. LinkedIn, a social networking service used for professional networking, allows its users to create a chronological report of their business career, and Facebook seems to engage the potential of storytelling to a great extent. According to Facebook Help Centre: "Your profile is your collection of the photos, stories and experiences that tell your story. Your profile also includes your *Timeline*." Thus, Facebook encourages its users to engage into what could be perceived as a form of storytelling and mass self-communication.

In March 2015, Facebook introduced a new function called "On This Day," which "brings you memories to look back on from that particular day in your Facebook history. Memories include things like your posts and others' posts you're tagged in, major life events and when you became friends with someone" (Facebook Help Centre, "On This Day"). Hence, one may nowadays effortlessly offload memories onto social media. In fact, humans have become obsessed with storytelling for the sake of applying some logic to the surplus information which is generated, shared, and stored without an end. It may be important to mention here Banks's predictions concerning the future of our globalised world, illustrated in his views on the futuristic society of the Culture, who "always tried to bring with them the thing that they saw as the most precious gift of all; knowledge; information; and as wide a spread of that information as possible" (Banks 29).

It could be argued that nowadays we are living in a society which fetishises information, understood as the reservoir of society's memories, and storytelling is one of the strategies used in order to make sense out of all the surplus data. Humans have a propensity for shaping and sharing stories with others, but also for receiving them. According to William Flesch, "being able to learn through the experiences that others narrate is essential to human adaptation in a highly various and tricky world" (9). In other words, stories transmit wisdom and form the fabric of culture (Damasio ch. 11). Moreover, this also applies to literary fiction: Flesch notes that we tend to get anxious about the fate of fictional characters as though we were caring about real people (11). Thus, it may be argued that it is the ability to form narratives that makes us truly human.

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view, including the inborn human propensity for dualist thinking (together with the brain-incited inclination to believe in possessing an immaterial mind and transcendent soul). Men are vulnerable to subjective illusions produced by their bodies and brain. In this sense, appearance means reality for a human being. I perceive discussing this topic, however, as irrelevant in the context of this particular article.

In an excerpt from an interview with Colin Hughes published in *The Guardian* on August 7, 1999, Banks stated: "I love plot, I love stories […] I don't want any of this post-modern shite, pal. I want a story, with an ending." Thom Nairn claims that an asset of Banks's work is his "fascination with the nature of stories themselves, and how and why they are told" (134). In fact, the whole *Use of Weapons* may be perceived as a conscious play with storytelling functions and goals. The likeable (and mostly righteous) Zakalwe is being depicted in a favourable manner until the last pages of the novel, where the reader learns that he was in fact following the story of the psychopath-like Elethiomel. Although Banks uses third-person narration, Zakalwe is the focaliser, and the whole story proves to be a series of his remodelled memories, out of which the protagonist compiles a positive and believable avatar. Iain Banks thoroughly examines the way memories function, and he does not refrain from playing with people's innate expectations towards recall. The enhanced cognitive and affective salience of memory does not depend on it being true and permanent. Quite the contrary, it is being caused by its creative and imaginative powers. In *Use of Weapons*, the protagonists' memories are extremely plastic and labile, while his identity is being shaped and re-shaped by fluid and changeable recollections.

Banks also tends to focus on the human cognitive ability to turn recollections into narratives, so that a (social) self may emerge. In Banks's terms, memory assumes the form of a narrative, while, at the same time, the Scottish writer does not refrain from playing with people's expectations concerning storytelling itself.[5] In case of *Use of Weapons,* the recipients get anxious about the hero who finally proves to be a liar guilty of severe crimes and, in the end, not even subject to deserved punishment. According to Peter Brooker, "recent theory has simultaneously encouraged a scepticism towards the supposed authenticity of personal or common histories, making identity the site of textualised narrative constructions and reconstructions rather than of transparent record" (ix). Such scepticism towards identity is vivid in the case of *Use of Weapons*, where the narrative oscillates around a character who tells stories and creates his self via the narrative he shapes.

5 In fact, Scotland has a long tradition of storytelling, which, though primarily oral in character, is closely connected to the literary (Bennett 7). As Simon McKerrel (2014) notes, in Scotland's cultural policy traditional music, storytelling and dance are conceived of as the traditional arts of utmost importance, which, consequently, receive substantial public funding (159). Recently, the Scottish Storytelling Centre "has become a forum for the transmission and enjoyment of orally-performed texts," while the Scottish Storytelling Festival, established in 1989, has played a crucial role in the promulgation of the traditional art of storytelling in Scotland (Lyle et al. 18–19). The genre most commonly associated with Scottish storytelling is folk narrative, whose prominent characteristics are: non-linear structure, special focus on characters' psychology, and social relevance (21). All of these characteristics seem to be fulfilled by the *Use of Weapons*, which, as I have already mentioned, is a non-linear narrative concentrated upon workings of human mind, and serving as a commentary on the importance of memory in contemporary culture, or even a critique of mechanisms present in the society due to the scientific and technological developments. I perceive it as a fact worth emphasizing, nevertheless, the analysis of Banks's work in the context of the Scottish narrative tradition is not the aim of my article, and I decided to focus on the cognitive sciences' approach towards storytelling instead.

By creating a protagonist with his personality emerging out of a self-serving fiction composed of remodelled recollections, Banks appears to be intent on accustoming the reader to the powers of human memory. According to Banks, memory is the prerequisite for narrative construction and storytelling, both of which phenomena he perceives as essential for the emergence of both personal and social self. Thus *Use of Weapons* may be treated as a novel directly grappling with the topic of humanness, and a work in which fictional characters are presented and treated as if they were real people who may become a subject of discussion of what it means to be human. Moreover, Banks is alert to the impact storytelling has on the reader's mind, contributing to the ignoring of fictional aspect of literature, and treating well-constructed characters and well-shaped stories as if they belonged to the everyday, extra-literary domain instead.

In *Use of Weapons* Iain Banks perceives stability, consistency and permanence as a myth: whether they refer to memory, to the individual self, or to the culture. He perceives a threat to human emotional and intellectual integrity in the advancement of technology, which allows all the surplus memories to materialise and never be lost, and which demands of humans the amassment and continual public communication of experiences. Banks envisions the world and the human being as characterised by plasticity and fragility. Contrary to a common belief, he does not perceive these features as a hindrance, but rather as a huge asset of a phylogenetic and social value. Plasticity of the brain allows us to think prospectively, to adapt to changing conditions, to craft the self. Banks, being a biologically-oriented materialist, as well as an atheist with a propensity for gallows humour and descriptions of grim realities, is nevertheless an author full of acceptance and optimism. In the end, it is illustrated in his approach towards memory, which instead of being placed in the context of repression and trauma, is more often connected with imagination, creativity and storytelling.

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