

# **Grotesque Affectivity of Iain Banks's *Canal Dreams***

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Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tutkin romaanin vaikutusta lukijan tunteisiin ja sitä kautta päätöksiin oikeasta ja väärästä Iain Banksin romaanissa *Canal Dreams* (1989). Romaani kertoo japanilaisen naissellistin kasvutarinan, joka muuttuu toimintaelokuvamaiseksi päähenkilön joutuessa kansainvälisen vallankaappaushankkeen keskelle Panamassa. Tutkimuksen pääaiheena on lukijassa syntyvät tunteet, joita tutkin romaanissa esiintyvien moraalisten näkökulmien kautta. Tutkin myös, miten nämä moraaliset näkökulmat asetetaan esille groteskin vastakkainasettelun ja sen lukijassa synnyttämän epävarmuuden sekä kauhun avulla.

Tutkimuksen ensimmäisessä osassa esittelen teorit, joihin luentani perustuu. Augusto Boalin kritiikki katarsiksesta on näistä ensimmäinen. Kritiikin mukaan katarsis on liian yksinkertainen malli ja sen päämäärä, negatiivisten tunteiden poistaminen, on väärä. Mikhail Bakhtinin uudelleenluova parodinen nauru on toinen teoria, johon tutkimukseni nojaa. Bahtin tutki myös groteskia, jonka aikaansaama vaikutus tunteissa vie lukijan uuteen perspektiiviin. Tunteiden kognition kautta lukija muodostaa rationaalisen kuvan aikaansaadusta vaikutuksesta ja voi toimia sen perusteella. Tutkin myös absurdiuden tunteen yhtymäkohtaa groteskiin ja romaanin tapahtumiin valtarakenteiden kuvauksen avulla. Absurdin kokemiseen liittyy tunne siitä, ettei kontrolloi omaa elämäänsä. Tämän tyhjiön täyttämiseksi tutkimani romaanin päähenkilö kääntyy moraaliseen individualismiin ja hylkää yhteiskunnan sopimukset hyvästä ja pahasta kokiessaan elämän absurdiksi. Päähenkilö kieltää tunteet ja muun transendentiaalisen, mikä johtaa siihen, että hän muuttuu hirviön tai koneen kaltaiseksi ja irtautuu luonnosta. Hirviöt ja elämellisyuden yhdistän tutkimuksessani groteskin ja gotiikan kauhuun sekä 1980-luvun toimintaelokuvien sankareihin, joista jälkimmäistä katson *Canal Dreams*in parodioivan. Parodian naurun ja gotiikan kauhun vastakkainasettelulla on groteski vaikutus lukijaan, joka ei tiedä mitä ajatella.

Analyysini jakautuu kahteen osaan, joista ensimmäisessä tutkin *Canal Dreams*in sisältämiä viittauksia tosielämän tapahtumiin. Nämä yhtymäkohdat romaanin ja tosielämän välillä toimivat siltana, jonka avulla affektiivisuus saavutetaan. Ensimmäisen osan jälkimmäisessä puoliskossa tutkin psykologisia periaatteita samalta pohjalta, eli kuinka ne toimivat romaanissa sen moraalisen maiseman luomisen apuna. Analyysin toisessa osassa tutkin romaanissa esiintyviä moraalisia näkökulmia, joista päällimmäisenä sekä imperialismiin että ääri-individualismiin liittyvä ”tarkoitus pyhittää keinot” ajattelumalli, jota katson romaanin kritisoidun väkivallan kierteeseen johtavana ajatusmallina.

Tämän jälkeen tutkin vielä viimeisten muutaman vuosikymmenten aikana tehtyä tutkimusta tunteiden kognitiosta sekä siitä johdettavasta kirjallisuuden tulkinnan teoriasta. Eve Sedgwick Kosofskyn korjaava lukeminen sekä Martha Nussbaumin myötätunnon pedagogiikka yhtyvät tässä osassa ajatukseksi siitä, että tunteensa tiedostava lukija pystyy tekemään järjeviä johtopäätöksiä kirjallisuudessa esiintyvistä, ristiriitoja aiheuttavista tapahtumista ja rakenteista.

Avainsanat: pro gradu -tutkielma, affektiivisuus, groteski, absurdi, moraalisuus, Iain Banks

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## 1. Introduction

What is it that attracts people to violence? What makes them want to see tales of suffering and death on stage and makes them read novels that tell such stories? Stories of violence surround us – the news, films, novels of our time are full of tales of suffering. Stories of violence appeal to the reader's emotions, tickling their sense of suffering and the pleasure that comes along with it. People see them all the time in the news, and still they pay to see the same on a stage, read about it in a novel or watch films that accommodate bloodshed. The stories touch people, they evoke emotions that cause something in the reader. This development is called affectivity.

My intention in this thesis is to examine the idea of affectivity in connection with violence in literature. I take examples from Greek tragedy and discuss Aristotle's catharsis, then from Renaissance drama, Mikhail Bakhtin's regenerating laughter and the Grotesque, and also examine how existentialism and the absurd can be linked to affectivity. The idea of this historical look is to examine the way in which philosophers have seen literature as a renewing force in a society, with a hypothesis that through cognition the reader is affected by what they read or see and they will then want to do something about the injustices that are pointed out in fiction. I will then read Iain Banks' novel *Canal Dreams* (1989) with that idea in mind, looking at the way in which the novel presents recognizable facts, principles and phenomena, paying special attention on the violence and the moral image attached to it in the novel. From the reading I will continue to draw the line to more recent ideas about the affectivity of literature. I will examine Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading and Martha Nussbaum's pedagogy of compassion, both of which will be discussed at the end of my thesis. I will examine these theories of affectivity that handle the way in which

a reader is able to use their emotional intelligence and cognition of emotions to make rational judgments about their own emotions in addition to understanding the themes that literature handles.

The idea behind this reading of *Canal Dreams* is to examine how art, in this case a novel, can indeed be read as a reflection of and an attempt to recreate society. Peter Zima paraphrases György Lukács: “Within the aesthetic context he holds that art cannot be understood as an autonomous entity which pleases without concept, but has to be conceived of as an historical fact which signifies within a social totality.”<sup>1</sup> What is questioned in this thesis then is the paradigm that history can only be studied from history books. A materialistic historian might say that this is the case, as art shies away from objectivity and presents the world through a lens tainted with the author's viewpoints. The perspective in this thesis is that even though literature is make-believe, it can be taken seriously in its depiction of the world and its phenomena and so cause a change in the knowledge of the people reading it.

Readers of literature are well aware of the everyday violence in real life, be it military action or privately executed acts. Art re-enacts and intensifies that violence, presenting it on pages of novels, on a canvas or on stage and makes it hard for the audience to turn away from it. This intensified confrontation, albeit perplexing, produces a thought process in the reader who is made to face the real-life situations that correspond with the ones in art. The reader must take a moral stand and commit themselves to that position, something a lot of people seem to shy away from when the abundance of real-life violence is put in front of them. One of the principal ideas of the Grotesque, the stylistic category used in the reading of the novel in this thesis, is a conflicting response caused by art. This means that the reader

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<sup>1</sup> Zima, 87.

(or viewer) does not necessarily know how to respond to the piece of art at hand.<sup>2</sup> An example of this would be Quentin Tarantino's two-part movie *Kill Bill* (Vol. 1 in 2003, Vol. 2 in 2004), where scenes of mindless bloodshed are choreographed and filmed in an artistically beautiful manner or even transformed into another genre, cartoon, as in the scene where the protagonist's parents are killed when she is a child. The viewer can be either horrified by what happens or pleased by the beautiful artwork, but the confusion of these two would be the ideal response for an artist according to the theorists who have researched the grotesque in art. This mixing of beautiful and ugly is also handled in literature. A new perspective on a familiar subject, gained from the conflicting emotions caused by the grotesque in art, causes a reaction in the reader and makes them think differently.

The intensification of human actions on stage was first introduced into criticism by Aristotle in *Poetics*. Augusto Boal starts his book *Theater of the Oppressed* by declaring that "...all theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theater is one of them."<sup>3</sup> In the book the critic treats Aristotle's catharsis from the point of view that it is a tool of oppression: "...why is the repressive function the fundamental aspect of the Greek tragedy and the Aristotelean system of tragedy? Simply because, according to Aristotle, the principle aim of tragedy is to provoke *catharsis*."<sup>4</sup> Catharsis is the purification of soul that is needed when a person fails in their natural quest for a virtuous life. On stage the fall of the protagonist is brought on by a fault in their persona, which makes the viewer feel pity and/or fear for the protagonist. The feelings for the protagonist make the audience place themselves in the protagonist's place, and as the play progresses the emotions are

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2 Thomson, 2.

3 Boal, ix.

4 Ibid, 25.

replaced by more polished ones.<sup>5</sup> To summarize the working of catharsis Boal writes: “...when man fails in his actions – in his virtuous behavior as he searches for happiness through the maximum virtue, which is obedience to the laws – the art of tragedy intervenes to correct that failure. How? Through purification, catharsis, through purgation of the extraneous, undesirable element which prevents the character from achieving his ends. This extraneous element is contrary to the law; it is a social fault, a political deficiency.”<sup>6</sup>

Boal argues in opposition to Aristotle that catharsis is a political tool and because of this “...theater is the most perfect artistic form of coercion.”<sup>7</sup> This thesis looks at the novel from this point of view – where it can be used as a tool of coercion, for the purpose of making the reader see what it is the novel discusses from another point of view. The idea of catharsis is, however, too shallow. For the modern reader a more involving system of reading is needed. This shallowness can be questioned from the point of view of catharsis' goal: why should art purge people of negative thoughts of law, society etc.? Boal summarizes the role of catharsis thus: “...the system will nevertheless be there, working to carry out its basic task: the purgation of antisocial elements.”<sup>8</sup> A person experiencing a play should feel *pity* and *horror* at seeing someone, even flawed, suffer on stage. But feeling pity is wrong: why should one feel pity at a character that has caused their own downfall? Maybe sympathy, not pity. And if the downfall or suffering is caused by another? The viewer should feel angry at the cause of the protagonist's suffering, not pity for the sufferer. Pity leads nowhere, it is an emotion that causes no reflection on the viewer's part, and it disappears as soon as catharsis settles in. Catharsis is not only shallow but grossly inadequate, even misleading: why should a person sitting in a theater or reading a novel be *purged* of their “negative” emotions? Those

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5 Boal, 27-32.

6 Ibid, 32.

7 Ibid, 39.

8 Ibid, 46.

emotions should instead be intensified – someone seeing a corrupt leader on stage should be furious at the end of the play, willing to do something about the real injustices they see or read about in the news. Catharsis starts what Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque finishes: it causes an emotional reaction. Bakhtin's idea is that the viewer gains something from the experience – through laughter they take something away from the target of laughter.

Banks's *Canald Dreams*, I argue, is an important case for studying the affectivity of a grotesque work because it includes the ingredients required for a disturbing yet aesthetically pleasing work of art. Both the novel's construction and the themes it handles poke at the reader's consciousness to make them think and reflect on the emotions caused by the work, which is what I see as being the job it sets out to do.

### **1.1. The Grotesque Imitation of *Canal Dreams***

*Canal Dreams* imitates. It imitates older genres of literature such as Greek drama and Renaissance revenge plays, taking structural ideas, characteristics of persona and ideologies from them. The novel imitates Hollywood products from Westerns to blockbuster action films in laughter, parodying the ideas and ideals portrayed by them. In the process it creates something new, a grotesque twisting together of laughter at one idea (Hollywood's willingness to promote a politics and the politics itself) and respectful glances at another (drama's ability to probe the human psyche) that portrays the world in a new manner, creating a new perspective on the phenomena it handles. This neighboring of two different imitations also creates a grotesque confusion in the novel's construction.

In the foreword to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* Krystyna

Pomorska summarizes one of the central themes of Bakhtin's work thus: "...just as dialogization is the *sine qua non* for the novel structure, so carnivalization is the condition for the ultimate "structure of life" that is formed by "behavior and cognition""<sup>9</sup> The novel, through carnivalization, achieves an "unmasking" and disclosing of the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks"<sup>10</sup> This chapter explores Bakhtin's work from the point of view of the "regenerative laughter" that he saw in Francois Rabelais' work and other Renaissance literature. The term refers to the way in which Bakhtin saw carnival, the commoners' celebration, as a regenerative force that brings down power structures. As Michael Holquist states: "Among the many things Mikhail Bakhtin attempts to accomplish in *Rabelais and His World* is the job he [...] was called up by history to undertake: to interpret the world for his society."<sup>11</sup> According to Holquist the book had two roles: a guidebook to the tumultuous circumstances of Bakhtin's native Soviet Union<sup>12</sup> and, more importantly to this thesis, a "contribution to historical poetics with theoretical implications not limited by its origin in a particular time and place."<sup>13</sup> Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan place Bakhtin under the title of formalist, but regard him as a non-conventional one, because his work "...is historically at odds with the Formalists in its emphasis of social and ideological features of literature..."<sup>14</sup> This angle makes Bakhtin's work relevant to the reading of *Canal Dreams* that I propose, when a strictly formalist reading would disregard the politics and moral standpoint of the novel.

The following examination of Bakhtin's ideas is reflected in the reading of *Canal Dreams* and temporalized through a brief analysis of a Renaissance drama, Thomas

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9 Pomorska, x.

10 Ibid, x.

11 Holquist, xiv.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid, xv.

14 Rivkin & Ryan, 5.

Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy*, a play that not only includes many of the aspects Bakhtin discusses, but shares many themes with *Canal Dreams* as well. Another field of culture that is discussed with regards to Bakhtin is *parody* and how *Canal Dreams* works to empower through it. The target(s) of the novel's parody are the repetitive and mediated action films that were produced en masse in the nineteen eighties in Hollywood and also the aggressive foreign policies that they supported.

Bakhtin's starting point in his research of Rabelais' work is the dichotomy official/nonofficial. He saw that Rabelais brought to the world of literature something that other esteemed authors of the time had missed – the voice of the common people: “No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.”<sup>15</sup> The voice of the common people manifested at carnival, where “A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to being anti-official the carnival was “sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human nature that is, by the world of ideals” and “linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man.”<sup>17</sup> The carnival allowed the subject of the feudal class structure to enter a world of “community, freedom, equality and abundance”<sup>18</sup> by rejecting the rigorous structures of the official feast, where “hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions”<sup>19</sup> were the standard. The carnival allowed for a “pathos of change and renewal,

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15 Bakhtin, 3.

16 Ibid, 4.

17 Ibid, 8-9.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 10.

with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities”<sup>20</sup>, it enabled a “continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and crownings.”<sup>21</sup> The carnival reversed roles, it refused formality and it laughed at everyone. In doing so it cut down existing power structures and raised the commoner to the level of the powerful. This regenerative aspect of carnival was to Bakhtin its substance.<sup>22</sup>

A few other features of Bakhtin's grotesque need be mentioned here, the first of which is its corporeality. By this he means its handling of “images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life”<sup>23</sup>, but also its “coming down to earth”<sup>24</sup>. The celestial is degraded in laughter and the bodily images take over, devouring the object of degradation. The devoured is not destroyed, however: “To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place.”<sup>25</sup> Secondly, grotesque realism depicts an unfinished phenomenon. The simultaneous manifestation of birth and death brings about the concept of “cyclical time, of natural and biological life”<sup>26</sup> and shuts out the “ready-made, complete being.”<sup>27</sup> The grotesque body is a part of nature, not separate from it.<sup>28</sup>

A point should be raised about the nature of Bakhtin's grotesque in opposition to that of Wolfgang Kayser, a German critic who wrote extensively on the Grotesque. Bakhtin himself explores Kayser's analysis of the aesthetics of the Grotesque and comes to the conclusion that “In Kayser's concept there is no room for the material bodily principle with its

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20 Bakhtin, 11.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, 18.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid, 21.

26 Ibid, 25.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 26.

inexhaustible wealth and perpetual renewal”<sup>29</sup> and that it “presents an opposition of life to death”<sup>30</sup> in the “spirit of existentialism”.<sup>31</sup> He goes on to assert that “Such an opposition is completely contrary to the system of grotesque imagery, in which death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but a part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation.”<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin connects the kayserian grotesque with existentialism and its “fear of life”.<sup>33</sup> This fear of life I relate to the existentialism of Camus, whose work will be mentioned later. Bakhtin's characterization of Kayser's work may remove it from the notion of regeneration, but it is worth noting some things about what the German said about the Gothic (in connection with the Grotesque), especially in connection with the twentieth century and the novel. Kayser analyses a shift in the aim, stating that it “tries to demolish the categories prevalent in the middle-class world view”<sup>34</sup> to scare the reader and, referring to Franz Kafka's work “the strangeness does not issue from the self, but from the nature of the world and the discrepancy between the world and the self.”<sup>35</sup> The first characterization connects with the idea of *Canal Dreams* as a criticism of society, the second brings to mind the idea of the absurd, which is prevalent in the novel.

The most important concept that I will examine in terms of affectivity is morality. In examining how morals are displayed in *Canal Dreams* I will be looking at numerous issues of ethics, for example concepts such as the justification for taking a life, where an individual draws their morals from, and also how clashes of different moral codes

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29 Bakhtin, 48.

30 Ibid, 50.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, 50.

34 Kayser, 142.

35 Ibid, 146.

are portrayed. The central theme of the thesis is an examination of the way in which a consequentialist – “ends justify the means” –morality is portrayed in the novel, and how it can be seen as a reflection and critique of a society run by corrupt rulers and inhabited by a selfish (flawed) individual. Both the ruler and the protagonist of the novel possess the same flaw in their moral code – that of disregarding others on the way to gaining selfish goals. This I read as a critique of modern society, where a seemingly empowered individual is forced to make bad choices by a power structure the individual believes he or she cannot have an effect on. This feeling of powerlessness forces the individual to block the flow of unpleasant information, to hide behind a false consciousness, behind a materialism that rejects ideals or anything transcendent. The novel touches on this and criticizes it, blaming the protagonist for a moral laziness that drives her to indifference to others. The way that the protagonist determines the world leaves no room for anyone else's viewpoint, shuts out a socially constructed world and leaves the individual alone in their opinion to decide who gets to live and who does not.

This idea of a selfish individual is not unknown to drama, and it has been adopted by other modern genres of entertainment, such as the Hollywood film industry, which seems to take tragedy to mean what Terry Eagleton describes when paraphrasing Walter Kerr's examination of the subject:

Kerr is forced by his libertarian definition to dismiss as non-tragic works which do not affirm freedom, and where destruction is not part of an evolutionary process leading to new life. [...] Gripped by a Western ideology of untrammelled liberty, along with a remorseless American upbeatness, Kerr sees tragedy as springing from 'a fiercely optimistic society', in need of 'arrogance', 'robustness and certainty'. Tragedy, in short, begins to sound a little like the US Marine corps.<sup>36</sup>

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36 Eagleton, 6.

Arrogance, robustness and certainty are terms that spring to mind, when one thinks of the US Marine corps and military in general. It is the military's honor that the film industry set to re-establish in the eighties after a disastrous war in South-East Asia had dragged it through the mud.<sup>37</sup> The way the film industry envisioned this could be done is through the kind of tragic tales Walter Kerr seems to propagate in his definition of tragedy. Hollywood harnessed tragedy to promote the freedom-loving, gun-slinging defenders of a nation.

In the film tetralogy *Rambo*<sup>38</sup> the muscular hero is portrayed as something between a government-controlled drone and a self-guiding individual with an agenda of its own. The government sends him on missions, and he adopts the role of a killing machine very easily, causing the deaths of tens, even hundreds of enemies. According to William Warner the first Rambo film

develops a version of the fable of self and system which dichotomizes fictional space into two positions. The self, often associated with nature and the erotic, becomes the locus for the expression of every positive human value, most especially "freedom." Opposite the self is the System, which in its colorless, mechanical operations, is anathematized as a faceless monster using its insidious powers to bend all human effort to its own service.<sup>39</sup>

The individual is thus seen as a virtuous being, expressing the good values that an oppressing ruler takes advantage of. The film criticizes the government that takes advantage of an individual, but at the same time that individual is willing to do work for that government, casting aside any qualms he may have about killing scores of enemies in the name of that government.

The (flawed) hero of *Canal Dreams* is somewhat aloof, with no agenda of her

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37 Warner, 673.

38 The first part, *First Blood*, was released in 1982, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* in 1985, *Rambo III* in 1988 and *Rambo*, the fourth part, in 2008.

39 Warner, 673.

own – until her person is attacked, when her response is fierce violence and revenge. The individual is too principled to argue over what is good and what is not, too engulfed by the idea of radical choosing to consider the opinions of others. The reason that this analogy between ideology, film and novel is, in my opinion, relevant, is the recent (2008) release of the fourth Rambo film. The previous US administration's policies are arguably close to those of Reagan's (during whose reign the second Rambo film was released), and the release of a film that condones a policy of *acceptable collateral damage* or *ends justifying the means* makes the parody of the Reaganite policies in *Canal Dreams* current. Terry Eagleton discusses<sup>40</sup> the way tragedy has been adopted by both liberal and conservative intellectuals to defend their viewpoints on what tragic art wants to accomplish, saying neither the diversity-promoting liberal nor the gung-ho dogmatism of especially American conservatives can completely claim it. The convention-challenging point of view of the former comes closer, with the latter's usage of tragedy prompting Eagleton to question whether “it is wise [for tragedy] to occasionally affirm notions of 'bogus liberty'”.<sup>41</sup>

Through the images of suffering, the morality connected with violence and the grotesque way in which the novel portrays those ideas my idea is to investigate how *Canal Dreams* continues and adds to the long-standing notion of art displaying the moral inadequacies of a society, acting as a sort of pamphlet or a political statement. My intention is to shed light on the different ways in which the novel portrays themes common in literature to achieve this goal, as literature has done since Greek dramatists applied this aspect to the stage two millennia ago. I will look at Thomas Middleton's<sup>42</sup> *Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) and

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40 Eagleton, 62-63.

41 Ibid, 63.

42 Brian Gibbons discusses this at the beginning of his introduction of the play, saying that “common features in the spelling and language” are the cause of the play being attributed to Middleton rather than to Cyril Tourneur, as the case was before. There is no certainty of

compare the two tales through the similarities and differences in their themes. The play was chosen as comparison because it handles the issues of power, desire and revenge that *Canal Dreams* does and it also comes close to the form of what *Canal Dreams* is seen to exhibit – a mocking parody or a “bitter farce” as Brian Gibbons puts it.<sup>43</sup> I will also examine the way the novel's themes of morality compare with modern works such as Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) and some rape-revenge films of the 1970s and block-buster films that attracted crowds in the late 1980s, such as the aforementioned *Rambo* films. *Canal Dreams* continues the tradition of mocking the rulers, but it also mocks the Hollywood film industry of the late eighties, which promoted a Reaganite ideology<sup>44</sup>, creating characters such as John Rambo who could and would go around the globe terminating everyone in his way. This idea of vigilante justice is evident in the Reaganite ideology I mentioned before, but can be traced back to the Wild West and also the western films that followed the closing of the frontier. Jane Tompkins disagrees with a reading of westerns as a reflection of foreign policy, however. She sees it as a response to writing that preceded it with tales of church-going and softer values that was popular at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>45</sup>. The western answered this with the tough-talking, six-shooter wielding and unspeaking male that denounced organized religion, idealism and culture.<sup>46</sup> Tompkins also declares that the emergence of the western hero paved way for “Ernst Hemingway's Jake Barnes and Albert Camus's Stranger.”<sup>47</sup> *Canal Dreams* takes from both film genres, parodying the pompous masculinity

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the play's author, however. Gibbons, xx.

43 Gibbons, xxxii.

44 Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner state that as the American political mood started to change from liberal to conservative after the media disaster of the war in Vietnam, Hollywood followed suit and started making films that promoted an idea of a strong, just military that fights against the oppressing communists. Ryan & Kellner, 194-195.

45 Tompkins, 30.

46 Ibid, 31-37.

47 Ibid, 34. Tompkins uses one of the English translations of the name of Camus's novel to

and the ideology of spreading freedom through violence of the Ramboesque films, while at the same time poking ironic fun at the ideology that those films took their inspiration from. It comments on the Western male image with a snicker, casting a woman in the role of the silent vindicator, which makes the story akin to the rape-revenge films<sup>48</sup>. At the same time the novel acknowledges the interpretation of western films as portraying the aggressive foreign policies of the US through the character of Colonel Dandridge. All these intertextual relationships help build the “politics” of the novel and decipher the way that it comments on society. It is, as Ryan and Kellner argue, an overstatement to describe all Hollywood-produced films as being harnessed to spreading hegemonic ideology with its patriarchal, individualistic, capitalistic and racist undertones; but by looking at individual films from different genres it is possible to point out the ones that do.<sup>49</sup> As stated, this thesis sees the *Rambo* films as such.

It would be impossible to discuss the four topics I have mentioned – suffering, morality, affectivity and the Grotesque only under just one heading such as “Moral Ideas in *Canal Dreams*”, for example, as the topics penetrate the novel in so many ways. It is through imitation, parody of and laughter at pre-existing forms of literature (tragedy, Westerns, action narratives) and a mixing of the familiar with the unknown that the novel shakes the reader’s moral footing and makes them think about the world around them by making a political statement about it. The political statement of *Canal Dreams* is an anti-oppressive one. It condemns the imperialistic ideology of Reaganite foreign policy and the selfish individualism of the people that see the flawed ethics of the policy but do nothing about it.

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refer to the protagonist of the novel.

48 Carol Clover gives an “extreme example” of such a film in her analysis of *I Spit on Your Grave* (1977), a film where a female protagonist is tortured and raped by four men, who she then “hangs, axes or castrates.” She also draws a line between films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Dirty Harry* (1971) and also westerns, in their portrayal of vengeance. Clover, 114-115.

49 Ryan & Kellner, 1-2.

## 1.2. The (Post-)Modern Gothic of Iain Banks

This chapter is an overview of what has been said of the author of *Canal Dreams*, Iain Banks, and his writings. The aim is to locate the author and his literary work in the field and try to draw a picture of what is to be expected and how it will fit the premises of the thesis. Not much has been written about Banks's writings, especially regarding the way it displays the morals of a society. Allan Lloyd Smith's work on the post-modern Other and his linking it to the Gothic Other does bring morals into the discussion and also fits with the idea of the four knowledges discussed in the introduction. Smith's ideas will be present in the analysis to make the link between *Canal Dreams* and the aspects of Gothic that he discusses.

Iain Banks, a Scottish writer born in 1954, is deemed by Garan Holcombe to be “an original voice in Scottish fiction”.<sup>50</sup> Holcombe characterizes Banks's novels as handling issues like “...anti-Thatcherite contemporary politics, pop culture and technology”, describes them as featuring “mordant wit [and] pace and keen sense of the contemporary”. He also describes them as featuring “meticulous attention to detail, be that geographical, metaphysical (many of Banks' characters are concerned with the bigger questions of mortality, morality and religion) or structural”. According to Holcombe, Banks's novels surprise the reader with drastic changes in the characters, which cause a doubt to descend on previous events in the narrative. He also describes Banks's novels as handling the themes of “power and identity” and the “relationship between power and duplicity.” These characterizations of Banks's work go well with my reading of *Canal Dreams*. Peter Childs places Banks in the front row of a new wave of Scottish fiction writers, who have rejuvenated the country's literature since the

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<sup>50</sup> Holcombe.

mid-1980s.<sup>51</sup> Another critic mentions Banks as an author writing on “middle-class angst”,<sup>52</sup> claiming Banks’s Scotland is as “fragmented and decentered as anywhere else in its cultural expression”.<sup>53</sup> In my thesis I will not be concentrating on the nationality of the author, but middle-class angst could be used to describe the anxiety and displeasure that *Canal Dreams* portrays.

Victor Sage<sup>54</sup> links Iain Banks's fiction with traditional Gothic literature through the surroundings and themes that depict a culture halted through its own beliefs in the supernatural. But before considering what Sage says about Banks in relation to the Gothic, I will examine Allan Lloyd Smith's linking of post-modernism and Gothicism. Lloyd Smith parallels Old Gothic and post-modernism through several topics, the first of which is indeterminacy. He explains it with the deconstructed, displaced self that is evident in the writing of both eras: “In both [Gothic and post-modern] we confront the embattled, deconstructed self, without sureties of religion and social place, or any coherent psychology of the kind observable in both the Enlightenment or modernist traditions.”<sup>55</sup> Next he connects the epistemology of Gothicism and the ontology of post-modernism: questions about the known and existence in both seem to have their roots in the indeterminacy mentioned earlier. The aesthetics of Post-modernist art is, according to Smith “an aesthetics of the surface, dominated by the depthless image, divorced from attendant complications of reference” together with “a manipulation of response, in which free floating 'intensities' substitute for more coherent sets of feelings”.<sup>56</sup> He cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in explaining that these

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51 Childs, 222.

52 Carruthers , 127.

53 Ibid,

54 Sage, 20.

55 Lloyd Smith, 7.

56 Ibid, 8.

ideas of surface and affectivity, the latter a focal points of the thesis, can be seen in Gothic literature as well. He concludes: “Like post-modern fiction, then, the Gothic foregrounds issues of ontology in reader and text, while subduing or subverting the explanatory structures that might, in a realist or modernist text, control, explain, or direct affectivity.”<sup>57</sup> Temporality is another concept that links Gothic and the Grotesque<sup>58</sup> – their reaching into the past, be it through “the Gothic ransacking an imaginary museum of pastness”<sup>59</sup> or “the post-modern cannibalisation of images from the detritus of global history in which the past [...] has become a vast collection of images, a 'multitudinous photographic simulacrum’”<sup>60</sup>, which acts as a bridge between then and now to the effect that the depravity of today is revealed through images of yesterday. This connection to the past is also at the core of the next topic, pastiche, a term Smith uses instead of parody to imply the more serious tone taken by the Gothic or Post-modernist author. The motive to use pastiche lies, according to Smith, in the desire to “produce an undecidability”.<sup>61</sup>

That ambiguity is achieved in post-modern literature through placing the signs in a network that makes the interpretation a difficult task and also by first juxtaposing events, then making them inexplicable (or not explaining them) in the Gothic narrative.<sup>62</sup> This uncertainty in interpretation leads to the aforementioned intensities that cause a “*danse macabre* of ‘readerly doubt, unease, and horror, codified in bathos – in the staggeringly banal

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57 Ibid, 10.

58 Wolfgang Kayser discusses this linking of Gothic and the Grotesque, citing Walter Scott and William Hazlitt as the theorists that moved the Grotesque from its original meaning of a style of ornament into the realm of literature, where Scott defined the “emotional correlate [of the Grotesque as] a feeling of helplessness and disparagement before an increasingly absurd and fantastically estranged world.” Kayser, 77-78.

59 Lloyd Smith, 11.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid, 12.

62 Ibid.

mechanisms of exaggeration, mistaken identity, misunderstanding and cross purposes”<sup>63</sup>. This mixture leads, according to Smith, to the breaking up of conventions and morality, the speaking of the unspeakable and realization of evil. In Post-modern writing the evil is, as Smith quotes Fredric Jameson, “the emptiest form of sheer Otherness (into which any type of social content can be poured at will)”<sup>64</sup>. The Otherness is caused by industrialization in Gothic writing while post-modern literature tries to challenge the insecurities created by the shrinking world of the twentieth century's information revolution.<sup>65</sup> Smith finds in both eras “an aesthetics of anxiety and perplexity, as similar responses to the confusing world order”<sup>66</sup>. This aesthetics corresponds with Bakhtin's grotesque and the two intertwine in *Canal Dreams* to create not “a politics of petrification”<sup>67</sup>, a term used by Victor Sage, but instead a politics of regeneration.

Sage gives an example of Scotland and Ireland as countries where the “politics of petrification” is prevalent in contemporary literature. It “is organised around consciously static, backward-looking moments, decorative and often fetishised digressions which act as self-conscious pastiche” that “is a way of giving their own history back to a readership”<sup>68</sup>. He then analyses numerous Iain Banks novels, both his 'mainstream' fiction and his science fiction, summing up that “For Banks, the dialectic, a paradoxical struggle still dynamically present in the highly technologised Western culture of the late seventies, eighties and nineties, the decades of the Falklands and the Gulf War, is between the Civilised and the Barbarian”<sup>69</sup>.

In the analysis I will take up an idea of this dialectic in *Canal Dreams* and question it through

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63 Lloyd Smit, quoting Victor Sage, 14.

64 Lloyd Smith, 15.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid, 18.

67 Sage, 20.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid, 21-22.

the novel's regenerative power. The ideas of Lloyd Smith and Sage are present in my reading of the novel: the indeterminacy and subduing of familiar structures in conjunction with the confusion created by the Grotesque elements in the novel, the linking of Gothic and the Grotesque that correlates with the links made to Albert Camus's literature and the novel as being a response to a world order, which I relate to in discussing Thomas Middleton's play. *Canal Dreams* operates in the field of the Grotesque and horror to suggest a criticism and a response in the reader. The novel does not give back a history, because of the way it handles power and politics in a way that is lasting, but creates a new one by mocking the ethically questionable rulers and the sheepish people that do nothing about them.

Many of Banks's novels are set in surroundings of Gothic heritage: castles, imitation Gothic churches, a bridge built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, according to Sage, they communicate a dialogue between the past and the present, a struggle of a self struggling to cope between religion and humanism.<sup>70</sup> Banks attacks the conventions of today with a chaotic image that questions the given:

The castle or fortress in Banks' *Complicity*, *The Crow Road*, *Fearsum Endginn* (*sic*) and *The Player of Games*, self-confessedly a pastiche, represents a vertical arrestation of time, a barbarian labyrinth of darkness that takes the reader outside the comfortably depthless, cliché-ridden, so called 'postmodern' landscape of 'heritage', and holds up to ransom easy notions of secular humanism and social progress since the 1960s.<sup>71</sup>

The secular humanism of *Canal Dreams* is apparent in the link that I draw between the novel and the work of Albert Camus. The protagonists of *The Outsider* and *Canal Dreams* are both depicted as individualists who see the world through a materialism that coldly disregards

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70 Sage, 23.

71 Ibid, 36.

emotions, seeing human beings as objects that interact with each other only through codes such as language.

In *The Wasp Factory* (1984), Banks's first novel, the author handles many of the themes that have become his trademarks and are to be found in *Canal Dreams* as well: gender, growing up and upbringing, mythology, religion, and the notions of choice and freedom (or, as Sage puts it, un-freedom<sup>72</sup>) that link the novels to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Smith also mentions *Canal Dreams*:

[*Canal Dreams*] has none of the Gothic I have been talking about. And yet, the choice of a delicately beautiful Japanese female cellist who discovers warrior violence in herself when made the victim of male terrorists in Panama, has a very obvious and logical, if an unexpected, symbolic relevance to the dialectical analysis of postwar culture in the other books.<sup>73</sup>

The surroundings of *Canal Dreams* may thus not be Gothic, but the novel does incorporate the means and themes of Gothicism that Smith and Sage talk about. This connection will be pointed out in the analysis. The Gothic of *The Wasp Factory* is more deliberate and visible than that of *Canal Dreams*:

I looked round the Bunker. The severed heads of gulls, rabbits, crows, mice, owls, moles and small lizards looked down on me. They hung drying on short loops of black thread suspended from lengths of string stretched across the walls from corner to corner, and dim shadows turned slowly on the walls behind them. [...] The yellow brain-bones of horses, dogs, birds, fish, and horned sheep faced in towards Old Saul, some with beaks and jaws open, some shut, the teeth exposed like drawn claws. To the right of the brick, wood and concrete altar where the candles and the skull sat were my small phials of precious fluids... (WF, 57)

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72 Sage, 28.

73 Ibid, 24.

Here the protagonist describes his altar, where he brings the skeletal remains of the animals he kills. The dim shadows, skulls and candles allude heavily to the Gothic, to the “Castles and estates, citadels of the Old Gothic”<sup>74</sup> that Victor Sage refers to. The reader would be hard pressed to find such a description in *Canal Dreams*, where no such straightforward allusions exist, but the mindset of the protagonist is another thing. The killer, or slaughterer, of animals is a teenager with a disturbing history:

Quite apart from the ones I killed (and they were all about the same age I was when I murdered them) I can think of at least three of our family who went to whatever they imagined their Maker was like in unusual ways. (WF, 29)

As will be seen in the reading of *Canal Dreams*, it is the psyche of the protagonist that bridges the two novels and brings *Canal Dreams* into the field of the Gothic.

Roz Kaveney claims the following about *Canal Dreams* (and other “general fiction”<sup>75</sup> novels by Banks):

Yet some of the Iain Banks novels are more frivolous and irresponsible than the science fiction. *Canal Dreams* (1991), for example, is a variant on *Die Hard*, with a woman cellist as the active protagonist.<sup>76</sup>

The argument in this thesis is that *Canal Dreams* is not a straightforward action story in the spirit of *Die Hard* and other films of that genre, such as *Commando* and *Rambo*, although it can be read as such. Instead of being a copy of them it parodies and disempowers those films and the ideology behind them.

The questioning of authorities that is prevalent in Banks's novels is also

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74 Sage, 20.

75 Banks writes Science fiction novels under the name Iain M. Banks, whereas his “normal” fiction is published without the middle initial.

76 Kaveney, 20.

apparent in *Canal Dreams*. The protagonist questions her mother, tutor, teachers, even government on different levels. This dissidence is the result and producer of different levels of aggression, both physical and psychological, that are directed at the protagonist and also by her, at the authorities. In the next chapter, the analysis of the novel, these acts of aggression will be discussed and analyzed to separate the ideologies that are criticized and to see the way in which the story acts as a blade being thrust through the fabric of false consciousness, the idea that people delude themselves by not knowing themselves – like Willy Loman of Arthur Miller’s *The Death of A Salesman* (1949) – mocking their own humanity by adhering to a “false social order”, as Terry Eagleton puts it.<sup>77</sup>

The next two chapters consist of the analysis of *Canal Dreams*. The hypothesis is that the novel can be read not only as a straightforward action story or entertainment, but that it acts as a repository of moral knowledge and social phenomena that, when read closely, will affect the reader in critical ways. The reading will proceed in the order laid out in the introduction, with the focus first on the factual knowledge, secondly on the psychological principles, thirdly on the understanding of moral phenomena and last on how the first supports the second and third to create the affectivity of the novel.

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<sup>77</sup> Eagleton, 98.

## 2. Knowledges of *Canal Dreams*: Actuality and Psychology

Before the analysis I will study generally how literature supplies knowledge of the world. This will help chart the contribution of *Canal Dreams* and point out how the grotesque elements in the novel construct a new perspective on the principles and phenomena it handles and also how that perspective creates a particular affectivity that stimulates the reader's ethical knowledge. Literary cognitivists assert<sup>78</sup> that literature has a place in people's life as a source of different kinds of information about the real world. Paraphrasing Novitz, David Davies lists four kinds of "knowledge or understanding of the real world"<sup>79</sup> that literature is a source of. The first knowledge is factual information about the place or time of the literary work, which may result in the reader learning something about the world. Secondly, the writer may incorporate "moral, metaphysical, or psychological" principles in the piece, implicitly or explicitly, to bring them to the reader's awareness. The third kind of comprehension literature is said to increase is a categorical understanding of phenomena that can be applied by the readers to the real world, thus enabling them to learn something about it. The final knowledge is labeled affective, meaning "it bears upon our ability to comprehend, and respond appropriately to, morally complex situations that we encounter in the real world."<sup>80</sup> The last two knowledges are the most important to my thesis, as moral phenomena construct the most important part of my reading and the affectivity of a novel is something I wish to address as being a step forward from a simple purgation of emotions in a reader, as catharsis suggests.

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78 Davies, 142-147.

79 Ibid, 145.

80 Ibid, 146

David Davies<sup>81</sup> cites the work by David Novitz and James Young in defence of a cognitivist reading of literature, which has been accused of over-emphasizing the “knowledges” in literature. Critics have stated that the mentioned knowledges can at best be “*hypotheses*”, “*beliefs*” or “*potentially insightful ways of categorizing things in our experience*,” that require additional testing to assume the role of knowledge. Novitz's claim is that literature is equivalent to science precisely because of the assuming role it takes, making hypotheses just like science does.<sup>82</sup> Davies refutes this point of view as inadequate<sup>83</sup>, but offers Young's “more elaborate and sophisticated”<sup>84</sup> explanation to support the idea. Davies paraphrases Young's idea, saying that fictional characters and events represent *types* that the reader finds in themselves and others, in “real people that can also be classified as belonging to different types, including the types represented by fictional characters.”<sup>85</sup> Fiction thus demonstrates real-life characters and events and makes the reader see them in a different light, from a different perspective. Fiction represents the world through illustration, where a type is used to exemplify a point about a character or a characteristic. This leads to new understanding on behalf of the reader and thus it can be argued that new knowledge has been acquired.<sup>86</sup> What is needed is that the readers bring their own previous knowledge of types, both literary and real, to the reading.<sup>87</sup> Another way to defend cognitive reading of literature lies in the claim that emotions can be regarded as being cognitive. This position will be discussed at the end of my thesis, where Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky's and Martha Nussbaum's ideas about affectivity in literature are discussed. The following two chapters consist of an

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81 Davies, 148, his emphasis.

82 Davies, 153.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid, 154.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid, 155.

87 Ibid, 156.

analysis of two knowledges that are perceived in this thesis as supporting (or being a part of) the most important subject matter of the novel, morality. The two knowledges in question are the factual knowledge that is mentioned in the novel, and the psychological principles referred to in the novel, which revolves around violence and its effect on the human psyche.

### 2.1. Actuality in Canal Dreams

The first kind of cognitive knowledge that researchers of literature attend to is the factual knowledge about the world we live in. So, for example, by detailing Hale's circling of central Brighton in the beginning of *Brighton Rock* Graham Greene delivers to the reader a setting that is, if not familiar to all, at least credible and, even in the 1930s, researchable. The reader would have had some kind of idea about the popular seaside resort and, if willing, could have checked the details from a source such as a library or a newspaper. This helps the author in two ways, says David Davies. The author no longer has to meticulously detail the backdrop to the surroundings, they can “assume shared beliefs”<sup>88</sup> about it. The author can also assume that the reader will be able to locate the story in a time – what happened before in the settings and, in case the story is set in history, what happened after. In Greene's case, for example, the first paragraph sets the tone by placing the action in a city “which, in the late 1930s was becoming violent, a centre of criminal activity”.<sup>89</sup> Greene's novel was published in 1938, so only the history and geographical information was to be known by the reader.

*Canal Dreams* is in many ways different from Greene's novel, but at the same time the principle is the same. There are multiple settings, from many cities in Japan to a ship

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88 Davies, 145.

89 West, 78.

on the ocean to the ship stuck in Panama during a revolt. The reader will, as when reading Greene's novel, be able to find factual knowledge in many of the settings and also in the chronological passing of events from what happened before the events in the novel to what happened after it. The factual information that can be found in *Canal Dreams* is plentiful, and a discussion of some of the instances on display will follow.

The novel is set in numerous geographical locations, with the main events taking place in Sapporo and Tokyo, Japan and in the Panama Canal. The way that these locations are depicted sets the tone for the novel – just like Greene's depiction of Brighton did in *Brighton Rock*. The implied reader<sup>90</sup> of Banks's novel is a western, educated one that is able to fill in the text where it aims to criticize US foreign policy, one that thinks about humanity and its many psychological and philosophical manifestations. The novel calls for a reader that maybe wants to do something about the injustices that they see around them. It is not so important that the reader has visited the locations in the novel, maybe even better if they have not, for the creation of the borderline atmosphere of the locations. The depiction of locations is, at least to a point that it is reasonable to check here, accurate and thus trustworthy. The reader does not need to check whether an airport being built in Tokyo was opposed by a demonstration as the novel claims (CD, 173-179), but one need not doubt it either. Environmental activism has been around since the 1970s and the demonstration in the novel sets a tone for a scene that will be analyzed later in the section on morals in the novel. There was in fact an airport built in Tokyo and large demonstrations against the construction work, so real knowledge can be claimed here. Real knowledge is not the focal point of this chapter, however. The following examples of depictions of real places and events are laid out

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90 A term coined by Wolfgang Iser in the 1970s, it “designates a network of response-inviting structures, such as patterns, points of view and blanks in the text, which impel the actual reader to grasp the text.” Macey, 200.

to support the two latter knowledges that the novel is claimed to produce: psychological and philosophical principles and a new understanding of moral phenomena in the real world.

The two aforementioned Japanese cities are described in many sections of the novel. Also ferry rides between Hokkaido and Honshu (CD, 51/73) the protagonist Hisako Onoda's home island and the main island where Tokyo, the city where she attends cello academy and university, lies are described. One of Hisako's boat journeys to the academy is described in more detail:

The ferry journey north that winter was a wild, rough affair, but she sat outside part of the time, hugging her old cello case to her, her teeth chattering, her hands raw and red in her mittens, the salt spray a taste on her lips and a cold and grainy sweat on her face, while the ship pitched and rolled and the white waves tumbled and slid, battering the ferry like one sumo wrestler slapping another out of the ring. (CD, 106)

The passage paints a credible picture of a boat trip on a north Pacific strip of sea, but this is not the only reason to include this passage from the novel here. The stormy, cold sea journey can be read as a metaphor, depicting also a state of mind and a crossing over from one stage in life to another. The return trip is similar in nature, but Hisako's actions speak of another turn taken:

On the ferry back she sat outside again, watching the pitching, ragged sea, and the dark veils of distant squalls. [...] After a while she stood up, crossed unsteadily to the rail on the shifting deck, lifted the cello and its case up over her head, and threw it into the water. (CD, 107)

The throwing of the cello into the water is one of the culminating points in the novel, both as an event in the plot and as an allegory. Hisako casts her history off the ship, the old cello has become excess weight and the sea its final resting place. But getting rid of one's history is not so easy, as Hisako finds out:

She got into trouble; somebody saw the case in the water and was sure it was a body. The ferry slowed and turned, heeling over alarmingly as it turned broadside to the storm, and headed back. She hardly noticed at the time, locked in a toilet, sobbing. (CD, 108)

The cello case is compared to a corpse here, and can be read as a sign of things to come. She does not manage to get rid of the cello by drowning it and, consequently, she goes to the other extreme and burns it:

The old cello was ruined, of course, but she kept it, and then one Sunday in the Spring, after her punishment had ceased, and while the cherry blossom painted the Tokyo parks pink, she took the water-warped cello and its salt-stained case on the train to Kofu, climbed to the bald summit of a hill to the north of the Fuji Five Lakes, and in a clearing – using several cans of lighter fluid – cremated the instrument in its battered, twisted coffin. The cello groaned and creaked and popped as it died, and the strings snapped like whips. The flames and smoke looked pale and insubstantial against the budding trees and the bright sky, but the heated fumes, rising through the clear fresh air of spring, made Fuji itself tremble. (CD, 108)

Here the beautiful landscape, Fuji as the backdrop and full of cherry blossom pink, is contrasted against the destruction of history, making the affair sound very unnatural, in opposition to nature. The cello dies, is not destroyed, again making it seem like the narrator thinks that it is indeed a living (or dying) being. The unnaturalness of the event is accentuated by the last sentence; in the narrator's mind a mountain is moved by Hisako's act of destroying her cello, with the heat haze distorting her vision.

The description of *Todai*, or University of Tokyo, is another example of a real-life place being described in the novel.

*Todai* is not to be taken lightly; it is The Place, the Harvard, the Oxbridge of Japan; virtual guarantor of a job in the diplomatic service, the government or the fast track of a *zaibatsu*. In a country more obsessed with education than any other in history, Tokyo University is the summit. (CD, 118)

The university is not described physically, but in rather intangible terms that make the corporeal institution sound like an abstraction, comparable to other institutions that have established a revered place in the minds of people who have never visited them. The reverence that follows the mentioning of a name is put into question, it seems, as Hisako ponders her career at the university:

Still, she sailed through it. [...] She knew she didn't have to worry, she would float through everything, she'd be found regardless, and at her finale mountains would tremble. [...] She would survive; she would always survive. She was smart and strong after all, and with *gaijin* music and *gaijin* music box, she'd get by. (CD, 119)

No matter what the reputation of an institution, there is a glitch to it. Hisako's ability to play the cello, a foreign (*gaijin* means “foreigner” in Japanese) instrument, puts her at a level where no average Japanese person can get. Her “floating through everything” seems to imply effortlessness, of not having to do anything much in order to attain success and wealth. The statement in the previous passage about not taking the university lightly is completely crushed by this idea of non-action, as if to make a point about appreciation of certain talents. Someone with a talent sails through life, supported by others, who have arbitrarily chosen that talent to be of more value than others. The trembling of the mountain in the previous quotation can be re-raised here, as it brings to mind a god-like power that the protagonist feels herself to possess.

The riots at an airport construction site refer to real riots at the Narita airport, where Japanese left-wing activists protested against the construction from the 1970s until mid-1980s.

The line pressed forward; they chanted and yelled, voices muffled by the damp cloths many had over their mouths to keep out the worst of the tear gas. She had forgotten to bring a pair of goggles, and the crash helmet had no visor. Her arms were held on either side; linked with the students. She felt good; frightened but

purposeful, acting with the others, part of a team, greater than herself. (CD, 176)

Again the fact that the riots occurred is not presented here as new or even accurate information, but to illustrate a point about the human psyche and to give another perspective to it. The section detailing Hisako's attending the riots is an example of the Grotesque, where familiar and foreign, calm and turbulence, peace and violence are all thrown in a pot and mixed to create confusion through change of pace, subject matter and action in the narrative.

(She ate satsumas on the ferry ride across from Kagoshima City to Sakurajima, to see the volcano. Dust fell on the city that evening, and she realised – as her hair filled with the fine, gritty stuff, and her eyes smarted – that it was true; people in Kagoshima really did carry umbrellas all the time. She'd always thought it was a joke. At Ibusuki she watched the sad bathers lie on the beach, smiling and chattering to each other while the hot black sand was piled on them. They lay like darkly swaddled infants near the waves, progeny of some strange human-turtle god, long laboured on the black sands.) (CD, 176-177)

The narrative at this point jumps in time. Hisako takes time off from her job (albeit unwillingly) as the cellist of an orchestra and tours Japan to set her mind at ease after a traumatic experience – when she could not board a plane with which the orchestra flew to the USA, her fear of flying preventing her. The mundane action of eating satsumas, mentioning the umbrellas at Kagoshima and the reference to beach life and turtles sets this example apart from the previous one and creates a dichotomy with help from real life places and events. Their banality serves to build an opposite to the hectic atmosphere of the previous paragraph.

The riot is again the subject of the next paragraph. Here the scene evaporates in description.

Orange smoke and the sting of tear gas. The orange smoke was theirs, the tear gas belonged to the riot police. The air was a choking thick mixture and the sun shone through the braids of dark smoke twisting through the sky from piles of burning tyres on the perimeter of the demonstration. High cloud completed the set of filters. Marshals wearing bright waistcoats and specially marked crash helmets shouted at them from megaphones, voices drowned by the sporadic

screams of the planes. Between them and the airport perimeter fence, the riot police lines were advancing, dark waves over the long grass and reeds, like the wind made solid. Heavy water cannons lumbered to one side, where the ground was solid enough to support the trucks. (CD, 177)

The use of depictions of different gases and fumes makes the passage an ethereal experience – smoke, gas, cloud, the police turned into wind, even the ground is somehow not solid – all this creates an atmosphere of surreality about the scene, which fits well with the idea of the Grotesque. It is familiar, yet strange.<sup>91</sup>

Another way in which factual places and events is subjected to moral and unsettling dimensions in the novel is in the description of Hisako's boat trip from Japan to Panama. Hisako decides to do a solo tour of Europe, but refuses to fly again, and decides to take a boat across the Pacific Ocean to the Panama Canal, from where she is meant to continue across the Atlantic to Europe.

The wide sea, the vast skies, the soothing consistency of the view – reliable in its simple outline, but ever various within its elemental parameters – made the voyage an escape, an experience of freedom of a type and duration she'd never encountered before; something sublime, like a raked garden or a perfectly proportioned room, like Fuji on a clear day, rising beyond Tokyo like a great tent being drawn towards heaven. (CD, 35)

Here the sea is described in a completely different manner from the example before, again fitting the mood of the passage. A passing, a journey from one state (of mind) to another is again taking place, but this time the sea and skies have a calming effect, with the references to Japanese gardening and architecture, both rigorous disciplines aiming at peace of mind, adding to it. Again the sea is used in a metaphorical sense, with backing drawn from the two

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91 Wolfgang Kayser's description of the Grotesque is evoked by this passage. He summarizes the nature of the Grotesque as being estranged yet familiar and natural, as absurd and as “our failure to orient ourselves in the physical world.” 184-185.

disciplines and also from the image of mount Fuji, another Japanese landmark, being referred to with a celestial reference that hints at protection (tent) and ascension (drawn towards heaven). The mentioning of the sublime evokes thoughts of putting nature on a pedestal, even though it causes feelings of terror at the same time. Nature, naturalness and unnaturalness will be discussed in more detail later.

Centrally located in the novel is another aspect of Japan and Japanese life – the atom bombs that were dropped on the cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1945, respectively. Many of the philosophical and psychological principles that will be discussed in the next chapter carry a link to the novel's portrayal of *Pikadon*,<sup>92</sup> the name given to the Hiroshima bomb by its survivors.

(So Hiroshima. The girder skullcap and empty eye windows of the ruined trade hall. She went through the museum, she read the English captions, and could not believe the cenotaph was so incompetent. The flensed stone and bleached concrete of the wrecked trade hall was much more eloquent. She stood on the banks of the river with her back to the Peace Park, watching her shadow lengthen across the grey-brown waters while the sky turned red, and felt the tears roll down her cheeks. Too much, turn away.

In the train again, she passed through Kitakyushu, where the second bomb would have been dropped if the visibility had been better that day. The cluttered hills of Nagasaki took it instead. The monument there – a giant human statue, epicentric – she found more fitting; what had happened to the two cities – both crowded, busy places again – was beyond abstraction.) (CD 175-176)

Hisako's reactions to the two monuments points at pacifism, or at least to thoughts about war's futility. The allegorical way of describing the monument in Hiroshima is in contrast with a flat statement about the one in Nagasaki, and while she meditates on them the sky turning red is used to create an atmosphere of doom and gloom. The reference to the cenotaph's incompetence may be the most powerful statement here – the inscription on it says: “Let all

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92 Pika=flash, light don=loud explosion in Japanese.

the souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the evil.”<sup>93</sup> The inadequacy of the Hiroshima cenotaph could refer to several things: to the fact that a second bomb was dropped in Nagasaki; to all the civilian victims of wars since the end of the Second World War; to the text itself not being enough to explain the killing of tens of thousands of people.

A passage (CD, 27-31) details the history of Panama and the building of the canal. The section lays the ground for an idea of places of transition as being volatile, subject to violence, as if violence was somehow prerequisite to change. From the beheading of the first Spaniard in Panama to the slaughtering of natives and perishing of the constructors and designer of the canal, the story of Panama reported in these pages revolves around bloodshed and brutality, two central themes of the novel.

Some already rich Americans formed the Panama Railroad Company. Somehow persuaded of their righteousness, the Columbian government granted them a monopoly. It made money. The track ran from Colón to Panamá, over one of the old Spanish gold trails. Then a golden spike was driven into its heart, thousands of miles of the north-west, in the United States of America: the first rail route from sea to shining sea was in operation. So people began to neglect Panama again. (CD, 29)

Here another issue that the novel handles is raised – righteousness is mentioned as a somewhat fickle idea, the implication being that morals are hidden or twisted with rhetoric. In this section the novel also introduces to the reader the continent-spanning ideology of the Monroe Doctrine which, in short, declared the two American continents a US playground, where European nations were banned.<sup>94</sup>

The United States was a major regional power now. It was determined to have a canal. [...] Congress was convinced. The word went out that it would be a good idea if Columbia let La Compaigne Universelle sell all its rights to the US. The Columbian Congress disagreed, and wouldn't ratify, no matter what President

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93 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mshades/2893711803/>

94 Jones, 513.

Roosevelt wanted. Incredibly, an uprising in Panama City played right into the US's hands, and when Columbian troops went to squash it, Congress sent a gunboat. (CD, 30)

US involvement in Panama (and Central America in general) is brought to the front of the stage and associated with rhetoric and, following its failure, violence. The partisan politics implied in the paragraph will be discussed later on in connection with Hisako's selfish individualism. Yet another example of factual information in a supporting role in the novel approaches US foreign policy in the same vein:

The man looked at her for a long time, then nodded slowly. 'Well', he said, putting the hand holding the cigar slowly through his cropped hair, massaging his scalp, 'there's a long and honourable tradition of shooting down commercial airliners, Miss Onoda. The Israelis did it back in...oh, early seventies, I believe; Egyptian plane, over Sinai. KAL 007 was chalked up to the Russians, and we downed an Airbus over the Persian Gulf, back in eighty-eight. An Italian plane probably took a NATO missile in an exercise, by mistake, back in the seventies too...not to mention terrorist bombs.' (CD, 171)

Here the American soldier in charge of a plot to enable US forces to enter Panama justifies the plan to shoot down a passenger jet carrying a US congressman, who is flying to Panama to assess the situation. A blueprint of consequentialist political thinking is uttered by the American in just a few sentences, “the ends justifying the means” ideology spelled out with echoes of what American presidents have conveyed to the people for decades: innocent people die, when policies are pursued, and that is acceptable. At the same time the scene alludes to the ideology of the *Rambo*-films:

*Rambo* offers a model and film analogue for Reagan administration media-events in Grenada and Libya – where swift televisual military action was used to confirm American greatness with comparatively little cost to this country. When the Iran/Contra scandal brought the activities of Oliver North to light, there was a strong sense of “déjà vu.” Over twenty columnists and political commentators drew the analogy between Rambo and North, each a “lone wolf” working within, and against the system to restore a squandered American

greatness.<sup>95</sup>

Banks himself has stated that if a film version of *Canal Dreams* was ever shot and the lead part played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, it would not be hard to see it as a pro-CIA film if the “politics was cut out”.<sup>96</sup> It is, however, impossible to cut out the politics from the novel, and therein lies the parody of the action-genre of films.

The numerous allusions to real-life events and places listed here are, as stated earlier, not to be viewed as factual knowledge per se. Instead the idea is that they help the reader in getting an understanding of the “politics” of the novel by tying the psychological and philosophical principles to actual places and to phenomena that the novel suggests exist, thus enabling the reader to make sense of them more easily than they would if there were no points of reference. The ethical discussion that the novel goes through is apparent in the factuality of places and events, also. The next chapter consists of an analysis of the psychological principles that the novel draws from.

## **2.2. Psychological Principles Recognized**

Grotesque conflicts are used in the novel in a psychological sense to tickle the reader, but there are also psychological principles in the content, principles that are explored and portrayed from a perspective that may be alien to the reader. One of the novel's central themes handles the grotesque dichotomy of creation/destruction, which is here discussed in relation to the psychological principles in the novel. The principles and psychology in general

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95 Warner, 685-686..

96 Branscombe.

are seen as supporting the ethical discussion of the novel, with an emphasis on the cognition of emotions that produce moral judgments in people. The protagonist's life is narrated via a series of lulling, happy times, during which the reader can gain knowledge of psychological principles, and moments of absurd violence and calamity that cause the reader to think about the morals of the story. It all begins before her birth, when her father dies because of the Hiroshima atom bomb.

He'd been with his unit in Kaita, a town a few kilometres from the city suburbs, when the *Pikadon* came. [...] His unit stayed in Hiroshima, in the ruins and dust, for a few days. They did what they could. Ten years later, a quarter of the men who'd been with him were dead. Eleven years later, so was he. (CD, 258-259)

The first tragedy of Hisako's life occurs before her own life even begins. She is left fatherless, a state that carries a brand of abnormality in addition to being viewed as tragic. A fatherless child is seen by society as not complete, in danger of being raised wrong:

Her father died three months before she was born; she had never been held by him. They told her she was lucky, all the same, she might have been born deformed. It was years after the *Pikadon*, and maybe he'd have died of cancer anyway. (CD, 257)

Hisako's father's death touches on two issues: the justification of (nuclear) warfare from the point of view of the individual who is left behind in its no-questions-asked destruction and whether a child can be raised right by a single parent, especially a mother.

The violence in Hisako's life that preceded her life continues during it. She is teased in school, even physically abused:

Her classmates made fun of her because she looked like a hairy Ainu. The Ainu were the natives of Japan; its abos, or injuns. After the eighth century they'd been pushed further and further north by the Yamato Japanese moving in from the Asian mainland until they clung on only in Hokkaido, its most northern island. [...] So the children in her school taunted her and offered to tattoo her

lips and wrists, the way real Ainu were marked. (CD, 49)

Not only does the paragraph discuss the psychological torture some children are subjected to, but it raises the issue of racism, comparing the Ainu to two well-known minority peoples, the Aboriginals of Australia and the Native Americans. Here the author invokes a familiar psychological issue (racism) through a foreign situation – not too many people in the West know about the Ainu. A good example of explicitly stating a principle from an unfamiliar perspective. Hisako puts up with and shuts up about the discrimination and bullying and focuses on the one thing that she loves – the cello. Music becomes her escape, her protection from the outside, a kind of psychological shelter.

She would lie in her mother's arms, being read to, or rest her English books in her lap, turning the page with her nose, or just sit with her cello, looking at it and rubbing her cheek against it. Whenever she started to cry she buried her face in the crook of her elbow, in case her tears stained the cello's varnished surface. (CD, 50)

Music has been studied in psychology for over 30 years,<sup>97</sup> with results showing that listening to music and attending music therapy have a positive effect on the human psyche.<sup>98</sup> The sanctuary Hisako builds around her mind brings this idea of music as therapy to the reader's awareness, if only in passing. Another thing that the passage evokes is the idea that when traumatized, a human being turns to the things that they like and are good at. So not only does the hearing of music act as a therapeutic vehicle, it builds self-esteem as well.

Another psychological aspect handled by the novel is womanhood. Hisako is a successful, famous and empowered woman who changes into a killing machine, a vengeful destroyer with no visible morals left. The change is complete, grotesque, with something

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97 Sacks, xiv.

98 Levitin, 227.

familiar turning into something foreign, or familiar but foreign in the context. Everyone recognizes the vengeful killing machine Hisako has turned into in the last few pages of the novel, but that recognition comes with a suspension, as the result of the change is not what is expected. The recognized genres (a story of growth/an action narrative) are too far apart to be directly compatible, and this tension creates the grotesqueness of the plot. A woman as a killing machine? Nowadays the idea does not seem so absurd, with the likes of Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill* (2003) and maybe Angelina Jolie in *Tomb Raider* (2001) playing the action heroine, but in 1989 the idea of a woman as an active contributor in action films was somewhat far-fetched.<sup>99</sup> The idea of a woman revenger is not uncommon in the history of art, however. Euripides' *Medea* from the fifth century BCE tells of a woman that avenges her husband's infidelity by killing first his new lover and then her own children.

Slasher and, more to the point in discussion about *Canal Dreams*, rape-revenge films have exhibited women as active participants on a regular basis since the first half of the 1970s.<sup>100</sup> Hisako is subjected to repeated rape after she refuses to co-operate with the American soldier and play the cello for his entertainment.

She was a toy, a mascot, they fucked her and made themselves a whole, together. But toys could corrupt, she thought (as they took her away from the sunlight, back to her cage and captivity and torture), and mascots might bite back. (CD, 199)

Her humanity and womanhood are subjected to the ultimate humiliation of being sexually assaulted. The allusions of Hisako as playthings and a group of men somehow consummating themselves through gang rape make the paragraph a grotesque one – there is nothing playful

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99 Carol J. Clover (p. 16-17) notes that after the mid-1970s a few exceptions to the rule existed, most notably Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* (1979) and Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween* (1978).

100 Clover, 137.

or fulfilling about rape. The second sentence hints at what is to come, with almost a threatening tone to it. Hisako frees herself and wreaks revenge on the men who subjected her to the horror of rape:

The gases flared on the tip of the cigarette, igniting with a swoosh and blowing flame towards the surprised soldier, flashing through the air in a vivid yellow ball. The man's hair caught; she saw his face, mouth opening, eyes closing as his brows sizzled and shrivelled and flamed blue. His burning hair lit up the beret stuffed underneath his left epaulette [...] He lit the place well enough for her to see a massive wrench hanging on the wall not a metre away. She stepped smartly to it, unclipped it and swung it in one movement. His scream had barely started and he had hardly moved - the cigarette he'd dropped hadn't even hit the deck - before the jaws of the wrench buried themselves in his skull, and he slammed into the metal deck as though he'd thrown himself there. (CD, 210)

The first soldier dies in a flaming pyre, like a sacrifice to appease gods. Hisako's actions are depicted as almost machine- or animal-like in their effectiveness and fluidity. The image is carried further, when she approaches the leader of the group of men:

She crept into the ship. The saloon was dark and silent, and smelled of dried blood and expended smoke; the whole deck seemed deserted. The television lounge still smelled of semen. She sniffed the dark air, drawing the sharp, animal scent into her, stomach churning. (CD, 214)

The animal smell of the men who raped her, herself now turned into an animal out to get them.

Sucre. His chest was smooth, almost hairless; nipples very dark in the half-light. She crossed quietly to the bed and fumbled with the holster at her hip. She kissed him, hair brushing the sides of his face, shadowing. He jerked awake, eyes white. She drew back a little so that he could see her; he relaxed fractionally, then the eyes balled wide and he started up, hands clutching together at the sheet beneath him before one went back up to his head, fumbling beneath the pillow. But he was too late, and she was already pumping down with the heels of her hands, the tip of the old cello spike on his chest and then bursting through as she put all her weight on it forcing it between his ribs and into his heart. (CD, 215)

The slaying of the leader, whose name is Sucre, starts out as an erotic affair, with a description that could go in a completely different direction. The scene has a strong sense of poetic justice, not only through Hisako's ability to turn the tables before the assault, but also in her using the cello spike to kill the man. She plunges the phallus-like spike into the man's heart, pumping – a strong sexual innuendo again, except there is nothing sexual about the scene.

The cello, her shelter and therapeutic device, which she refers as a husband even (CD, 196), was destroyed earlier by the rapists:

[...] she kept seeing Philippe crumple under the first bullet that hit, but it was the cello; the needless, pointless (apart from to hurt) destruction of the cello that finally killed her. Old wood. New metal. Guess which won? No surprise there. Killed, she was free. She heard the scream of the engines in the rasp of the guns. The sky was filled with thunder and fire, and she felt something die. (CD, 198)

It is not the death of her lover (Philippe, a French sailor she has an affair with while in the canal), nor the killing of all the other hostages on the boat, but the destruction of her cello that feels the pain. The question one wants to ask when reading this passage is whether Hisako is a pure materialist, coldly disregarding the relationships and feelings in her life, or if she is a fatalist, who believes that things are predetermined and that a human being has no effect on what happens in their life. The first idea is supported by the passage in connection to the manner in which Hisako treats Sanae, a conductor she has an affair with and who wants to marry her:

Fairy tale, she told her reflection in the dark train window. Too good to be true. Brilliant and handsome and now only a few months later he wanted them to be true only to each other, and to be married, and to live together [...] and have children if she wanted. (CD, 247)

She refuses to marry him (having imagined going on a honeymoon with a cello), refuses to be

loved by someone that adores her, abandons him and aborts the baby conceived with him without telling him about it. Her refusal to feel has a strong sense of premonition of what is to come, of what she symbolizes: a Cartesian dualism, where sense and sensibility are separated by the self. I use the preposition *by* here instead of *from*, as I see the kind of separation that the novel portrays as being the protagonist's choosing. The protagonist becomes emotionless through will, from thinking about it and deciding that life is not for the emotional. Here we have also the novel's connection to the Gothic – Hisako can be seen as a sort of monster, a human body but with no emotions, a reversal of the eloquent, logical and sympathetic monster created by Frankenstein<sup>101</sup>, if you will. Hisako is a monster on the inside, capable of atrocious acts, even if she looks fragile and pleasing on the outside.

The psychological ideas that *Canal Dreams* draws on support the grotesque morals of the novel. Mind and morals go together in my reading, as I see the emotions described in the novel and also caused in the reader as being cognitive. The reader reads the novel, thinks about the psychological and moral aspects, fills in the gaps in the text with previous knowledge of the matters. The protagonist of the novel, just as the reader, is not purged of the negative feelings as catharsis suggests, but instead they are transported or changed. The protagonist turns to a monster-like killer, the reader gains a new perspective on the matters. The confusion created by the protagonist's mind changing together with the actuality discussed in this chapter form the groundwork for the next section, where I examine the moral issues of the novel.

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101 Peter Brooks's account of the monster, p. 83.

### 3. Moral Positions

The moral setting in the tale is as follows: there is a morally corrupt ruler, who plots to overthrow a foreign government that is not to his liking, assisted by dissidents of the government. To achieve this, the ruler will not shy away from anything, including killing numerous bystanders, seeing the action as a necessary evil. This approach has also been adopted by the Panamanian dissidents, who are also being manipulated by the corrupt ruler to an extent. The story's protagonist is a modern woman, liberated both financially and sexually, but at the same time imprisoned by a feeling of absurdity, of not being in control of her life. This realization has driven her to an individualistic materialism, where she rejects her own feelings and the people around her. In the course of the novel, which changes from a story of growth to an action-come-revenge piece, she turns into a revenger, takes justice into her own hands and acts as judge and jury to get rid of the corrupt ruler.

This is what Brian Gibbons says about the hero-revenger of *The Revenger's Tragedy*

These [revenge of the betrothed and a dead father] are typical motives of the hero-revenger, and to them must be added his desire to purge the society of evil. Vindice, then, is a revenger of blood who believes his motives to be pure and so retains the characteristic heroic stance.<sup>102</sup>

As stated earlier, the novel under investigation borrows aspects of tragedy, and linking it to what has been said about *Revenger's Tragedy* will help establish that claim. The motives of the protagonist are one link, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The grotesque of *Canal Dreams* is linked heavily with a concept of *suffering* that is universally present in

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102 Gibbons, x-xi..

tragedy, as Terry Eagleton states<sup>103</sup>. Eagleton lists a number of true-life tragedies from slavery to the denial of individual's rights, saying "none of these experiences is abstractly exchangeable with others [...] they share no essence, other than the fact of suffering."<sup>104</sup> My intention is to examine this idea and how it works to bring up phenomena in the actual world through fictional narratives. Given my concentration on questions of morality, the emphasis on violence and suffering in my analysis is important. I will examine what kind of an image of good and evil the novel portrays, particularly in connection with violence and death, which play a big role in the novel. I am also going to compare that image with other tales that utilize this tool of tragedy and compare the images, both in the way they depict the morals of the people in the stories and also how they comment on these moral codes through irony and disarrangement of positions of power, for example. I will show how these two are used in the novel as vessels for what violence in tragedy is said to be, how they help achieve the goal of luring the reader to "pierce the veil of false consciousness"<sup>105</sup>, as Terry Eagleton explains one kind of tragedy.<sup>106</sup> I define *Canal Dreams* as the kind of everyday tragedy that Eagleton speaks of, but at the same time it includes allusions to older texts that have a classical, elite hero.

This chapter is the second half of the reading and will concentrate on the moral principles present in the novel. As with the psychological aspects studied in the previous section, the Grotesque is implicated in the construction of the moral principles too. The dichotomies ugly-beautiful and familiar-unknown will be also handled in the reading, where the presented principles will be reflected through them. The reading is divided into three sub-

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103 Eagleton, xvi.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid, 100.

106 The kind of tragedy that involves "normal" people like Willy Loman of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* instead of the elite heroes of traditional tragedies. *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, 84-100.

chapters: the first examines the overall moral atmosphere that the novel exhibits, that is, consequentialism. The second chapter concentrates on the cycle of violence that the novel describes – one act of violence leads to another, then another and so on. The third part of the reading of the morals focuses on the depiction of justice and how it is brought up in the novel.

### 3.1. Utilitarian Violence: Ends Justify Means

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama published his notorious essay on the end of history. In it he proclaims a victory<sup>107</sup> for a “Western *idea*” that has no rivals for its liberalism, both economic and political. He declared an end to history, to ideology in stating “the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”<sup>108</sup> The American colonel of *Canal Dreams* is one mockery of Fukuyama's ideas in that his moral standing is far from the way that Fukuyama saw democracy as being spread through infusion and not war; but at the same time he is a proponent of the “Western idea”:

'Oh yeah, shame about that.' The blond man looked concerned. 'Boy showed promise; he thought he was doing the right thing for America. Can't blame him for that.' The *jefe* shrugged, his shoulders moving like a great wave gathering, falling. 'There are always casualties. That's the way it is.' (CD, 171)

Add to this the line where the American talks about the planes shot down by governments that was quoted earlier (p. 30), and a moral image starts to emerge. The American is pictured as if he had no conscience, possessing only an ability to see what is good for his country. This nationalistic consequentialism drives him forward, coldly disregarding the havoc and suffering left in his wake. The allusion to a wave before his last comment makes it sound like

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107 Fukuyama, 2.

108 Ibid, 3.

a natural phenomenon, as if civilian casualties, or “collateral damage” as the US military has termed it, was something that just happens and the perpetrators can do nothing about it. This is not the only time in the novel where death and natural forces are mentioned in combination.

'Oh!' Mandamus said suddenly, still reading the guidebook. 'Listen: “The lower part of the ramparts, near the law courts, contains vaulted cells in which doomed prisoners were chained at low tide.” Mandamus looked up, eyes bright. 'You see? And then, when the tide came in, the Pacific drowned them... the *moon* drowned them! (CD, 49)

Natural forces become mixed with human actions, the causality of voluntary acts is questioned when an ocean or a celestial body is blamed for the deaths of the convicts. The shooting down of an airplane full of people is just as unavoidable as a hurricane that rips through a city. The thought process exhibited by the American in the novel is somewhat astray from the meaning of “collateral damage”, however. The term revolves around the idea that the damage done is somehow extra, albeit calculated and deemed unavoidable. After going through the list of airplanes shot down by different governments the American laconically states: “These things have to happen sometimes.” (CD, 171) He thus alleges that the actions are unavoidable and uncontrollable by the subject. The object of the action becomes a number in a game, a powerless pawn.

...she had to leave her mother and go to live in Tokyo to attend the Academy. For months, whole seasons at a time. She was twelve. She didn't think it was allowed to desert somebody who was so little, but everybody seemed to think it was for her best [...] Hisako looked at her palms of her hands that night – it was so dark she wasn't sure whether she could see them or not – and thought, *So this is the way the world works, is it?* (CD, 72-73)

The idea of powerlessness is first introduced in the plot when Hisako is a young girl. She is astonished at what to her feels like abandonment, and the lack of choice makes her feel she is not in control. On a visit home later she continues this train of thought:

The pace of Tokyo life, the urge to do as well in exams as any other child but to be a musical prodigy as well, even the regularity of the seasons; cold, mild, hot, stormy, warm; Fuji invisible for weeks then suddenly there, floating on a sea of

cloud, a flurry of cherry blossom lasting hardly longer than a pink snowstorm...all seemed to conspire to sweep her life away from under her. (CD, 75)

Here again nature is depicted as a proponent to take control of Hisako's life. The fixed, rhythmic seasons giving a beat to a life that takes its context from immovable mountains and vanishing foliage, all of which to her symbolize the evanescent nature of life.

The evanescence of life is not an unfamiliar concept for someone whose father died because of an atom bomb:

That was the way it worked, by statistics. It came down to probabilities, a cellular image of the jeopardizing indeterminacies that lay beneath the physical world, and were its absolute – but absolutely uncertain – foundations. So maybe the bomb did kill him eventually, or maybe it didn't. (CD, 257)

Again, as in the previous quote, the paragraph is controlled by two opposites. Absoluteness and absolute uncertainty. The suggestion that the “jeopardizing indeterminacies” lie *beneath* the physical world seems to challenge the philosophical tradition that the metaphysical is transcendent, or above it. Maybe the bomb killed Hisako's father, maybe it did not. That does not matter, as it did kill tens of thousands of people who had no active part in war – they were collateral, means to an end.

Where does one go from violence as “natural” being literally shoved down one's throat, when it looks like the damage caused could easily be avoided? When human action is explained as unavoidable and even inevitable? In Hisako's case the answer comes through trauma. She is mortally afraid of flying, a condition that seems unnatural and is in contrast explained as a condition of the brain, biological. The psychology of the novel discussed in the previous section is apparent here. Hisako's description of the airplane is striking:

She saw the plane outside in the sunlight; massive, secure, anchored-looking. It was linked to the terminal at its nose and tail by the fitted collars of the access jetties, and fuel hoses looped under its wings from tanker trucks. [...] She moved

towards the tunnel. Her legs felt as if somebody else was operating them. The leather bag smelled of animal death. She wished she'd taken the pills the doctor had prescribed. She wished she'd got drunk. (CD, 140)

The plane seems secure to her, but at the same time she is threatened by it. The depiction also brings to mind an insect or animal, with the nose, tail and wings being mentioned. The hoses hanging and collars linking the plane make it sound like a giant moth or a queen bee even, being fed baggage, petrol and people by the workers. The airplane that is made of steel and plastic becomes alive in a grotesque metamorphosis. A plane weighing hundreds of thousands of kilograms is not supposed to fly, and yet she is being ushered into its belly by someone else, another clash of the real and unreal. And finally, with the smell of animal death, a reference to sacrifice hangs in the air. Hisako seems to invert the categories of alive and inanimate objects, which lends a hand to the materialism I talked about earlier.

### **3.2. Accumulation of Brutality: Violence Begets Violence**

Hisako ends up killing all the terrorists who attacked the boats in the Canal. She also kills the American soldier who was supplying the terrorists with the weaponry needed to shoot down a passenger jet. The massacre of the terrorists concludes a novel that is filled with violence, both physical and psychological. The framework for the violence was explained in the previous chapter, where a consequentialist approach to life – killing people is just a means to “noble” ends – was shown to be present in the novel. If a person or an organization thinks thus, it is no wonder that bloodshed occurs. What was also shown to be present in the novel was a protagonist who turns into a killing machine because of violence directed at her. This chapter takes a closer look at the way the novel proposes an idea that violence breeds more violence – especially if the proponents of violence disregard laws to attain their goals.

There are a number of instances in the novel where violence brings about more violence, be it physical or psychological. An act of violence leads to a new one, which in turn causes another one and so on. The cycle of violence gets more and more intense as the plot progresses, starting from innocent teasing in school to more and more physical acts and eventually to bloodshed of insane proportions. Side by side with this steepening vortex of brutality the reader will find a tale of hypocritical rulers, who bring forth a seemingly good motive for the use of violence: if a ruler sees that laws are only for the common people and is thus allowed to break them himself, the subject has no other alternative but to succumb to using violence as well.

The cycle of violence in the novel starts with Hisako being first verbally, then physically abused in school. She takes it in and does not get back at her teasers. She then feels she is being treated unjustly by her mother, when she is sent to school in Tokyo, far away from home. She learns to cope with her isolation, starts to cherish it even. Trying to board an aircraft, a traumatic event, sends her reeling and contemplating her country's violent past, especially the suffering of the victims of the atom bombs. Afterwards, she takes part in a demonstration at an airport construction site, where she kills a policeman:

It was at the airport she killed a man. [...] The body fell to the muddy, trampled grass, while the feet pounded and the cries rang and the sound of a jet landing shattered the air above them. His legs kicked once.

[...]

She stabbed at his throat with her fingers, instantly furious, beyond all reason or normality, the pressure of all her frustration hammering her bones and flesh into his neck. He dropped the baton. His eyes went white. (CD, 173-174)

The laconic way of describing the killing in the first paragraph and in the last two sentences of the second paragraph brings to mind a news report, where the narrator is not the subject of action, but rather an onlooker. Coming from a first person perspective it makes the chapter a chilling read, like the person narrating the events has no feelings whatsoever. The blunt

statement about killing a man, continued (after a narrative jump to preceding time) with a description of the surroundings and (after another jump) a description of the blow that killed the man, then again a brief explanation of the man dying. Yet again the protagonist describes the action as “beyond reason or normality”, linking her mindset to that of the American soldier on the boat later on in the story. The bridging of *Canal Dreams* to *Wasp Factory* and the Gothic that was discussed earlier happens here also, in the description of Hisako’s psyche and in the cold-blooded way of describing murder. The shattering of the air can also be seen as an allusion to Hisako’s world shattering, for she is committed to a mental hospital after the incident.

Hisako’s aggression at this point seems to emanate from different sources: disappointment at not being able to fly, the embarrassment caused by the event, from peer action in the demonstration, but also from willingness to retaliate. She has just visited the memorial places of the victims of the two atom bombs and sensed the futility in them. The demonstration turns ugly, as the police bring out batons and start swinging them liberally, beating the demonstrators. There is a sense of revenge in her actions.

This is the case also in *Revenger's Tragedy*. In the play a young man, Vindice, takes justice into his own hands after his fiancée is murdered by the ruler of the land, the Duke. Vindice plots to become the Duke's trusted man by promising he will (in disguise) make his own sister surrender her virtues to the Duke. The sister refuses, displaying high moral ground, so Vindice has to come up with a new plan for the Duke's death. This he accomplishes with the help of his brother, Hippolito. Vindice gets his revenge, when the tyrant duke is dead and the death of Vindice's fiancée is avenged. The play revolves around the hurt and pain caused to Vindice by the death of his fiancée at the hands of the Duke, less so on the pain and suffering of the other people affected by her death (the father is mentioned off-handedly by the brothers as they murder the Duke). The actions of the brothers are just as

selfish as those of the vain Duke, who murdered Vindice's betrothed after she refused his advances. In *Canal Dreams* the protagonist lays revenge on the policeman at the demonstration, and also on the terrorists and their American leader, in the final scene.

The culmination of violence and revenge in *Canal Dreams* comes at the end of the novel. After the American soldier realizes that Hisako will not be of use to him, he turns a blind eye to what happens to the hostages. The hijackers take his turning away as a sign that they are free to do what they want, and in their utilitarian thinking they dispose of the hindrance:

Nobody talked in the room. Sucre made the two women kneel in front of the semi-circle of low stools, facing the bar like worshippers. Down at the far end of the room, the Koreans, the North Africans and the remaining crewmen had been collected into three giant circles; they too were kneeling, facing outwards, their wrists apparently strapped to those of the men on each side of them. [...] She saw Sucre pretend to inspect the bonds of the men making up the far circle. She saw him take the grenade even though nobody else seemed to. She saw him wander away from the group, towards the second one. The soldier behind her tightened his grip on the restrainer. (CD, 180-181)

The religious image in the first sentence makes the scene seem like sacrifice. The "natural" of the American soldier becomes a divine command in the hands of the rebels. Sucre is God's executioner, his hand of vengeance that strikes down those who stand in the way, who are of no use. The repentant sinners, on their knees and herded together like cattle, know not what is to happen. The carnage is the tipping point in the novel. No longer is it a *Bildungsroman*, nor does the scene or what follows it include signs of the psychological horror of the previous violence. From here on end it is purely carnal, and in the center stands Hisako, whose transformation into a killing machine is almost complete.

The collateral damage of bombing a building or destroying a dam in wartime may somehow be explained as necessary evil, but disposal of human life as in the previous passage is not explicable. The rebels and the American soldier sent to enable their taking over

in Panama, display degrees of the same philosophy: if the goals are good, reaching them can cause damage to anyone. Hisako, as it turns out, thinks alike. Her cello destroyed, lover and friends slaughtered and her own body ravished, she turns to the one thing that is left – revenge. The passages where she kills the first two soldiers – one sent to fetch her for more raping, the other the leader of the rebels – have already been handled. Hisako’s metamorphosis was already mentioned in the passage on page 37, where her senses are compared to those of an animal. There is also another change in her, this one in the way that she thinks. For the rest of the story her mind does not wander to feelings or emotions anymore. This is her thought process after killing the first soldier.

She watched. Thought: *How do I feel?* Cold, she decided. So cold. She kicked him over, pulled the assault rifle free and hoisted it, checking the safety was off. (CD, 211)

Her self-reflection is a robot-like process, as if a machine was going through a check-up of its functions. She *decides* to feel cold, the feeling does not emanate from within. The *Bildungsroman* has turned into an action-packed plot of mayhem, only this time the protagonist’s name is not John Rambo, the main character is not played by John Wayne, the killing machine’s name is Hisako Onoda. Jane Tompkins explores the coldness of the hero of a Western film:

The hero’s body becomes the frozenness of the land by becoming progressively less able to register feeling and reaches the condition of flayed stupor achieved when the body has been driven relentlessly by the will. Victory, in *The Last of the Breed*, means becoming insensate – the freezing, a metaphor for the numbness necessary to withstand circumstances so appalling that to *feel* them would be to wipe out consciousness altogether.<sup>109</sup>

The similarity to Hisako’s situation is indisputable. She has assumed the coldness necessary to withstand what has happened to her, the Cartesian division is complete – she feels nothing,

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109 Tompkins, 214.

the only thing left is the cold logic of the brain.

She studied one of the grenades in the light spilling from the corridor. She even held the little shiny handle down, extracted the pin, inspected it, and then replaced it, letting the handle click back. [...] The Kalashnikov was easier. She'd watched: safety, semi-automatic, automatic. The emplaced magazine was full and two more hung on his belt. The pistol was a Colt... (CD, 211-212)

Hisako, with no training in weapon-handling, becomes a confident and skilled weapon-handler, silent and lethal. Her weapon is a Colt – not the six-shooter of a western, but a modern version of it. The allusion to westerns appears in the props, too. She considers leaving the ship and escaping, but her attention is caught by the splinters left from her cello, and so she gains the spike that brings her poetic justice. Another soldier meets his end:

She was on him while the expression of puzzlement was starting to turn into suspicion and he was reaching for his rifle. [...] He was not one of those who'd raped her and she didn't have the heart to kill him just like that, so she dragged him to the starboard anchor's chain locker... (CD, 215)

Here Hisako seems to display humanity by not being able to kill the soldier in cold blood. The disclaimer “just like that” crushes that feeling, however, when she later disposes of him, after he wakes up and starts to make a racket:

She tapped one finger against her lips as she inspected the controls [on the ship's bridge], then reached out and flicked a switch. The starboard anchor dropped to the lake and splashed. Its chain rattled massively after it, links whipping through the chain locker where the soldier was. [...] If she'd waited till dawn, she thought, she'd have seen him exit through the eye of the anchor port in a red spray, but she shivered at the thought of his blood spreading over the surface of the lake. (CD, 220)

It does not really matter that he did not take part in the rape, the man becomes an annoyance and might even put her in danger by making noise, so he turns into collateral. An innocent (at least if we think that Hisako is only avenging herself being raped) man dies for the sake of a successful revenge on the guilty. Again the cold, machine-like materialism is apparent in the grotesque sentence that one expects to end in her shivering from the thought of killing

someone, when she actually shivers at the thought of seeing his blood on the water. The sentence starts in a humane, familiar manner that almost anyone can relate to, but is twisted into something ugly and strange, a psychopath's thinking.

Hisako finds a crew of rebels playing cards in one of the cabins on the boat:

She lay there, shoulder against the raised metal lip round the skylight, remembering [the last time she had smoked dope], then quietly took a grenade out of its Velcro fastening, clutched the handle, removed the pin, let go the handle, subvocalised 'wun-ih-erephantu, two-ri erephantu, tri erephantu, fori erephantu, favi erephantu', and was still chuckling to herself as she reached up and dropped the grenade through the skylight. (CD, 217-218)

As she gets ready to kill the men, there is a hint of humanity again – she goes back in time, reminiscing a happier time perhaps – elaboration is not necessary, however, as her next move is lifted straight out of a Hollywood action film. The counting to five, using a cadence so as not to do the counting too quickly, and the cold humor attached to it – she counts in a mixture that resembles English, but sounds Japanese. Her silence and dry humor are a reminder of the hero of Westerns as well as more modern action films. Jane Tompkins discusses the lack of language in Western movies:

...Western's hatred of language is not a philosophical matter only; it has codified and sanctioned the way several generations of men have behaved verbally toward women in American society. [...] The Western man's silence functions as a script for behavior; it expresses and authorizes a power relation that reaches into the furthest corners of domestic and social life. The impassivity of male silence suggests the inadequacy of female verbalization, establishes a male superiority and silences the one who would engage in a conversation.<sup>110</sup>

In *Canal Dreams* the role is reversed. Hisako, who has been physically abused (she stays silent through the rape) and disempowered, takes the role of the Western hero, the silent killer that needs not speak nor does she want to – her actions speak louder than any words.

The reversal of roles is most apparent when she disposes of the American

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110 Tompkins, 59.

soldier, Dandridge. He is on one of the other boats stuck in the canal and Hisako has to take a boat to get to him. Her boat is loaded with weapons, ranging from knives to pistols to assault rifles and heavy machine guns and a heat-seeking missile. The plethora of weapons replaces speech:

‘Ha, Ms Onoda.’ The radio cut out, came back. Dandridge wheezed, ‘Dead and kicking, huh? Who the hell taught you to shoot like that?’ She didn’t reply. She checked the machine gun again, put it down and went back to the stern of the boat, restarted the outboard. ‘What’ve you been doing, lady? What you been up to? How come you got a radio?’ (CD, 228)

The American man is the one doing all the talking; the only things Hisako says during the scene are short, abrupt questions or statements in the Western fashion.

‘Ms Onoda; talk to me. You’re screwing things up here. I think I deserve a little explanation. Let’s talk.’ ‘Did I hit you?’ she asked, putting down the assault rifle to talk into the radio. (CD, 229)

He begs her to talk, but to no avail. Her only attention is on getting revenge.

‘[...] Ma’am, you have me quite incredibly impressed. You should be on our side, and I mean that as a compliment, I really do. And that’s what I want to talk to you about. See, there’s things in all this I don’t think you really understand. We are talking about the geopolitical situation here. What I mean is you actually are on our side, if you only knew it. I mean it. You’re a mercantile nation; this is about what matters to you, too. Ah, hell, Ms Onoda, it’s all about trade; yes, *trade*; trade and spheres of influence and ... and *opportunities*; the possibility of influence and power ... you still listening, Ms Onoda?’ (CD, 231)

In desperation (Dandridge is pinned down by Hisako on a pontoon next to a ship) the man assumes the role of the talker, assuming that that is what Hisako wants to do. But in doing this he only completes the reversal of the roles, takes the role of the heroine of Westerns and action films. The politics behind his actions are also revealed – all the killing, the plan to shoot down the jet, the helping of the rebels, all done for power, for *spheres of influence*, a term that brings up the Monroe Doctrine again. Noam Chomsky quotes an American politician from 1927:

The Central American area down to and including the Isthmus of Panama constitutes a legitimate sphere of influence for the United States, if we are to have due regard for our own safety and protection...<sup>111</sup>

Chomsky comments on the Doctrine in general, saying its main object is or was<sup>112</sup> to safeguard American commercial ventures on the continent.<sup>113</sup> The American, in his nationalistic fervor, automatically assumes that Hisako represents Japan, that its people are a unit that think alike and what is best for their country. Little does he know that her history is not that of the Japanese people, and that her people suffered at the hands of the Japanese nor does he know that her father died in Nagasaki. Nothing will persuade her:

She squeezed the trigger. There was a moment of hesitation, and she almost put the missile launcher down, preparing to look at it again. But while she was waiting, just starting to wonder what she'd done wrong this time and what she'd have to do to make the thing work, it happened. The tube shook, hammered her shoulder, kicked against her neck and the side of her head. The noise was not a noise; it was the end of sound, an editing mark that cut her off from the world beyond her suddenly deadened ears. Flame burst around her. It swept, narrowed, funneled, while she was still trying to cope with the image of herself the backwash of light had thrown before her, over the grey plastic of the Gemini's bows and the rippled lake beyond. It met the bloom of flame on the pontoon and burst. The explosion seemed not to start; she thought she must have blinked, and missed the start. It was suddenly there; white, yellow; a jagged splayed froth of incandescence, already falling, collapsing, dimming through orange and red. (CD, 232-233)

The end of Dandridge comes as a surprise, both to the reader and for Hisako. The Rambo-like scene, where the hero uses the most powerful piece of equipment, one that is not meant for what it is used for, the heat-seeking missile. Ironically, the piece of equipment was the one that was supposed to bring Dandridge the power and sphere of influence. Like in Sucre's case, poetic justice is done. His death is beautiful, colorful, long-lasting and it comes with the end of sound that lifts Hisako above the physical, transcends her to divinity, a goddess of

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111 Under-secretary of State Robert Olds in a secret memorandum, quoted in Chomsky, 60.

112 Whether the Doctrine exists in this day and age is disputable: the sphere of influence that guards American business interests seems to have shifted some thousands of kilometers east.

113 Chomsky, 63.

destruction surrounded by fire.

One of the ships stuck in the canal is an oil tanker, and during the night Hisako empties its tanks into Lake Catún. Thus she not only kills the humans on board the ships, but causes damage to the nature around them, embracing her goddess-like stature:

In the past she'd always coped, she'd put up with it, with them. Dreams were dreams and took their cue from what had happened, accessories after the fact. She'd dismissed those she'd been having recently as she'd dismissed those she'd always had. But now they spoke of a lake of blood, and it occurred to her that the brown slick of oil, the great dumped flat platelet she'd spread over the waters, was a kind of blood. Blood of the planet, blood of the human world. The oil-blood greased the world machine; the blood-oil carried energy of the workings of the states and systems. [...] Now, a leech, she'd let it. She was making the dream. She hadn't meant to pretend to such authority. (CD, 262-263)

Her dreams have become her divination, she acts as a blood-letter to the world, letting the bad blood out to the surface, causing a disturbance to the workings of the machine that Dandridge represented. This allusion to a goddess-like existence is continued when she kills the last three soldiers left of the group, who are rowing away in a lifeboat from the tanker:

'Hey!' She screamed, standing on tip-toes. 'Hey, punks! Make my day! Don't push me! That ain't nice, you laughin'!' [...] She put the flare pistol on the deck, stood, stuck her finger through the ring-pull. The soldiers were shouting. She pointed the flare into the sky and pulled the ring. [...] Screams, when they realized. [...] The flare sank, diving, met the oil and disappeared. [...] The fire spread at a fast walk, blossoming outwards from the point of its birth in an ever-widening circle a slow ripple on that thick brown tide. The flames were yellow and orange and red, the smoke dense and black. (CD, 268)

Hisako assumes the role of the one-liner hero in the style of Clint Eastwood.<sup>114</sup> The last of the men die like the first one, in a sacrificial pyre. Only they are made to wait for their deaths, knowing it is coming on a parachute from the flare gun. One of them shoots himself before the flames get to him, the other two perish in the flames. Hisako looks on nonchalantly and

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114 Hisako's line – "Hey punks! Make my day!", is a direct quote from Eastwood's tough-talking film character "Dirty" Harry Callahan of *Dirty Harry* (1971).

starts looking for diving equipment. When she finds it she enters the lake and dives away under the flames that burn on the surface.

### **3.3. Moral Authority: Justice Served?**

Death and violence are prevailing features in Banks's novel, linked heavily with morals and especially the utilitarian viewpoint of permitting violence if the goals are good. This philosophy is visible in the corrupt ruler (the American soldier), in the dissidents (the rebel fighters) and in the protagonist. From Hisako being bullied in school to her killing a policeman to the carnage of first the tourists, then the rebel fighters, the novel revolves around brutality and bloodshed that gets gradually worse and turns from immature teasing to calculated slaughter. First Hisako is, as can be expected of a little girl, very confused by the brutality that her schoolmates subject her to, but her attitude to violence and dissidence changes when she grows older and begins to form a moral consciousness, when she acknowledges the harm being done to her society by the government that is building an airstrip where people do not think it belongs. At this point, however, she is still somewhat aloof and ends up taking part in a demonstration without truly understanding what it really is about. She participates in the demonstration (see p. 26), where her experience is described as feeling like an over-cranked film scene, where everything seems to go in slow motion.

This scene is reminiscent of another, more famous one: in Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) the protagonist shoots someone and the scene is similar in ambiance. A slow-paced introduction to the beach, sand and sun leads to a few moments of rapid, frantic action. But the similarities in the two stories do not end there. Colin Wilson describes Camus' protagonist, Meursault, as someone devoid of feeling, indifferent to the point of being a

nihilist.<sup>115</sup> He also points out Camus' seeming lack of wanting to condemn his protagonist for his lack of morals: “there is no suggestion that the author intends us to condemn Meursault as a futile idler.”<sup>116</sup> But then, at Meursault's sentencing, Wilson sees Camus reveal the irony of his narrative. Meursault is sentenced to be beheaded, not because of killing someone, but because he did not show emotions at his mother's funeral earlier. The evil-doer is punished, not for reasons of doing something bad, but for not showing a human side in himself.<sup>117</sup> Wilson quotes Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of Meursault's awakening that follows his sentencing: “Freedom is terror”. At the moment, Wilson continues paraphrasing Sartre, when a person is limited by something or someone, they feel “most free and alive.”<sup>118</sup> Hisako, the protagonist of *Canal Dreams*, does not know that the policeman she hit dies until she hears about it on the news, after which her mind shuts down, and she is committed to a mental institution. At the time of the demonstration she was still suffering from the trauma of not being able to fly, and the demonstration; the police battering the demonstrators, constricting their lives, made her feel again.

Camus himself defined the absurd extensively in his literary works. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he handles a theme that is also in conjunction with *Canal Dreams* and the action narrative genre is here adjudged to parody – we are all familiar with the term “suicide mission”, which occurs on a steady basis in films in its non-terrorist meaning: to try and accomplish something against all odds with certain death as a result. No martyrdom is involved, as it is likely that the mission will be a failure, the hero of an action film will more likely be seen as only that, heroic and unselfish. Camus says: “Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of

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115 Wilson, 28.

116 Wilson.

117 Ibid, 29.

118 Ibid, 30.

any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation and the uselessness of suffering.”<sup>119</sup> That habit, Camus clarifies, is the broken connection between the universe and human, the alienation and separation from life itself – it is what he calls the absurd.<sup>120</sup> As the protagonist of *Canal Dreams* embarks on her suicide mission the reader prepares for her death – one cellist against a small army of thugs armed to the teeth. Another example of this is given at the beginning of the hijacking of the boats, when a young American college student decides to play the part of the hero:

Orrick must have jumped. Swam – probably underwater as much as possible – to the stern, where the overhang would protect him from the guns. But not from the grenades. (CD, 135)

The young man dies, achieving nothing but death to a number of other hostages, who, encouraged by his example, try to overpower the soldiers. He tries to seek refuge from the sea, but it will not help him, like it does Hisako later on, when she first uses it as a base to kill Dandridge and then, under its cover, swims away from the inferno she caused. The irony here is that after Orrick, the loudmouth American, fails, Hisako single-handedly kills all the soldiers, again pointing to the reversal of gender roles. And, as will be pointed out, the fact that she escapes the deed without punishment.

“If I see a man armed with only a sword attack a group of machine guns, I shall consider his act to be absurd”, Camus says.<sup>121</sup> But, keeping with the fashion of grotesque art, Banks throws in another absurd twist in and keeps the protagonist alive, has her survive the attack and even kill all the terrorists. This would be expected of a main character in a Hollywood film, as they tend to have a happy ending. But they are usually also male, trained in weapon-handling and war. In Camus’s novel *Outsider* there is no such hero, only a man

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119 Camus, 4.

120 Ibid, 5.

121 Ibid, 28.

who feels his friend was treated unjustly by the Arabs, one of whom he then slays in revenge. He is caught, taken to court and sentenced, but does the reader feel for him? A man that does not weep at his mother's death, who is indifferent to defending himself in court and, most importantly, who *kills* a man for *hurting* his friend. The protagonist of Camus' novel suffers no harm himself, only his friend. Hisako, the other side of the coin, is not punished for her part in the death of the policeman in the novel, and she seems to be happy not to tell anyone of what she has done. The selfish, materialist protagonist escapes punishment for the first time.

In *Revenger's Tragedy*, as in Camus' story, the fate of the vigilante is different. Vindice, the revenger of the play, and his brother, Hippolito, are punished for the murder of the Duke and his son by the new duke, Antonio:

HIPPOLITO 'Twas all done for the best my lord.

VINDICE All for your Grace's good. We may be bold To speak of it now: 'twas somewhat wittily carried Though we say it. 'Twas we who murdered him!

ANTONIO You two?

VINDICE None else i' faith my lord. Nay 'twas well managed.

ANTONIO Lay hands upon those villains.

VINDICE How? On us?

ANTONIO Bear 'em to speedy execution.<sup>122</sup>

The perpetrator of vigilante justice gets what he deserves, at least if one thinks no-one is above the law, no matter how unjustly they have been treated before they took justice to their own hands. The situation is of course ironic, as the new ruler is able to do away with committing crimes without punishment. The question is, whether the reader/audience should think it is right for someone to take justice into their own hands where it is blind to the extent that it is also unjust.

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122 Middleton, 108.

The brothers see nothing wrong in their actions, defending the murder by saying the ends were good, so the means do not matter. The new Duke will not hear their defense, and has both executed. The speedy execution completes *Revenger's Tragedy*, a play that, according to Brian Gibbons<sup>123</sup>, consists of “energetic, high-spirited action and brooding, slow-paced scenes of meditation on death, revenge and evil”. This draws us back to the earlier discussion on the similarities between *Canal Dreams* and *The Outsider*. Here we have three texts from different eras that have a similar plot. Someone feels injustice has been done to them, they take justice into their own hands and wreak personal revenge on the wrongdoer(s). The differences in the stories lie in the ending – in two tales the revenger is sentenced to death (*Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Outsider*), whereas the third (*Canal Dreams*) sees her escaping not one, but multiple acts of homicide. It is here that the difference in the moral settings of the stories lies. It is in this difference that we can see Banks's critique of the Reaganite Utilitarian morals that justify violence if the goals are just in the mind of the subject, and of the Hollywood film industry that has spread the idea of vigilante justice from the very beginning. Whereas justice has been blinded by the ruler in *Revenger's Tragedy*, in *Canal Dreams* the ruler has replaced justice with a puppet of its own. What follows is a game of mimicry, where the subject follows the example set by the ruler. Orrick, the young American that claimed to stand for something, dies in vain trying to achieve something, when Hisako, the materialist who does not have an ideology, achieves much without trying. She also gets away with it, unlike Orrick, Meursault or Vindice, all of whom had an ideology to justify their actions. Orrick stood for naïve nationalism, Meursault for his friend and Vindice for his loved one. The final image in Alex Cox's film adaptation (2003) of *Revenger's Tragedy* is a mushroom cloud, with the word revenge repeated in a shrill voice-over, an implication of

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123 Gibbons, xiii.

violence begetting violence in a never-ending spiral. The image is fitting to this reading of *Canal Dreams* as it is from a mushroom cloud that the hardships of the protagonist's life began.

#### 4. Affectivity in the Novel

As stated in the beginning of the thesis, the underlying idea is that literature is here seen as not just entertainment, I argue it possesses attributes outside or above the text that is on the paper. It is possible to read *Canal Dreams* as Roz Kaveney has, as a story that copies Hollywood action films and so renders itself insignificant to the critic. However, by doing what Kaveney has, the reader shuts out the structural, psychological and philosophical aspects of the novel that have been pointed out in my reading. In this chapter I will point to the ways in which two differing readings of literature may result in the text being dismissed as inconsequential or the same text being affective. I will also explain how my reading of *Canal Dreams* opens the text up for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “reparative critical practices”<sup>124</sup>, or ways of piecing together the puzzle that are the phenomena around the reader, with the text as a sort of decoding device that reveals to the reader a new perspective on the phenomena, a revelation that helps the reader rid themselves from the “determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*”.<sup>125</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick places reparative reading opposite a paranoid one, which does just this, denying surprise by claiming to be able to expect *everything*. This perspective I will call a materialistic reading, and opposing it I will place Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading, which calls for the knowledge gained by the reader when they dismiss that disapproval and leave themselves open to both horror and surprise. The novel *is* much more than the words on paper that constitute the physical book, and it generates something new, something that a straight-forward materialistic reading misses.

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124 Kosofsky Sedgwick, 128, her italics.

125 Ibid, 146, her italics.

#### 4.1. Materialistic Reading

How does a materialistic/paranoid reading work? The reader does not interpret the text, instead they take it as gospel or as an image of the world that is a figment of imagination. What would this mean to *Canal Dreams*? It is reduced to a fiction, a folly of the author's mind. The American soldier thus stands for nothing, he is not a metaphor for the US government, his actions not an allusion to its foreign policies. The violence in the novel does not comment on the "ends justify means" thinking that has been the justification for numerous heinous acts by governments around the globe. According to the materialist there is nothing surprising or horrifying about the novel, which in fact does the opposite of causing fear by imitating the plots of Hollywood action films that imitate each other. The action films paint a simple picture of the world, things are black and white, good or bad, with the latter deserving a punishment. The punishing of evil gives pleasure to both the action hero and the reader, who seeks pleasure in the Freudian vein, avoiding pain although it is present on the screen or on the pages of a novel.

The materialism of the plots and characters of the Hollywood action film genre prompts the reader/viewer to disregard the thought behind the action – they are expected to separate the corporeal from the transcendental like the heroes of Western films<sup>126</sup> that gave birth to the action film genre. What needs to be known is read in the text or seen on the screen, not in between lines or in the reader's mind as prior knowledge of the world. What one needs to know according to the mentality possessed by the makers of westerns and rambos is that violence exists and it goes to those that deserve it. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states: "...increasingly, an ethos where forms of violence that are hypervisible from the start

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126 Tompkins, 48.

may be offered as an exemplary spectacle rather than remain to be unveiled as a scandalous secret.”<sup>127</sup> She refers to the real life events of government abuse of power in Argentina and mass rape in Bosnia as instances of “violence that was *from the beginning* exemplary and spectacular, pointedly addressed, meant to serve as a public warning or terror to members of a particular community”.<sup>128</sup> The film industry, in its zeal to mimic the foreign policies of rulers, makes violence a spectacle of blood and explosions, leaves no doubt as to who is right or, as William Warner puts it, offers “a victorious helicopter ride home to base camp [...where...] everything depends on the mobility of the hero, his control of his own visibility, and his ability to destroy anything that stands in his way.”<sup>129</sup>

A materialistic reading of *Canal Dreams* would not look at the moral aspects of the story. It would perhaps concentrate on the idea of Hisako as an empowered woman, one that picks up a rifle or a grenade and without proper training and kills a small army of men without much hesitation. The novel becomes a copy of the Hollywood blockbuster action film, its only meaning is to entertain and generate money. The history on display in the novel would not matter either. What has been written before does not matter to the materialist. The fact that government actions have been criticized in literature for centuries is of no consequence – the meaning of art is to liberate the reader from the banality of everyday life, not to bring it in front of our eyes, magnified, to evoke emotions that need to be handled or controlled somehow. What matters is the *entertainment value* of the text, and the materialist can not put a price on emotions. How many deaths does the novel or film have, the materialist asks. The actualities of the novel do matter to the materialist either, they turn away from that which reminds them of real life. Hisako becomes a Lara Croft, her actions do not need any justification or thought in the reader's mind. To the materialist a just murder exists – and ends

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127 Kosofsky Sedgwick, 140.

128 Ibid. Her italics.

129 Warner, 682.

sometimes justify the means in that even.

#### 4.2. Reparative Reading and a Compassionate Pedagogy

The reparative reader sees the world through the text, drawing parallels between the narrative and the phenomena in the actual world, claiming the narrative explains or elaborates on the surrounding phenomena somehow. This thesis makes that claim – the novel achieves this explanatory goal by juxtaposing familiar structures, principles and ideas with unfamiliar ones, and in so doing creates a surprise, a horrifying element that affects the reader's emotions. It does it through language that communicates through a similar dichotomy of good and bad, ugly and beautiful. It also laughs at the action film plots that have been raised on a pedestal by a marketing machinery whose job is to entertain and, to some extent, raise nationalistic feeling. This laughter is the regenerative laughter of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains the reparative position: “...to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new...”<sup>130</sup> and continues to assert that “...the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates.”<sup>131</sup> As was pointed out in the discussion on post-modern writing, the fragments are evident in Banks's writing. The novel does not underline the positions it takes, it places them in a grotesque web that pushes the reader's emotions with images of horror and confusion and makes the reader find the positions instead. Martha C. Nussbaum discusses revenge and violence in the same vein: “...compassion cuts through the

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130 Kosofsky Sedgwick, 146.

131 Ibid.

dehumanizing strategies that are frequently enlisted in the service of cruelty of many kinds. It thus qualifies the motive to take revenge and forges an alliance among all human beings.”<sup>132</sup> Nussbaum's extensive analysis<sup>133</sup> of the dispute between philosophers that support compassion and those that side with reason in the making of moral judgments also lends a hand to this reading of *Canal Dreams*. She has this to say about compassion in conjunction with literature:

The standard occasions for compassion, throughout the literary and philosophical tradition – and presumably in the popular thought on which the tradition draws – involve losses of truly basic goods, such as life, loved ones, freedom, nourishment, mobility, bodily integrity, citizenship, shelter. Compassion seems to be, as standardly experienced, a reasonably reliable guide to the presence of real value.<sup>134</sup>

Sedgwick's and Nussbaum's theories coincide with what Allan Lloyd Smith (who refers to Sedgwick) has said about Iain Banks and the Gothic. The “fragments and part-objects” can be placed side by side with Lloyd Smith's “pastiche and photographic simulacrum”, all of which provoke a response in the reader. That response is one of horror infused with ambiguity that is the trademark of the Grotesque as described by Wolfgang Kayser. The analysis of *Canal Dreams* in the previous chapters pointed out several points about the novel that the reader can

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132 Nussbaum, 395.

133 The three classic objections to compassion are 1) that it treats people as victims, thus taking away their dignity and it also leads to softheartedness, 2) that its scope is too narrow, a person making moral judgments based on compassion can only concentrate on those nearest them, because it is impossible to educate people to use an appropriate theory of concern on every instance where compassion is needed and 3) that while succumbing to compassion in the face of cruelty that targets others, a person also lets in negative feelings that will surface if the sufferer is the self.

Nussbaum strikes the objections down, stating that 1) in no way does compassion shut out a victim's humanity in the compassionate person's mind, the objection is too blunt, 2) it is possible to create an ethical guide that incorporates both compassion and ethical code and distribute the code to society with the help of institutions designed for it and 3) yes, anger and revenge are sometimes appropriate responses to wrongdoing, that focus should be concentrated on the instances where this is not the case, where they are out of place.

Nussbaum, 356-394.

134 Nussbaum, 374.

organize to bring about new knowledge, and the dichotomy familiar/unfamiliar creates an atmosphere of suspense and horror, an unknown that breaks the illusion of simplicity that a materialistic reading would suggest. The protagonist's tragic experience becomes the reader's; her emotions, thoughts and decisions are judged by the reader in a sort of simulation of what psychologist Daniel Goleman has labeled “emotional intelligence”, the ability to understand and consider the emotions of others and also to control one's own urges.<sup>135</sup> The reparative reader also makes a Humean rejection<sup>136</sup> of the consequentialist viewpoint that the novel proposes lies at the foot of the cynical<sup>137</sup> American imperialism that Colonel Dandridge stands for, seeing it as criticism of that philosophy, not as solicitation of it. The rejection allows the reader to pierce the veil of false consciousness, after which they can hang up another, woven from the materials of their own previous and newly acquired knowledges.

A development of the kind of ethical code that Martha Nussbaum discusses, together with a mode of reading that allows for negative emotions to surface and be handled is called for. Being purged of negative thoughts with the help of art is not ideal, but an understanding of the emotions would help in regeneration of society. The pity that cathartic reading of art calls for should be replaced with compassion, which is a much more productive emotion, one that helps to understand the target instead of feeling sorry for them. Understanding of one's own emotions should also be promoted in the mode, as it is paramount to understanding the feelings of others. Understanding the feelings of others leads

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135 Goleman, xii.

136 According to Tom L. Beauchamp Hume stands for utility as foundation of justice, but rejects “grossly immoral beliefs about torture, genocide, and slavery that are accompanied by correct judgements of fact” as unreasonable. Beauchamp. 47.

137 Cynical in the ideological sense, where, as Slavoj Žižek paraphrases Peter Sloterdijk in an update of the Marxist notion of “false consciousness”, the “cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask.” The novel's stand could be described as Sloterdijk's cynicism, which, according to Žižek, refuses the official cynicism “by means of irony and sarcasm.” Žižek, 318

to understanding others, which leads away from stereotyping and anticipation and to greater understanding.

## 5. Discussion

The two-fold story of Hisako Onoda that I have studied in this thesis handles numerous issues of psychology and morals that place the reader in a situation where they, if so inclined, are made to think about the world around them from a strange perspective. The perspective is created by the use of the Grotesque, which places familiar and unfamiliar elements side by side to nudge the reader towards that perspective. This confuses the reader and creates the affectivity of the novel through the reader's difficulty to define the emotion raised by the events and views in the novel. The novel laughs at institutions such as Hollywood and the US military by parodying them, while at the same time it has elements of a classical tragedy, where the protagonist faces hardship only to come out on the other side, vindicated. The most important aspect of the novel to this thesis is morals, however. The novel establishes numerous questions about what is right or what is wrong and puts the reader in a position where they are confronted by these questions. Where one reader sees the novel as an adaptation of a dozen Hollywood action films, it is possible to read it through compassion that creates a meaning for the work by accentuating its social significance.

To what extent they can feel the suffering in the novel depends on the reader's ability to empathize when they are affected by what they read. The allusions to needless killings of civilians in a passenger jet may for one reader mean much more than to another. Emotional intelligence is not a clear-cut model, and therefore it is hard to draw a line from the object of allusion to the emotion it may cause in an individual reader. As Martha Nussbaum states: "The emotions are in this sense localized: they take their stand in my own life [...]" Even when they are concerned with events that take place at a distance, or events in the past, that is, I think, because the person has managed to invest those events with a certain

importance in her own scheme of ends and goals.”<sup>138</sup> An astute implied reader is able to connect the events in the novel with phenomena or ideas that exist in their own life, even without knowing what the definition of grotesque is or what consequentialism stands for.

It should be noted here that Nussbaum's rebuttal of the third Stoic opposition (see footnote 131) to compassion raises a question about my reading of *Canal Dreams*. Nussbaum states that it is sometimes appropriate to feel anger and even seek vengeance against those that hurt you or those near you. If this be the case, we could argue that rape and murder are good enough reasons (both on Nussbaum's list of real values) to do what Hisako does, and she is justified and right in her actions. To this Nussbaum's answer is law. A civilized person takes these matters to court and does not act in vengeance personally, but rather lets a court do it for them. She also states that “As an attentive spectator of tragedies and reader of novels, the pro-compassion person will have recognized that private revenge is an especially unsatisfactory, costly way to effect the punishment of offenders...”<sup>139</sup> Which of course brings up Hisako's situation and the moral dilemma facing the compassionate reader. It is hard to imagine that in her predicament anyone could think that they possess the capacity or even a chance of bringing the perpetrators of the rape and murder to justice. The situation is not one that one would expect to face in life, but rape in other circumstances is not a rarity, and the deed remains the same even though the setting is extraordinary.

Another note of interest may be put forward here, with regards to the Grotesque and Gothic nature of the novel. I return to Peter Brooks, who deliberates on the importance of language in *Frankenstein*: “...language presents itself as both the tool he needs to enter into relation with others, and a model of relation itself (sic): it implies [...] that 'chain of existence

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138 Nussbaum, 31.

139 Ibid, 396.

and events' from which he feels himself excluded.”<sup>140</sup> I continue on the idea of reversal of roles that was discussed in connection with Western films and also was mentioned earlier in connection with *Frankenstein*. Hisako Onoda is at the same time the opposite of both the silent Western hero and the eloquent monster – taking away the empowered position of Colonel Dandridge by making him do the talking in a reversal of gender roles and also takes the opposite seat to Frankenstein and excludes herself from existence and events. This role reversal is a grotesque one, and the use, or lack thereof, of language would be an interesting topic of research.

Further study aside, the one at hand set out to research a number of things. Whether *Canal Dreams* can be described as leaning on traditions of tragedy is in my opinion clear. The novel does not call for pity to be felt for the protagonist, however. It shows that the protagonist's fall is partly her own fault, which removes pity as the feeling the reader should feel. Someone who takes the life of another and does not take responsibility, as Hisako does to the policeman at the riot, should not be pitied. The reader may seek for causal relations in the events that lead to the killing and decide whether compassion or disgust is an appropriate emotion. The grotesque elements in the novel make this decision hard by confusing the reader, which prolongs the thought process and maybe lead to the reader finding similarities in the real world. This connecting of literature and actuality is the goal of the Lukácian notion of literature that I mention in the introduction.

The novel draws ideas from traditional tragedies, uses them in the sense that they have been throughout millennia and establishes itself in the genre. Whereas the novel may not be as clear-cut case of Gothicism as some of Banks's other novels, it does hint at this in the suspense and horror that is built up, not only through the way the protagonist changes and becomes an emotionless, animal-like killer, but also via the placing of the novel at the

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140 Brooks, 86.

borders of the globe, at sea and in the metaphorical state of being in a canal, which can be read as a state in between, like a limbo. Absurd is evoked in the novel by the protagonist's thoughts of the surreality of the world, her pondering of the mechanisms of power that structure her life and, at times, take it over completely. The power mechanisms apparent in the novel are the Japanese and US governments, the film industry (through evocation of a Hollywood action film plot) among others, and the novel proposes a disempowerment of them through bakhtinian laughter of carnival. Just before the people on the boats are taken hostage the passengers and crew even set up a sort of carnival, wining and dining each other in an egalitarian manner, where no-one is above another. This carnival is then crushed by the hostage-taking, a hint at the struggle of the commoner in face of the power mechanisms. From her mother sending her away to school to the atom bomb that killed her father among tens of thousands to being sucked into a struggle for power in an unfamiliar land the absurd is always present as a feeling. At times the feeling turns into horror, which links the novel with the Gothic. The rape of Hisako is one instance where horror is present, her unnatural, machine-like existence that results from it another. The language, images and events of the novel create an absurd, horrifying atmosphere that pushes the reader's tolerance and ability to handle their emotions.

The novel works in the realm of grotesque art, creating reversals and dichotomies of roles and philosophies that help create the feeling of horror and suspense. By doing so it appeals to the feelings of the reader, who must decide whether the moral positions taken by the characters in the novel are justifiable or not. A compassionate reader works to understand these appraisals instead of judging the novel without thinking about what lies behind and in between the lines, bringing their own previous experiences and knowledge into the reading and learning from it. This enabling of a new perspective is the most important aspect of the novel, when it forces the reader to think and reflect on the phenomena and

principles that are apparent in the world outside literature. All the other things, the use of tragic form, the grotesqueness or Gothic imagery or appeal to emotions work to achieve this goal, which in turn enables the reader to take action based on the newly acquired position. Someone reading *Canal Dreams* could, for example, see the actions of the US military taken in Iraq and Afghanistan as being ethically questionable, as they lead to suffering on the part of innocent civilians and even more violence, because the surviving sufferers may turn to revenge in response to it.

The greatest suffering that *Canal Dreams* points to is the trauma suffered by the Japanese people in August of 1945. Two atom bombs killed tens of thousands of people and left a trauma that scarred the country for decades. The idea of a national trauma is something that I chose not to discuss in my thesis, as I see that nationality and traits gained from it are given little weight to in the novel. Hisako Onoda is portrayed as someone that gives little significance to matters of national traditions, she even feels empowered by her ability to speak English with no accent and her pride at the ability to play a *gaijin* instrument is another sign of this. Introducing a nationalist angle to the thesis would also call for a look at the moral image from the point of view of a nationality, in this case from a Japanese perspective. I felt this would make the reading too difficult and it could prove pointless even. The world gets smaller and smaller as information about traditions and other group signifiers travels faster, which makes a nationalist viewpoint debatable. The postmodern Gothic of *Canal Dreams* refuses a nationality with the protagonist's individualism that stands in opposition to the conservative stagnation of the American colonialist. At the same time the novel raises a question about the extreme individualism that the protagonist represents, asking whether it is just another form of moral relativism that leads to unilateral decisions in its rejection of socially agreed norms.

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