

CHAPTER 4

WORLD'S FAIR: A NEVER SERIOUS, NEVER JOLLY WORLD

As a collection of memories, *World's Fair* (1986) appears to be less artistically experimental than Doctorow's other novels. Initially, *World's Fair* creates the impression that it is a collection of diverse autobiographical recounts. The novel is filled with apparently normal childhood memories and one wonders what the justification of the reconstruction of the "seminal events" (Weber, 1985:78) of Edgar Altschuler's past may be. Towers shares this impression:

There is nothing remarkable about many of the events in *World's Fair*: the grandmother's death, a Sunday visit to the paternal grandparents, a Seder celebrated at rich Aunt France's house, a near mugging at the hands of anti-Semitic toughs from the East Bronx, a Tom Sawyer-like romance with a child named Meg. The material is familiar from a dozen novels, from books on the Depression era, and from memoirs of growing up Jewish in New York. But to it Doctorow brings so much observed period detail that a reader who has lived through the Thirties will experience repeated tremors, if not shocks, of recognition (1985:23).

Harter and Thompson observe that the novel is not only a composition of a fictional character's early life, but that it consists of the author's memories of his own childhood:

Enough is known about the novelist's life from sources, including his own interviews, to recognize that the line between the novel's material and his own past experience is very difficult to distinguish ... The book, in fact, appears on the surface to be virtually a memoir recounted by a narrator with Doctorow's own first name, birth date, and biographical facts (1990:107).

And Lewis's impression is that

[t]his narrative reads like an autobiographical memoir, and although Doctorow reveals fairly late in the novel that the 'I' is Edgar Altschuler, not Edgar Doctorow, the deliberate withholding of the narrator's name for so long helps to blur the distinction between fictional and real selves, between imagination and reality (1986:101).

Weber quotes Doctorow explaining that his novel is not simply an ordinary autobiography:

'A child's job is to perceive, that's his business. So the novel is the sentimental education of a kid, a *Bildungsroman*, if you will, that simply stops at the age of 10. And I had material at hand. I grew up in the Bronx. It is true that I have an older brother Donald, a mother named Rose. We actual Doctorows, including my late father, lived on Eastburn Avenue ... These are all true. But the book is an invention. It's the illusion of a memoir' (1985:78).

The representation of the memories does not have the mere purpose of bringing about nostalgia, but has literary value. Ultimately there is no question that *World's Fair* is as much a work of art as Joyce's *A Portrait*. Treadwell draws this comparison:

Both *World's Fair* and Joyce's *Portrait* have as their subject the gradual extension of an individual consciousness from pure self-absorption, outward through an awareness of the reality of other people and relationships, to a sense of the complexity of the world and the place of the self in it; both novels begin with infantile bed-wetting and end with their narrator's determination to embrace the multiform experiences of life and, by implication at least, to turn them into art (1986:163).

The artistic character of the work is particularly recognizable in its construction of events. The novel is different from Doctorow's other novels in that it does not include a singular seminal event which is comparable to the arrival of the Bad Man of Bodie in *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960); the arrival of the giants in New York harbour in *Big as Life* (1964); the execution of the Isaacsons in *The Book of Daniel* (1971); the vandalization of Coalhouse Walker's car in *Ragtime* (1975) or when Joe first sees the girl in the train car in *Loon Lake* (1980). The novel has a different kind of logic for which Doctorow himself offers an explanation:

'So what I wanted to do was write something with narrative advance that did not depend on plot, that is to say, that seemed to be life, not a story. To break down the distinction between formal fiction and the actual, palpable sense of life as it is lived, the way time passes, the way things are chronically dramatic without ever coming to crisis. And that is the strongest impulse in 20th-century literature, to assault fiction, assault the forms, destroy it so it can rise again' (Weber, 1985:78).

Doctorow re-creates real life by depicting a continuous subversion of unpleasant, potentially harmful or disastrous events that are in turn followed by other disasters and/or potential catastrophes. The revocation of "malevolent" events does not necessarily entail a direct reversal of what goes wrong, but positive juxtapositions follow negative events.

The events can be divided into minor, major and potential disasters. A global analysis of the novel makes one aware that the disasters start out to be small, harmless and not serious. The mature narrator's presence is also discernible because of this organization. The first "disaster" is the incident of the child's experience wetting his bed. It is indeed a real disaster to the child. However, it is considered a minor unfavourable event from a mature person's point view.

An event that has the potential to be a serious disaster then follows these small disasters. Subsequently, two events follow, one of which is the Second World War. This forms the height of the seriousness of the (re)presented disasters. The progression of events that

becomes increasingly devastating steadily turns around and the disasters become less serious. The cycle that Doctorow presents here is one that implies that all disasters are not always harmful to the same extent and that the world is marked by a constant return of "bad", but also "good" events.

The main questions which this chapter will address are: What is the nature of the events in *World's Fair* and what is their relation to context and causality?

This chapter will use M.M. Bakhtin's *Literatur und Karneval: Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur* [Literature and Carnival: Regarding the Theory of the Novel and the Culture of Laughter] as a theoretical basis. Of specific interest here is Bakhtin's discussion of the nature and characteristics of carnival. The sections "Wolfgang Kayser's Theorie des Grotesken" [Wolfgang Kayser's theory regarding the grotesque], "Grundzüge der Lachkultur" [Basic features of the culture of laughter], "Der Karneval und die Karnevalisierung der Literatur" [Carnival and the carnivalization of literature] and "Karnevalistisches bei Dostojewski" [Carnival related matters in Dostoyevski] are especially useful to serve as a basis from which to interpret *World's Fair*.

In Bakhtin's criticism of Kayser's theory of the grotesque (which is supposed to describe the nature of the carnival in its totality), Bakhtin points out that Kayser only takes the modernist grotesque into account. When Kayser looks at the romantic grotesque, he only does so through the prism of the modernist grotesque (Bakhtin, 1985:24-25). According to Bakhtin, Kayser's theory is not applicable to the development of the grotesque prior to Romanticism, i.e., the grotesque of classical antiquity as well as the grotesque of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (1985:25).

It is important not to view *World's Fair* against the background of the development of carnival as a whole. Coincidentally, *World's Fair* bears more resemblances with the carnival of the Middle Ages and Renaissance than that of other ages such as those that Kayser describes.

One should be aware that carnival tradition is rich and diverse and that Doctorow's novel may not always be comparable to all forms or aspects of the carnival. This is supported by McHale who states that "postmodernist representations of carnival often take the form of

some reduced or residual version of carnival, rather than the full-fledged popular carnival such as Bakhtin describes" (1993:174).

If the principles contained in a work like *Literatur und Karneval* are used to read and interpret a novel, one may logically conclude that the novel lies within the genre of carnival and may be comparable to the work of an author like François Rabelais. However, it is not intended here to give any direct comparisons.

The discussion in this chapter will centre primarily on one aspect of the carnival, namely the fact that *World's Fair* repeatedly exhibits the carnivalesque trait of a metaphorical rebirth or "restoration", or "repair". Bakhtin says in his introduction to *Rabelais and His World* that the carnival has a universal spirit: "It is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (1984:7). The essence of the carnival as Bakhtin presents it seems to be just this:

Die Menschen des Mittelalters hatten an zwei Leben gleichmäßig teil: am offiziellen Leben und am Karnevalsleben. Ihre Existenz war von zwei Weltaspekten bestimmt: vom Aspekt der Frömmigkeit und des Ernstes und vom Aspekt des Lachens (Bakhtin, 1985:41)

[The people of the Middle Ages participated equally in two lives: the official life and the carnival. Their existence was determined by two aspects of the world: by the aspect of the piety of seriousness and by the aspect of laughter.]

People yearned to escape the vices of seriousness. There was a need to "restore" or "repair" their lives. The effect which the World's Fair has on Edgar is a pleasurable preoccupation. At one stage he forgets everything but the fair. "Escape" is perhaps a word that does not fully communicate the meaning of the "repair" offered by the carnival, but it is certainly characteristic of the carnival experience. It is the experience of liberation from the suffering of sober and serious life. Existence becomes endurable again by placing the official world in relativized perspective. Bakhtin explains:

Der Ernst knechtete und schreckte, log und heuchelte, geizte und fastete. Auf dem Festplatz, am feiertäglichen Tisch wurde der ernsthafte Ton wie eine Maske abgelegt und es begann eine andere Wahrheit zu tönen: lachend, närrisch, unziemlich, fluchend, parodierend, travestierend. Furcht und Lüge zerstreuten sich vor dem Triumph des Materiell-Leiblichen und des Festtäglichen (1985:39).

[Seriousness reduced people to servitude, scared them. It lied, it was hypocritical, it was stingy and it fasted. It was possible on the fairgrounds to put the serious tone down on the holiday table and another truth began to sound: laughing, crazy, unseemly, swearing, parodying, travestyng. Fear and the lie are dispelled due to the triumph of the material-physical and that of the festive.]

However, Doctorow's novel does not represent carnival as a conscious decision to be jolly as a result or a ritual because of preceding seriousness. The return to "laughter" is in *World's Fair* also not always a "reparation" of the same "seriousness". For example, for Edgar the amelioration of the Second World War is not in the ending of war, but in another form: that of an increasing awareness of the safety which family life provides.

One can only see the connection between carnival and causality as an intersection of independent causative processes. The cyclical return to laughter and seriousness is a universal, uncontrollable condition.

By focusing the reader's attention on events that are either disastrous or potentially disastrous followed by "ameliorating" incidents, viz. through the notion of rebirth, Doctorow puts forward the carnivalesque elements in the novel. For example, when Edgar's grandmother dies, one finds a carnival death, death inverted to become youthful:

She lay white and slender; I could not see her face, but her body, the white female whiteness of it, it was dazzling to me, not at all wrinkled and not bent but straight ... I wondered if it was a thing about death that made grandmas into girls (WF, 97).

Another important aspect to consider is the appearance of the fairs and fair-like places in the novel. The 1939 New York World's Fair has a central position in the novel. There are references to an animal exhibition, a circus and Rockaway beach as a kind of fair. McHale makes a useful comment in this regard when he says that: "Representations of circuses, fairs, sideshows, and amusement parks often function as residual indicators of the carnival context in postmodernist fiction" (1993:174).

Ultimately, the concept of a fair should be seen as a metaphor for the world. The truth of the carnival is therefore ironically that it is, and at the same time is not, an alternative life. The carnival is imbedded in the real world as the real world is imbedded in the carnival. The world is therefore like a fair. It is a carnival. It is, however, also serious "official life". Here one finds an implied carnivalesque concept: the one is in the other. Opposite spheres merge and are recognizable in one another:

Im Tod wird die Geburt sichtbar, in der Geburt der Tod, im Sieg die Niederlage, in der Niederlage der Sieg, in der Erhöhung die Erniedrigung usf. Das karnevalistische Lachen sorgt dafür, das nicht eines dieser Momente des Wechsels sich verabsolutiert, in einseitigem Ernst erstarrt (Bachtin, 1985:66).

[Birth becomes visible in death, death becomes visible in birth, in victory defeat, in defeat victory, in elevation humiliation, et cetera. The carnival laughter ensures that not one of

these moments of change are made absolute, that they do not set in one-sided seriousness.]

World's Fair illustrates that the individual's context is as much a part of "official life" as well as jolliness. Events that are representative of seriousness *and* carnival coincide in one context, i.e., the world. A permanent escape to a different context is an illusion. Misfortune and fortune are presented never to be constant.

An important aspect of causality is presented early in the novel. The first few pages consist of Edgar's mother, Rose, providing a brief autobiography and certain incidental comments that reflect her history and principles. Through Rose's views, it is made clear that the novel also presents the context of the Altschuler family as an extensive "result" overarching many other events: "Only now do I see that our lives could have gone in an entirely different direction" (WF, 29). Edgar's mother is a strict, reliable, hard-working person: "Rose is Apollonian, all order and efficiency and common sense" (Parks, 1991a:99). His father, who owns a radio shop, is the opposite in that he is not only amiable and fun-loving, but also inclined to gamble. In general, Dave is an unreliable family member who is notorious for breaking promises and he might also be a philanderer: "Dave is a free spirit, the Dionysian, the impulsive, dreamy but passionate" (Parks, 1991a:99). Therefore, the lives of the Altschulers could have been different if Dave were more reliable. However, literally anything could have occurred differently in the past and might have affected the Altschulers' future existence. For example, Dave lets the opportunity to become a Hollywood actor slip through his fingers. Edgar's context is a result of such past events and decisions.

The focus of this novel, however, is not on the origin of the represented context. *World's Fair* is ultimately a description or an analysis of a total outcome, i.e., Edgar's context in which he experiences events:

Edgar's chronologically ordered remembrance is the novel's central body, and it is concerned with fundamental things: first and foremost, a child's home and family; second, his initial venturings away from them, off his block, into the world (Weber, 1985:78).

An experience that is representative of Edgar's early home life is when he wets his bed, the first of the "not serious disasters". This memory has three basic components that correspond with Stephen Dedalus's experience in *A Portrait*. The first is a physical sensation; the second is the mother's care and the third is the child's awareness of both his parents. It is already

noticeable here that Joyce's novel is as a *Bildungsroman* significant in relation to *World's Fair*. Edgar and Stephen often experience childhood as a balance between menace and exemption from menace. Compare the following excerpts:

When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had a queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father (P, 3).

Startled awake by the ammoniated mists, I am roused in one instant from glutinous sleep to grieving awareness; I have done it again. My soaked thighs sting ... From her bed she hushes me. "Mama!" She groans, rises, advances on me in her white nightgown. Her strong hands go to work. She strips me, strips the sheets, dumps my pajamas and the sheets, and the rubber sheet under them, in a pile on the floor ... In seconds I am washed, powdered, clean-clothed, and brought to secret smiles in the dark. I ride the young prince, in her arms to their bed, and welcomed between them in the blessed dry warmth between them. My father gives me a companionable pat and falls back to sleep with his hand on my shoulder. Soon they are both asleep. I smell their godlike odors, male, female (WF, 6).

Loon Lake and *The Book of Daniel* differ from *World's Fair* and *A Portrait* with regard to this experience seeing as the families in the latter two novels are depicted as sanctuaries. Joe of Paterson recalls:

... alone at night in the spread of warmth waking to the warm pool of undeniable satisfaction pissed from my infant cock into the flat world of the sheet and only when it turned cold and chafed my thighs did I admit to being awake, mama, oh, mama, the sense of real catastrophe, he wet the bed again -- alone in that, alone for years in all of that (LL, 5).

In *Loon Lake* one finds a complete lack of care, an inversion of the care that Stephen and Edgar experience. The neglect signifies the unnatural order of family life which is a reflection of Joe's unfortunate relationship with his earliest context. Unhealthy relationships with other contexts continue and consequently lead to the final and bleak outcome. In *The Book of Daniel* Susan's bed-wetting refers to her traumatization and the unpleasant experience itself which should be seen as a result of the execution of her parents.

This common childhood experience has a "reconstructive" development for Stephen and Edgar. Stephen's reference to bed-wetting is immediately followed by a cheerful remark, the bed-wetting apparently already forgotten: "She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance" (P, 3). The experience startles Edgar, the smell is disagreeable and it is even abrasive. However, the situation is "repaired" by the efficient care of Rose and the comfort given to Edgar. "Secret smiles" combined with Edgar becoming a "prince" can be related to the triumphant carnival laughter that relativizes seriousness and suffering. The introductory story creates an ambience that suggests general assurance and safety of family life that a child experiences.

As the novel progresses, both Edgar and Stephen become more aware of the menaces which the world presents. The distinction is made between the warmth of family life and events that are associated with the outside world. Harter and Thompson also point out a central feature of *World's Fair* that is reminiscent of *A Portrait*:

Metaphorically speaking, one can see the novel as a series of concentric circles, or as one circle constantly expanding. At the novel's center is the boy's emerging life, particularly his perceptual life. Around this center circles his immediate family and other relatives. Beyond the extended family lies the Bronx and all of New York. Surrounding the city is the economically and politically troubled yet curiously hopeful America of the 1930s. Beyond America, but coextensive with it, looms the larger world, especially the inexorable growth of European fascism (1990:113).

Early in the novel a potential disaster is brought about by the outside world when the Altschulers' dog, Pinky, disappears after an unloading coal truck scares her away. The janitor, Smith, notifies the Altschulers of this and Rose and Edgar start searching for the dog. Pinky is finally found after a car had grazed her. Apart from the Altschulers' fear, the "disaster" would have been if Pinky were either not found or if the car had killed her. Edgar says:

The calamity of her loss panicked my small heart ... 'With luck she'll never come back,' my mother said. This was her way -- to express concern from opposite sides of the crisis ... 'Oh Pinky,' my mother said and got down on her knees and hugged the dog she despised' (WF, 23).

There is a connection between this episode and a later "disaster", still relatively early in the novel. The Altschuler parents come to the conclusion that Edgar is allergic to the dog. Pinky is taken away and put to sleep. This infuriates Donald as he is just as concerned as Rose and Edgar earlier are when the dog disappears:

When Donald got home from school and found no Pinky and heard my report to him, he became enraged. ... 'I hate you!' he said. 'I hate Mom and I hate Dad and I hate Dr. Perlman, but most of all, I hate you because you caused the problem in the first place' (WF, 83).

Rose saved the dog's life on another occasion when it ate rat poison, but she defuses the possibility of the dog's close death. Edgar and his mother prevent another misfortune from happening when they find the dog. However, the love and care involved are relativized by the dog's eventual fate. The dog's death does not affect the further coexistence between the brothers, but it affects Donald's relationship with Edgar at the given point in time. Although the dog's death would appear as a catastrophe for a child, similar to the bed-wetting incident, it can be regarded objectively as a "minor disaster". However, even if Donald's hatred is only temporary, he nevertheless experiences it as an upsetting event.

Edgar is less traumatized by Pinky's death merely because of his allergic reactions. Donald's parents are not traumatized, because they do not want Edgar to suffer. The parents mislead Edgar with the intention not to upset him. They tell him that Pinky will be brought to the "Bide-A-Wee home": "Here Pinky would be cared for and have other dogs for friends" (WF, 82). He understands the logic of Donald's stance, namely that: "[i]mplicit in what my brother said was the truth, I knew, that adults could be loved but never trusted; only Donald could be trusted" (WF, 83). But Edgar has ultimately the disadvantage of being only five years old:

I was not as advanced as my brother. In my anguish it never occurred to me to be angry at my parents. I could perceive their characters, but I could not go on to make moral judgements of them. All my wit was spent in avoiding their critical judgement of me (WF, 84).

The situation is eventually "repaired". Donald's reaction when he finds out that Edgar has won a free visit for him and his family to the World's Fair in an essay competition and the occasion when he finds out about what has happened to Pinky are evidently incongruous. The death of the dog is long-forgotten. One recognizes excitement in Donald's reaction. The bad becomes relativized by the jolly (Bakhtin, 1985:62): "Donald enjoyed very much the way it had happened that the family was finally going. He claimed not to be able to believe it. He hit his forehead with the heel of his hand" (WF, 281). The hatred caused by the dog's fate is nullified. That is exactly what carnival laughter means: "The representatives of the old but generating world are beaten and abused. Therefore, the punishment is transformed into festive laughter" (Bakhtin, 1984:206).

The cycle never stops and any event, either good or bad is ultimately relativized. Despite the intermittent return to order, Edgar is always aware of disaster and he learns that it is part of the way in which the world functions.

The occasion when Edgar saves his friend, Arnold, from drowning during a swimming lesson has more serious implications than the earlier "disasters". It is an event that really has the potential to lead to death.

At the moment when Arnold goes underwater, Edgar's first reaction is to look for the swimming instructor, Mr. Bone. He is an authoritarian caricature like his female colleague Mrs. Fasching. The theme of carnival is also stressed through these characters. Coincidentally, "Fasching" is a German word meaning "carnival" and she is Mr. Bone's

female counterpart, the carnival queen. Compare the following excerpts from *World's Fair, Literatur und Karneval* and *Rabelais and His World*:

He was the school's swimming coach and *lord* of this underworld, a fat bald man with steel-rim spectacles who wore a white cotton undershirt stretched taut over his enormous belly, and white ducks and rubber sandals. He also had a gimpy leg. ... The girls were instructed by his associate, Mrs. Fasching, as skinny as he was fat ... (WF, 149-150; my emphasis -- PvdM).

Im Brauch der Erhöhung und Erniedrigung des Karnevalskönigs finden wir den Kern des karnevalistischen Weltempfindens: das Pathos des Wechsels und der Veränderung, des Todes und der Erneuerung ... Gekrönt wird der Antipode des wirklichen Königs: der Sklave oder der Narr. Es öffnet und erhellt sich die umgestülpte Welt des Karnevals ... Alles wird in den Stand der Relativität versetzt, wird beinahe zum Requisit (aber zum brauchwürdigen Requisit) (Bakhtin, 1985:51).

[We find the centre of the carnivalesque experience of the world in the custom of the elevation and humiliation of the carnival king: the pathos of transition and change, death and renewal ... The exact opposite of the real king gets crowned: the slave or the fool. This expresses and elucidates the carnival world which is a world turned on its head ... Everything is moved to the standing position of relativity, it almost becomes a requirement (but a customary requirement.)]

Debasement and interment are reflected in carnival uncrowning, related to blows and abuse. The king's attributes are turned upside down in the clown; he is king of a world 'turned inside out' (Bakhtin, 1984:370).

The representatives of the official world, Mr. Bone and Mrs. Fasching, are clowns, yet, they are also figures of authority. They do not need to be uncrowned. This is a powerful statement against the "official world". Edgar would still be a reliable narrator even if his depiction of them ridicules them on the grounds of Mr. Bone's failure to help the pupil during the crisis. Edgar says: "I looked for Mr. Bone, but he was down at the end of the line yelling at someone" (WF, 151). His strictness has no bearing as he appears not to watch over the children sufficiently. The instructor "crowns" himself as a ludicrous leader by a display of aggression aimed at another child, but the unfortunate effect is that he almost lets another child drown as a result.

Edgar manages to rescue Arnold: "We looked at each other, too terrified to acknowledge the seriousness of what had happened. You came up, you went down, you took in water like air, and in a few quiet moments you could die" (WF, 151). The potential harm is eliminated and Arnold survives. The conclusion is that this potentially harmful situation is "repaired" as well, yet Edgar's fear is not immediately alleviated.

Immediately after this episode, Edgar describes an incident which is far worse than Arnold's close call in that it is a realized disaster. While at school Edgar witnesses how a woman is fatally hit by a car. His depiction of this episode ends with the following macabre images:

I remember the arm of the dead woman bobbing up and down as she was carried in the stretcher, the hand limp, palm up, as if the dead arm were pointing to the schoolyard, indicating it repeatedly -- so that I should not forget -- as a place of death. For weeks afterward the stain of her blood was visible on the schoolyard ground, a darkening of meaningless shape on the sun-bleached cement (WF, 153).

Edgar becomes aware of the reality of death and experiences of terror continue for a while. He struggles to conquer his fear, but eventually succeeds. This is a trait of the carnival. Bakhtin says: "The acute awareness of victory over fear is an essential element of medieval laughter" (1984:91) and that in the carnival the terrible is transformed into a jolly "bogey" (1985:36). The description of the woman's death and Edgar's awareness of it are followed immediately by a contrasting remark when the new chapter begins: "I found it very pleasurable to rub color comics onto waxed paper" (WF, 154). This discontinuity of the thought pattern emphasizes the fact that the disaster has no lasting or traumatizing effect on Edgar. However, what he has witnessed does upset him and ultimately adds to his life experiences and lasting memories.

Aside from unpleasant events like Edgar's grandmother's mental decline and Edgar being teased by his brother and his friends, the basic structure of the sequence of events form this pattern:

"disaster" : repair : potential disaster : actualized disaster : repair

This structure strongly reminds one of *A Portrait*. Each chapter presents a problem which is subsequently solved at the end of that chapter through the use of an epiphany. A subsequent problem or crisis is then generated in the next chapter.

Following the episode describing the death of the woman, the reader is presented with the innocent images of a boy's activities. This is followed by another disaster and the sequence structure above continues.

The explosion of the *Hindenburg*, another disaster which is more dramatic than the previous one, both fascinates and disturbs Edgar. He brings the fall of the airship into relation with his own existential angst: "In bed, trying to sleep, I imagined my father stumbling and crashing to the ground, and I cried out" (WF, 159). Parks observes that Edgar learns that the world is

not invulnerable and that death has made the world uncertain (1991a:100). This fear and uncertainty are then in carnival fashion once again subverted by a frivolous revelation that he fell himself all the time and he reveals concomitantly: "I had a best friend now, Bertram, who lived a block away on Morris Avenue and took clarinet lessons" (WF, 160). The child-like, enthusiastic tone of the seemingly unnecessary information given, namely that Bertram took clarinet lessons both mitigates the terrible story of the *Hindenburg* as well as communicates that the world is not solely defined by failure, tragedy or cacophony. It is also distinguished by a little boy who takes clarinet lessons with the objectives of having fun and implicitly to play well, i.e., harmoniously.

The disaster that redefines the whole world, the Second World War, also features as such in the novel. However, *World's Fair* succeeds in mitigating the reality of the War without undermining the fact that it is the worst catastrophe of the twentieth century. For the Altschulers the War creates the fear that Donald might be sent away, once America becomes involved. The given context indeed becomes a *world's* "fair" because of the War. But the narrator only represents the focalization of himself, his mother, his brother and his aunt and in doing so reflects on the universe enveloping his life: "Although outwardly his quietest novel, *World's Fair* uses the Bronx, as much as Joyce did Dublin, as a window through which to witness the tremors of a whole society" (Weber, 1985:26).

World's Fair, however, is not primarily concerned with the momentous events of Edgar's larger circle: "... the macrocosm impinges upon, but in no sense displaces, the microcosm" (Harter and Thompson, 1990:116). Lewin summarizes what the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm entails:

Doctorow's subtle way of involving the reader's historical consciousness allows him to expand the scope of what is a type *Bildungsroman* to accommodate his preoccupation with the relationship between the private and the public, the personal and the historical (1986:102).

The public is invariably part of the private. However, by way of private involvement, the novelist mitigates the public or historical reality whilst acknowledging the seriousness of the world-wide genocides which the War caused. This is done (within Edgar's context) by redirecting the focus towards a child's innocence. Edgar feels safe in his parents' house despite the War:

In the evening when he got home, he listened to the fifteen-minute sports broadcast of Stan Lomax, who with great thoroughness rattled off all the minutiae of collegiate sports with heartening references to the New York city colleges and institutions that were

disdained by the other sports news authorities ... Listening with him, I envisioned Gothic campuses of idyllic rusticity, as if sports scores were stories being told. ... There were no books and no lectures in these visions of mine. What was essential to them was that same dusk of winter, that late afternoon of cold hard air and leaves spinning down from the plane trees of the Bronx streets, produced by the clouds of World War Two. I liked in my house circles of lamplight surrounded by rings of darkness that grew in depth the farther out they went. I liked the shelter of a desk lamp, feeling toward it Bomba the Jungle Boy's affection for his campfire in roars of the dark surrounding night (WF, 200).

This section foregrounds the notion that an individual can experience levity and security despite the inevitable presence of "darkness" or disaster in his/her context. *World's Fair* succeeds in acknowledging historical and personal disasters while still presenting the perspective that the world is not merely characterized by either fortune or disaster.

This is clearly illustrated on the occasion when Donald tells his family the gruesome Sigmund Miller story. Although a horrendous tale, this relation might be seen as the first "decrease" in the seriousness of disasters after the introduction of the War in the novel. Miller and his girlfriend made a suicide pact, but he did not have the courage to kill himself after he had killed her. Donald tells the story to the family during supper. Rose disapproves that he tells such a story at the moment immediately after Donald has explained that the reason for the couple's decision was influenced by the girlfriend's pregnancy. Rose feels that the story as a whole is unbecoming for a dinner table conversation. Edgar misinterprets the meaning of Rose's reaction:

I was offended. 'You think I don't know what pregnant means!' I said to her. 'I can assure you, I know exactly what it means!' Then I was doubly offended because everyone laughed, as if I had said something funny (WF, 197).

The humour of the moment is brought about by Edgar's guileless reaction. Edgar is more focused on the sexual aspect of the story than the violent one. The violence is of such a brutal nature that it transcends his understanding. The novel also presents signs of his own sexual awakening, for example, in an episode with his friend, Meg. He also finds his Mother's friend, Mae, attractive. Edgar's reaction is comforting to the family because Edgar's youthful indignation mitigates the harshness of the reality produced by Miller's story. It distracts them in the same way a carnival used to distract people from the squalor of everyday life. The real meaning of the laughter can be deduced from what Bakhtin says:

Das rituelle Lachen richtete sich auf das Höchste. Geschmäht und ausgelacht wurden die Sonne (der höchste Gott), die anderen Götter, die höchste irdische Gewalt. Damit sollen sie gezwungen werden, sich zu erneuern. Alle Formen des rituellen Lachens hingen mit Tod und Aufstehen, mit dem Zeugungsakt, mit den Symbolen der Fruchtbarkeit zusammen. Das rituelle Lachen war eine Reaktion auf Krisen im Leben der Sonne (die

Sonnenwenden), die Krisen im Leben der Gottheit, im Leben der Welt und des Menschen (siehe das Begräbnislachen). Schmähung verschmolz darin mit Freude (1985:53-54).

[Ritual laughter directed itself towards the highest. The sun (the highest god), the other gods, the highest earthly forces were reviled and laughed at. This enforced their renewal. All forms of ritual laughter were related to death and renewal, the act of procreation, the symbols of fertility. Ritual laughter was a reaction to crises in the life of the sun (the solstices), the crises in the life of the divinity, in the life of the world and the human being (see funeral laughter). Diatribe merged in that with happiness.]

Edgar's family does not really laugh at him directly. He may well be the origin of the humour, and the family may tease him by not amending his impression and feeling that he is being mocked. They possibly do not know themselves why they are laughing, reducing their reason to believing that Edgar's response is funny and endearing. Edgar is, however, the catalyst in their reaction against the nature of the universe in which it is possible that such a macabre event such as the Miller story can take place. In laughing they celebrate Edgar and his innocence. In authentic carnival tradition they overcome their fear through laughter.

There are also other rituals that are supposed to counteract harmful forces of the universe that include laughter. A historian may explain the Second World War and a psychologist Miller's actions, but the idea that is present in the novel is that the Bronx family who is not necessarily always analytical or rational, often believes in superstition. Rose, for example, suggests to Edgar that he should avoid certain actions in order not to be the receiver of bad fortune.

Edgar's mother, concerned that her child should not suffer bad fortune, introduces the dangers of the external world to Edgar and links them to moral lessons. Rose tells Edgar about Mrs. Goodman's daughter who will always have to wear braces on her legs. Edgar, the narrator, describes his mother's point of view as follows:

She felt strongly that even little boys bore responsibility for their actions. However they were, so would their fate be decided. All about the air were the childhood diseases -- whooping cough, scarlet fever, and most dreaded of all, infantile paralysis. ... her stories dazzled me. Their purpose was instruction. Their theme was vigilance (WF, 13-14).

Rose informs her son of various precautions with regard to escaping dangers. An irrational notion regarding causality is distinguishable on the occasion when he has to blow out the candles on his birthday cake: "In fact, I had a secret dread of not being able to blow out the candles before they burned down to the icing. That meant death" (WF, 36).

A potential disaster that continues to underplay the seriousness of events, is connected to this irrationality. One of Edgar's self-made superstitions is put to the test. He has a "theory" regarding death and illness: "It was simply that if I thought of it, if I imagined it, it would not

happen to me" (WF, 171). Edgar believes that everything will work out well, provided that such a precaution be taken. When he suffers a ruptured appendix, he ascribes it to his neglect of not having thought about it. Another irrational expectation or superstition which surfaces during the episode describing Edgar's illness is when he dreams that his deceased grandmother visits him. His family interprets this as a sign of his own advancing death. But Edgar recovers and the situation is "repaired".

Physical strength follows physical weakness and the novel also presents a counterpart to this development regarding character. Strength of character follows weakness of character when a group of louts confront Edgar on his way home from the library. He could visit Meg after school: "Living in a neighborhood had made me independent. I ranged now. I did not run right home after school. I could see Meg without even telling anyone" (WF, 232). Edgar receives more freedom after his parents had to move to a smaller residence. He also tells: "With my new freedom I was developing a certain confidence" (WF, 232). The combination of the urge to wander and his new found confidence leads to an unwise decision: "I decided not to return home the way I had come but to walk past the Pechter Bread Company to Park Avenue and go north along the railroad tracks to Tremont. I wanted to see the trains in their wide trench below the street" (WF, 236). Edgar is robbed and belittled in the "territory" of the louts. This episode results in humiliation because Edgar denies that he is a Jew. He is also ashamed of himself because he says that his father is a policeman: "A policeman! It was the weakest of ploys ... It is what four-year olds say to one another" (WF, 238). Edgar is concerned that this might put his father at risk despite the fabrication of his father's identity: "Why had I mentioned my father! He existed now in their minds" (WF, 238).

In this instance, the influence of Edgar's mother leads him to indirectly make the best of a bad situation. Rose wants to distinguish her family from the rest of the neighbourhood: "My mother wanted to move up in the world. She measured what we had and who we were against the fortunes and pretensions of our neighbors" (WF, 14). Even if Rose's disposition may be interpreted as haughty and materialistic, her ultimate aim is to have nothing more than a respectable family life. Edgar is subsequently inspired after this encounter to distinguish himself from the louts. His essay reads as follows:

The typical American Boy is not fearful of Dangers. He should be able to go out into the country and drink raw milk. Likewise, he should traverse the hills and valleys of the city. If he is Jewish he should say so. If he is anything he should say what it is when challenged. He roots for his home team in football and baseball but also plays sports himself. He reads all the time. It's all right for him to like comic books so long as he knows they are junk. Also, radio programs and movies may be enjoyed but not at the

expense of important things. For example he should always hate Hitler. In music he appreciates both swing and symphony. In women he appreciates them all. He does not waste time daydreaming when he is doing his homework. He is kind. He cooperates with his parents. He knows the value of a dollar. He looks death in the face (WF, 244).

The definitive facets of his life are "important things" that differentiate Edgar, his parents and his context from Joe's Paterson "where nothing mattered because it was Paterson where nothing important could happen" (LL, 6). Edgar delineates for himself and the reader what is important. He counteracts his own actions, i.e., being fearful and denying that he is Jewish. Identifying himself with his ideal of what the typical American boy should be, helps him to overcome his fear. For Edgar, the value of this essay lies in self-validation. He distinguishes himself from the louts in every sentence. It is a self-portrait with personal experiences, activities, principles and discernment imbedded. Edgar maintains that the louts are the direct opposite of Americanism or that they forfeit their right to be American seeing that he associates the adjective "American" with integrity.

Edgar merges American nationality with his own Jewish identity and with the ideal of virtuous behaviour. The "bad habit" of enjoying entertainment without much significance (which is typical of American culture with regard to consumerism) is relativized to being in moderation harmless compared to the criminal tendencies of the louts.

The essay introduces the American identity by representing principles like courage, respect for freedom, loyalty, the desire to learn, diligence, enlightenment, kindness, refinement, respectfulness and peace-lovingness. Edgar's overall attitude of intolerance towards misconduct reveals his sense of dignity:

I was not to resume my Saturday trips to the library for some time. But my resolve to enter the World's Fair contest for boys was unshaken. In fact, writing an essay on the Typical American Boy had now the additional appeal of an act of defiance. I, not those miserable louts, would propose the essence of American Boyhood. They were no models for anything. I doubted they could even read. If, by some accident they were to hear of the contest they wouldn't know the first thing about how to go about writing for it. The best they could hope for was to go along the streets and stick someone who had written for the contest and to steal what he had written. Well, it wouldn't be me (WF, 237).

Edgar's unfortunate experience with the louts transforms itself into a fortunate encounter. The carnivalesque juxtaposition of bad followed by good is repeated as he overcomes his fear. He gains perspective with regard to differentiating the louts and his own ideals and abilities. Edgar has, so to speak, the last laugh.

Having "the last laugh" is also distinguishable in an incident in which Edgar is not the person who has final control over a situation. Edgar's mother permits him to go to the World's Fair

with Meg and Norma towards the end of the novel. Faithful to the novel's structure, a noteworthy episode occurs: Rose telephones Norma whilst Edgar is at Norma's house. Edgar's mother looks down on Norma on account of her being a "ten cents per dance girl" and presumes that she might have a suspect past. This attitude serves as a motivation for telling her to take good care of Edgar in an unpleasant manner:

My mother went on for a while and Norma sat down on the sofa and lit a cigarette as she held the phone cradled in her shoulder. She blew smoke and looked at me through the smoke. I was embarrassed about this but didn't know what to say (WF, 249).

It is probable that Rose attempts to intimidate Norma in order to emphasize the responsibility that she has in taking care of Edgar. The unpleasantness emerges from the implication that Norma is considered inferior and not fully trustworthy. Norma's reaction, however, "repairs" Rose's subversion of harmony. She says to Edgar: "'Your mother likes you a lot, Edgar.' I agreed. 'But why would anyone like a monkey face like you?' Norma said, and we all laughed" (WF, 249). From a Bakhtinian point of view laughter asserts "the people" (Norma, Meg and Edgar) against the tyranny of the "god" (Rose). Kayser maintains that laughter is scornful and cynical as found in Bonaventura and Jean Paul. However, Bakhtin's comment that laughter is not bitter, but that it may also be joyful, liberating, reincarnating and creative is appropriate here (1985:30). This is exactly what Norma actuates. She resurrects the happy anticipation that existed before the telephone call which would not have been the case if she were resentful. Norma remains genial and effectively defuses the discomfort of the event. If a miniature carnival had not taken place, Edgar might not have had the opportunity at that time to attend the World's Fair.

This incident demonstrates that the universe can be harmful in terms of looking at Rose, but also lenient, looking at Norma. This is also the case when one considers the roles that superstition and chance play in the novel. Dave takes Donald and Edgar to a baseball game, another pseudo fair. The boys stand outside the stadium without tickets and the game is about to begin. Dave purchases tickets at the last moment which follows another manifestation of Edgar's belief in "irrational causality":

I developed that specific prayerful longing that went with these situations: If we got into the game, I said to myself, I would do my homework every day for a week the minute I got home from school. I would help my mother when she asked. I would go to bed when I was told to (WF, 202).

This reminds one of Edgar's superstitious belief that all that the universe asks, is to think about an illness in exchange for health. Dave obtains three tickets and the carnival is a

success. Edgar says about his father: "He loved this sort of situation, the suspense of getting in just at the last moment" (WF, 204). This approach is similar to and reflects Dave's precarious financial, and as a consequence, existential life style. Obtaining the tickets at the last minute is regarded by Dave and Edgar as an indication that the universe in its mysterious workings is ultimately sympathetic towards them. Fear, according to Bakhtin (1985:26), is the extreme expression of a one-sided and stupid seriousness and liberation is only possible if fear is absent. This is determined by carnival laughter and everything threatening is transformed into the comical (Bakhtin, 1985:36) which one sees in Dave's merriment when he enjoys the success of obtaining the tickets at the last minute:

He'd done it! From one moment to the next he led us from despair to exhilaration through the turnstiles and up the ramp into the bright sunlight of the stadium ... We couldn't believe our good fortune. It was magic! His face was flushed with delight, his eyes widened and he pursed his mouth and puffed his cheeks like a clown (WF, 204).

Of interest here is that the real carnival for Dave is in obtaining the tickets and not in the game itself. His reaction is quite different from that of Edgar and Donald who enjoy the game once the tickets are bought: "My father was more calm. He smoked his cigar and every now and then closed his eyes and turned the face up to the afternoon sun" (WF, 204). Obtaining the tickets is an assurance that things have a way of working out well in the end: "The game meant more now, more than it might have if he had purchased the tickets a week in advance" (WF, 204).

The given context can at any moment produce events characteristic of "official life" and carnival as they coexist in the same context. This may also serve as an explanation for the Altschulers' predilection for superstitions. The Altschulers' logic dictates that rules that have to apply in an irrational universe which produces unexpected events sometimes requires a degree of irrationality themselves. Their beliefs and understanding of how the universe operates is an intense awareness that the universe does respond to one's actions and that there have to be connections between causes and effects.

The title "World's Fair" and the novel's motto taken from William Wordsworth's "The Prelude": "A raree show is here,/ With children gathered round ... " provide a foundation for the novel. The concept of a fair reappears at various stages in the novel. The travelling farm exhibit encamped in the big park, Claremont (WF, 49), the baseball game and the beach at

Rockaway in 1936 (WF, 62) can be regarded as symbolic "fairs" within Edgar's fair-like metropolitan context. Fowler (1992:133-134) says:

A brilliantly described Rockaway Beach in 1936 is not only rendered with intensity, but Doctorow also convinces the reader that the scene really did convey to him a primal sense of nothing less than the world itself: 'I learned the enlightening fear of the planet' (79).

This is where the focus of the novel lies. Edgar says: "You learned the world through its dark signs and its evil devices, such as slingshots, punchboards and scumbags" (WF, 58). This "education" coincides with growing pains that can be regarded as a metaphorical way of how Edgar experiences his context. However, despite upsetting incidences, a central principle in the novel is that neither bad nor good events are lasting. For example, unpleasant events and situations that pass are Edgar's vexation about the fact that his parents lock their bedroom door; that he is excluded when Donald and his friends visit; Grandmother's mental decline; Edgar's parents' unhappy marriage and the loss of his father's radio shop.

World's Fair is less concerned with how such events are causatively linked with one another than in Doctorow's preceding novels. There is no logical progression of events observable due to a singular seminal event comparable to *The Book of Daniel*. The novel represents fragments of a childhood which are not represented as a causative chain reaction. The novel focuses on how Edgar as the central consciousness views diverse events within his context.

Causality, however, can never be absent and appears in *World's Fair* as a collection of memories of events. It is recognizable not only as a collective result of Dave's and Rose's earlier lives, but actively involves Edgar's childhood experiences in forming an individual, coincidentally, an artist like in Joyce's *A Portrait*. The sum of the world's "contents" (including events) form part of an individual. Parks summarizes this notion as follows:

At the end, Edgar and a friend put together several of their precious objects to go into a time capsule made from a cardboard mailing tube and tinfoil. This is a fitting image of the novel -- a time capsule comprised of the human memory. And Edgar remembers well; his prose is stunningly evocative of the sights, sounds, and smells of the Bronx in the 1930s -- the fish markets, the butcher shops, the bakeries, the dairy, the clothing stores, the cafeterias, the streets. Like so many of Doctorow's narrators, Edgar sees clearly and intensely (1991a:95-96).

The events in *World's Fair* vary from mundane to dramatic ones but they are all seminal in the main character's childhood and in terms of causality. They are important because they are formative. This corresponds with Lehmann-Haupt's remark that the novel is the product of a middle-aged narrator who looks back on his childhood with amused amazement at the disasters he survived (1985:C21).

The experience of all the events contributes to a historical presentation of a world. A world defined by neither good fortune nor catastrophe alone. This is confirmed by the World's Fair itself accompanied by the theme of "the World of Tomorrow" which hoped for peace in the year 1939.

CHAPTER 5

THE WATERWORKS: THE UNKNOWN WORLD

The Waterworks (1995) is different from E.L. Doctorow's other novels discussed here -- with the exception of *World's Fair* -- as the major cause of the central event, the disappearance of the main character, Martin Pemberton, is unknown. This disappearance is representative of the mysterious nature of the whole context in which it occurs.

The Book of Daniel depicts heterogeneous coexistence and its concurrent irony because people are often unaware of what occurs within their context(s). *The Waterworks* continues the view that the world in which we live is essentially "unknown". Martin's behaviour is dramatic and mysterious when he finds out that Augustus Pemberton, his father, who is believed by his community and family to be dead is actually alive. McIlvaine, the narrator and the newspaper editor for whom Martin works, attempts not only to decode Martin's disappearance, but also to understand the context in which the disappearance occurs.

The reader may suspect Dr. Sartorius -- who plays indeed a central part in Augustus Pemberton's circumstances -- to be responsible. Dr. Sartorius appears as a kind of science fiction vampire who murders small children, drains their youthful blood in order to magically sustain the lives of old, terminally ill, evil rich men -- of whom Augustus Pemberton is one. These men may be imagined to be pseudo Frankenstein monsters. However, Dr. Sartorius was not promoted as a natural scientist by the New York government in the novel's history, i.e., society could not benefit from his findings. His research was kept only available to corrupt individuals like Augustus Pemberton who decided to trade the inheritance of his wife and son for a secretly prolonged physiological existence. The New York government has an agenda completely different from Dr. Sartorius's motivation. They are interested in Dr. Sartorius for their own benefit, whereas Dr. Sartorius is only interested in science for the sake of science. He does not support his city's government, neither does he attempt to influence the way in which his genius is used. He is completely dispassionate regarding how his findings could benefit society.

Dr. Sartorius is not without guilt, but he is certainly not evil and functions essentially as a catalyst. He does not pose the real threat. Augustus Pemberton, as the beginning of the novel indicates, is the actual villain who partakes in the corruption of the New York government and commences the causative process which harms his family. The mystery surrounding his

“death” and the subsequent disappearance of the Pemberton wealth which leaves Martin’s stepmother and her young son, Noah, without an inheritance involves Martin’s mysterious disappearance as well.

The first aim of this chapter is to describe the effects regarding Augustus Pemberton’s disappearance. The second aim is to differentiate between characters like Martin, McIlvaine and Captain Donne, Sarah and Noah Pemberton, Emily Tisdale, Dr. Grimshaw, Augustus Pemberton, Boss Tweed, Eustace Simmons and, lastly, Dr. Sartorius. A concomitant question is one which McIlvaine’s investigation implies as well, viz. who are the people that are the real source of the changes introduced at the beginning of the novel and what are their motivations? It is important to pose this question as Dr. Sartorius’s role is often misinterpreted. This illustrates that the world is often misinterpreted due to a lack of knowledge of what occurs in it and what people’s motivations entail.

Critics often refer to *The Waterworks* as a detective novel. Among others, Tokarczyk comments that

Doctorow’s new book moves with the pace of a fine detective novel, involving the slow unraveling of a mystery, the ferreting out of evil, and finally the satisfaction of seeing evil destroyed (1996:43) .

and Hutchings suggests that

... the foremost literary precedents for *The Waterworks* are the stories of Arthur Conan Doyle: McIlvaine’s investigation proceeds with Holmes-like logic and tenacity from a phenomenally startling initial incident (the supposedly dead man sighted among the living) and an ensuing ominous complication (the disappearance of the witness and estranged heir) (1995:139).

The novel includes besides these mysterious events the story of a boy who drowned at New York’s reservoir. A bearded man who identifies himself as a doctor collects the corpse and disappears. The novel presents this man as a certain Dr. Sartorius. This is coincidentally also the story of “The Water Works” in Doctorow’s *Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Stories* (1984). The reader therefore meets Dr. Sartorius for the first time in 1984 and only finds out ten years later in the novel who Dr. Sartorius is and why he rushed off the child. It is for “the people of the parapet”, the common citizens of New York in the novel as well as the reader of both the short story and the novel impossible to have a “bird’s eye view” and understand what they witness. However, *The Waterworks* eventually provides the reader with an opportunity to evaluate motivations to make distinctions between the characters.

This event is crucial with regard to the novel's ontological "intention". This "scene" is representative of the world as it is. McIllvaine describes the people who are present when the boy drowns:

Who these people of the parapet were, their names, addresses, the circumstance that brought them together, or if the boy lived or died, or if the blackbeard killed as well as kidnapped, are questions I can't answer (W, 55-56).

The purpose of the mystery is to make the reader part of the ignorant masses. The novel provides a broad perspective only later in the novel and the reader has even then the obligation to define for himself or herself the motivation of each of the characters' actions and their roles with regard to causality.

Sante (1994:12) points out that the waterworks serve as a metaphor for how a society is indirectly connected with the ominous activities that are organized by people who plan, and in many ways, determine their own fate as well as that of others:

In the novel progress and civic evil are joined in the image of the waterworks, the city's circulatory system, the vast project of aqueducts, tunnels, and pipes that continue to link upstate reservoirs to the island city.

The Waterworks presents the familiar concerns of the abuse of power and victimization. Tokarczyk (1996:43) points out that *The Waterworks* is in many ways the story of the city and its values and De Koven describes the novel's point of departure effectively by saying that "Doctorow saturates his 1870s New York with the crude quality of vast, ill-gotten elite wealth in dialectic with mass poverty, squalor and wretchedness" (1995:77). This creates a clear picture of opposing sides.

However, not only the ordinary New Yorkers are victimized. Sarah and Noah Pemberton are directly affected by the disappearance of Augustus Pemberton's wealth. Emily Tisdale, Martin's fiancée, is affected by Augustus Pemberton's actions as they cause Martin to neglect her and become morose and distracted. The New York citizens are victimized in a quite another way. Their government reserves Dr. Sartorius for an exclusive purpose, namely to hope for an extended physiological existence. They have therefore neither knowledge of or access to Dr. Sartorius's variety of modern treatments. The reader is initially tempted to regard Dr. Sartorius as the ultimate villain, and this confusion is illustrative of the difficulty to make the correct distinctions or to "know the world".

However, McIllvaine, Martin and Donne distinguish themselves as characters who resist the "unknown world" and consequently victimization.

When bringing Algirdas Greimas's categories into relation with the characters, one finds that the difference between Dr. Sartorius and Augustus Pemberton, is quite distinguishable. Greimas's actantial model is a useful instrument for identifying that the basis for motivations -- the mystery drenched causality -- is a matter of disparate values.

In the novel one sees the "categories" of characters represented respectively by McIllvaine and Augustus Pemberton as "subjects". Greimas (1971:161) comments on the terms "subject" and "object" as follows:

Eine erste Beobachtung erlaubt, in den Inventaren Propps und Souriaus die beiden für die Kategorie 'Subjekt' vs 'Objekt' konstitutiven syntaktischen Aktanten wiederzufinden. Auffallend ist, und wir wollen es sofort anmerken, daß die Relation zwischen dem Subjekt und dem Objekt, deren Präzisierung uns so viele Mühe kostete, ohne daß sie uns völlig gelungen wäre, hier, in den beiden Inventaren, mit einer identischen semantischen Investitur, der des 'Begehren' ['*désir*'] erscheint.

[A first look permits us to rediscover in the inventories of Propp and Souriau both the elemental syntactic actants belonging the category 'subject' vs 'object'. It is obvious, and we wish to indicate it immediately, that the relation between subject and object whose definition has cost us so much effort without complete success, appears here, in both the inventories, with an identical semantic investment, namely that of 'desire'.]

Greimas's categories and other models that are comparable, namely Propp's and Souriau's, referred to by Greimas (1971:159-161) are ideal if not indispensable models that may be used to avoid confusion. This is especially relevant in considering Dr. Sartorius's and the other characters' "objects". The object is what identifies the moral fibre of the characters.

Martin's "quest" entails finding his father, but Augustus Pemberton is definitely not his "Holy Grail". The literal "Grail" which Martin looks for is the same as the "object" which McIllvaine and Captain Donne (as well as Daniel) look for: knowledge in order to understand the world. Martin wants to locate his father only to discover the truth behind the events. McIllvaine wants to locate Martin to know the truth which is for him part of being a moral human being and journalist. The desire to identify themselves with honesty and oppose personalities like Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed motivates Martin, McIllvaine and Donne. McIllvaine, Martin and Donne long to understand their context, i.e., to know what occurs in it.

Boss Tweed, his government and Augustus Pemberton are undermining morality and transforming New York into a context ruled by evil. Their sole object is to misuse power in the selfish interest of their private benefit regardless of the consequences. They also succeed

in exploiting New York for a significant duration through the “support” of the motivation of selfishness.

Greimas furthermore identifies the actantial categories under the heading: “Die aktantielle Kategorie ‘Adjuvant’ vs ‘Opponent’”. [The actantial category ‘supporter’ vs ‘opponent’]:

Man erkennt jedoch ohne Mühe zwei Aktionsbereiche, und innerhalb dieser zwei hinreichend distinkte Arten von Funktionieren:

1. Die einen Funktionen bestehen darin, Hilfe zu bringen, indem sie im Sinne des Begehrens handeln, oder indem sie die Kommunikation erleichtern;
2. die anderen bestehen demgegenüber darin, Schwierigkeiten hervorzurufen, indem sie sich entweder der Realisierung des Begehrens oder der Kommunikation des Objekts entgegensetzen (1971:163).

[One recognizes nevertheless without any problems two activity areas and, within these, two considerably distinct ways of activity:

1. The one group of activity is to present help by functioning in support of the realization of the desire’s design or by simplifying communication.
2. the other group’s existence consists of creating problems by counteracting either the realization of the desire or the object’s communication.]

Martin’s virtue and accompanying ardour act as his “supporters”. He relentlessly pursues his father until he finds him. Donne is a supporter who directly acts as McIlvaine’s “assistant”. However, the irony of this is that despite Donne’s logic, his contribution fails to locate either Martin or his father. Nevertheless, this does not change the nature of his character. It is not only what is attained that determines to which side the character belongs, but also the nature of his or her actions.

Taking the evidence of Dr. Sartorius’s practice into account, it seems -- as various reviewers propose -- that Dr. Sartorius is an evil character. However, as the scientist’s only motivation is to work, his withdrawal from society for this purpose is not equal to what Augustus Pemberton does. The real evil is not Dr. Sartorius’s research *per se*, the harm is that his findings were never available to the public which is an effect of the corrupt New York Municipals’ manipulation. The novel should be read against the crucial question of what the nature of the subjects’ intentions is and to identify, in Greimas’s terms, the “thematic powers” behind their actions.

It is established later on in the novel that when Martin first entered McIlvaine's office at the beginning of the novel, the state of his clothes and the wet review were the result of an attempt to follow an omnibus containing his father. Augustus Pemberton "died" officially in 1869. Martin says to McIlvaine in his untidy condition: "He's alive" (W, 6) -- in 1872.

What marks Martin's character is his seemingly angry nature. Martin's motivation for his actions and somber personality are caused by the realization that his father is alive. McIlvaine does not disregard Martin's statement as invalid, but he admits that he, at the time thought it had an abstract meaning: "I interpreted what he had said as a metaphor, a poetic way of characterizing the wretched city that neither of us loved, but neither of us could leave" (W, 6). The first noticeable effect of the mysterious central event is therefore Martin's strange behaviour which has absolute credibility because his whole life has been formed by his father.

Martin's personality is a reaction against his father's evil nature as well as injustice in general: as a journalist who writes "tactless but informed reviews and cultural critiques" (W, 2), he indicts civilization by means of his profession. The son divorces himself from his father as an attempt to make it clear that he does not want identify himself with his father in any way. His integrity compels him to discover the truth surrounding Augustus Pemberton when he sees him on two occasions. Martin is, apart from the corrupt Municipals, closer to the truth regarding Augustus Pemberton and the secret of Dr. Sartorius's practice than anyone.

The statement that Augustus Pemberton is alive reflects an issue of his reality that is not understood by those around him. Martin is presented as a genius, a unique individual who is difficult to understand. This facet of his character creates the expectation that his statement bears abstract meaning. McIlvaine even says that he is "too tormented to speak plainly (W, 1) -- but that is exactly what Martin does. Another result of Augustus Pemberton still being alive is that Martin disappears. This fact makes the truth or reality of his statement more intelligible as a concrete issue and not only a metaphysical matter. He says that his father is alive and he is, ironically, despite this lucid statement, not understood.

A further effect of Martin's preoccupation with his father is the instability of the relationship between Emily Tisdale and Martin. When Martin disappears, Emily is subjected to a great deal of distress. She blames the family and she wishes to either love or mourn him. She also says: "There's no telling what he could have done if not for this awful pit ... he's been trying to climb out of all his life" (W, 132). The mysterious circumstances upset Emily to such an

extent that her relationship with Martin is put in jeopardy. McIlvaine comments as follows on the relationship between Emily and Martin:

Miss Tisdale was Martin's fiancée, though I found it hard to believe he'd give up his wild storms of soul for the haven of marriage. In this I was not far wrong: apparently he and Miss Tisdale were having a difficult time and their engagement, if that's what it was, was very much in question. ... Miss Tisdale was so used to his dramatics that she merely added this startling example to her accumulated fears for their relationship (W, 7).

The relationship endures unreasonable pressure. Emily is subjected to the insecurity that Martin's life style and, finally, his disappearance cause. When he tells her that he has seen his father she also believes like McIlvaine, as well as Dr. Grimshaw, that his words do not contain literal truth:

In fact this had not been the first -- what shall we call it? -- sighting. The first had occurred a month before, in March, during a heavy snow, and was afterward reported by Martin to his fiancée, Emily Tisdale, but in a context of the difficulties between them that would not let her believe anything was being represented as it really was (W, 39).

The reality of Martin's mysterious sighting is that the men in the coach manipulated Dr. Sartorius's findings and in doing so victimized their own families. Dr. Sartorius is a doctor who keeps old men alive in exchange for their families' security: "Men had turned their fortunes over to Sartorius ... betrayed their families" (W, 169). There are others like Augustus Pemberton who were firmly established in wealth, of an advanced age, became ill, "died" and then left their families without financial security. McIlvaine says:

Two of them were bachelors who had simply vanished, and their holdings with them. All of them, married or single, were of an advanced age. The family of one, Evander Prine, had been found living in hardship on Forty-sixth Street, west of Longacre Square, a neighbourhood of warehouses. They had come to the attention of one of my feature writers because they had put up Mr. Prine's sixty-three foot racing yacht for sale ... their only remaining asset ... and had had no takers. And so there were Mrs. Prine and her children, living in a boardinghouse for prostitutes, whose husband had in fact been an associate of Gould's and would have been expected to leave his family in, at the least, comfortable circumstances (W, 166-167).

McIlvaine gives a freelancer the assignment of going to the morgue to see whether other millionaires had also died penniless. The outcome is that

[h]e'd come up with a half dozen obituaries printed since 1867, of men who were thought to be financially sound but left a pauper's estate.

I'll tell you their names: Evander Prine, Thomas Henry Carleton, Oliver Vanderweigh, Elijah Ripley, Fernando Brown, and Horace W. Wells (W, 166).

The seminal event of the novel, Augustus Pemberton's life prolonged by Dr. Sartorius, has a similar effect. Apart from Martin and his aunt, Augustus Pemberton's family consists of

Sarah and Noah, and like Prine's family, they are also left without financial security and forced to live with Augustus Pemberton's sister. McIllvaine concludes after his visit to Sarah:

I did not appreciate why someone with a country estate would choose to be in Manhattan at this time of year. But Sarah Pemberton was destitute. From obligations signed by her late husband that she still did not understand, the wife and legatee to the Pemberton fortune had not only lost the family home, Ravenwood, but, with Noah, was reduced to living upon the charity of her sister-in-law. There was no end to the surprises this family had in store for me (W, 75).

Sarah tells McIllvaine that she and Noah are, according to Augustus Pemberton's will, his sole heirs: "That is not in question ... but exactly what happened to our legacy ... where it went ... is not clear" (W, 76). Instead, their inheritance becomes being forced to leave their home for New York. McIllvaine describes Noah's experience of New York as follows:

... and the lungs of the young country boy fill for the first time with the sickening air of the meat district ... the stockyards and slaughterhouses. Perhaps he thinks he has landed not in New York but on the chest of a monstrous carcass and is inhaling the odor of its huge bloody being (W, 79-80).

Noah is victimized by having his environment reduced from healthy country surroundings to an offensive city life and he consequently experiences existential angst. When retrospectively telling McIllvaine of his childhood, he says that he was afraid of who would come after him (W, 129).

Sarah and Noah are moreover not welcome at Augustus Pemberton's sister's house. The ambience of their new context is represented by the household's servants from whom Sarah does not receive much regard. When McIllvaine visits her, she asks: "Shall I ask for coffee or tea? They grumble, but they bring it" (W, 66). She is, however, hesitant to bid for coffee or tea and replaces the actual coffee or tea with a hospitable second offer, yet once again sharing her awareness of the attitude of the servants: "Are you sure you won't have some tea, Mr. McIllvaine? They grumble, but they bring it" (W, 75). The negative experience of being unwelcome in the house is also expressed when Sarah says: "We're on the top floor and have to tiptoe like mice" (W, 76).

However, it is not only the Pemberton family that is affected, but society at large as well. McIllvaine points out that Dr. Grimshaw misunderstands in thinking that only a few individuals were involved in the mysterious events:

Of course he was wrong, the Reverend, in thinking this was only a Pemberton family matter. We were all wrong insofar as we thought these misfortunes were circumscribed in one Godless family ... (W, 136).

The universal effect of Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed's actions are victimization which the whole of New York suffers.

Martin is a complex character: he is ambitious to be a moral individual and his actions are the most dramatic of all the protagonists to associate himself with morality. This is most likely because he struggles with remnants of Augustus Pemberton's personality in himself.

No doubt exists that the reader associates Martin more with McIlvaine, Donne, Emily Tisdale, Noah and Sarah Pemberton who are characters exempt from evil, even if not from certain weaknesses. They represent virtuous personalities that oppose Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed. What distinguishes Martin, McIlvaine and Donne from the evil category is that they are not inclined to be abusive and exploitative on such a grand scale as the antagonists and are focused on being moral human beings.

A central characteristic of the protagonist group, with the exception of Sarah, is that they focus on acquiring knowledge. The significance of their love for *acquiring* knowledge is that they therefore oppose the evil category which focuses on *concealing* the truth. A world unknown by the citizens of a context accommodates the antagonists to act freely and exploitively. McIlvaine, Martin and Donne gather and attempt to synthesize knowledge with the aim of countering corruption. It is in Greimasian terms finally the "object" which one associates with the two categories that distinguish them as either noble or evil.

Sarah is a gentle character and it is appropriate that she finally marries Captain Donne. Yet, she is also an archetypical victim who is unable to rebel. She remains voiceless for the sake of survival seeing that expression of any misgivings would not have been tolerated by Augustus Pemberton:

Therefore: She had made no effort to come to a conclusive judgement ... in the way women do who have no choice but to set their course for life and never veer from it. However: Or was this more like living in the state of irresolution most of us live in with regard to our moral challenges? (W, 71).

McIlvaine's criticism above is an identification of two reasons rather than possibilities that explain Sarah's silence: her silence is the result of a common fate of a nineteenth-century woman used to being dependent on her husband as well as the manifestation of an indecision common to human nature, i.e., the uncertainty of one's own moral courage. The narrator interprets this as a weakness which does not only bring us to insight about her, but his attitude

towards her also discloses one of his characteristics which is that he refuses to tolerate abuse: "Here was the flaw in the woman, that odd calmness, that steady forbearance in the face of trouble that made her deny that anything could be wrong ... that convinced her there was a reasonable explanation for Martin's absence" (W, 71).

The quest for knowledge, recognizable in McIlvaine's investigation and Martin's "Holy Grail", namely to dissociate himself from his father (like Joe attempts to disconnect himself from Paterson) is not recognizable in Sarah's approach. To Sarah the disappearance of the Pemberton wealth was merely a mistake. She believes that it would be possible to recover some of the money (W, 76), and does not fully comprehend Martin's reaction as she misunderstands his dramatic behaviour as being motivated by regret because he did not make his peace with his father before his "death". It is therefore also not a reality to her that she might in fact not be a widow. All this explains her patience. McIlvaine says:

But she had such patience for everything -- patience for the monstrous thieving husband ... patience for the absent stepson ... patience for her current, enigmatic, situation, of which I was now made aware (W, 75).

One can therefore conclude that Sarah's understanding is undermined by what she does know.

Although unable to become part of Martin's investigation that upsets her so much because it disturbs the harmony of their lives, Emily Tisdale should be considered one of the most noble characters of the novel. By showing what the characters do, the novel reveals not only actions, but also values. Emily's values are unmistakably virtuous:

She had enrolled, she said, in the Female Normal College up on Sixty-eighth Street with the purpose of becoming a teacher of public school children. ... 'I am so happy there. I am reading ancient history, physical geography, and Latin. I could have chosen French, I know a bit of French, but I'm inclined to Latin. Next year I take lectures in moral philosophy given by Professor Hunter' (W, 49).

Another character that is distinguished by his thirst for knowledge and discernment is Noah. McIlvaine meets Noah when the boy has a copy of Sir Walter Scott's *Quentin Durward* in his hand. McIlvaine says:

I hadn't realized I was so moved by him -- a sturdy, solemn, forbearing boy reading his book, a reader -- was that it? -- does the old bachelor merely have to see a child reading a book to lose his critical faculties? (W, 76).

Martin, Noah's brother, is introduced as a misanthropic person who is angry and sullen, but focused on the task at hand: "reading" his context. The first two pages present him as: "... a moody, distracted young fellow, and it was clear his own mind was more company to him

than people were" (W, 1) and "[h]is eyebrows would arch and then contract to a frown, and he would seem for a moment to be looking not at the world, but into it" (W, 1-2). This is also reminiscent of protagonists and narrators like Daniel, Joe and Edgar Altschuler. They are "spies": they scrutinize and analyse the world in which they live. Knowledge gained from analysis is a further reason as to why Martin chooses to oppose his father. Whilst in college he writes a dissertation about his father's corrupt dealings which infuriates Augustus Pemberton and leads to Martin's disinheritance.

However, Martin is not completely free from duality which may be why he is so sullen:

Martin was not terribly surprised by the sight of the stage. He thought of it as a hallucination brought on by the night just passed. He had reason to believe he'd conjured it up, it was early in the morning and perhaps he was not quite sober ... having spent the night in a shanty on the West Side, with a young housemaid, whose soul knew nothing but service ... so that ... this is a delicate matter ... so that as she kneeled before him and he held her head and felt the working muscles of her jaw and the rhythmic pullings of her cheeks, he realized in himself his father's imperial presence, his father's cruelty rising to a smile in the darkness like the inherited beast of himself breaking into being ... and he felt not pleasure but the brute disposition of a man he loathed as no other (W, 53).

Experiencing "the brute disposition" of his father through this episode, he virtually becomes his father. Yet, he also loathes his father, defies him and subsequently the evil in himself through his actions. He rejects the material benefits of the context in which he grew up. McIllvaine also mentions that this could be a form of self-punishment: "You can understand why a son would choose, like a penance, the deprived life of a freelance" (W, 3). It can thus be said that the struggle against Augustus Pemberton is not only an external war, but also an internal one.

Martin wins the war over his father by the act of acquiring knowledge and -- like Daniel -- a perspective which enables him to brave the world and the hardships that it produces. Both Martin and McIllvaine want to understand the world and know that they can only do so by establishing a truth for themselves through the process of attempting to acquire knowledge. They are journalists at heart who want to share the truth with the public. McIllvaine says: "If journalism were a philosophy rather than a trade, it would say there is no order in the universe, no discernable meaning, without ... the daily paper" (W, 12). Furthermore, McIllvaine says:

We were more honest and straightforward and did not make such a sanctimonious thing of objectivity, which is finally a way of constructing an opinion for the reader without letting him know that you are (W, 26-27).

One may infer that Doctorow uses McIllvaine to describe the professions of journalist and novelist here on the premise of his essay "False Documents" which purports that the trustworthy subjective document is more valid than the dubious objective one. The difference between journalism and fiction is that whilst a novel does not necessitate "factual" evidence to convey truth, a journalist with an honorable although subjective approach, like McIllvaine, can produce a principled informative and valid text. McIllvaine describes the value of the evidence of Boss Tweed's corruption that was brought to him:

Can you imagine what it meant to a newspaper wretch to have it black and white under his reading lamp? After all, what do we live for? Not wealth, certainly, not philosophical enlightenment ... not for art, or love, and not in any hope of salvation, certainly ... We live for proof, sir, we live for the document in our hand ... The glory we seek is the glory of the Revelator. And here it was, all recorded in neat columns. I think I wept for joy – I felt as privileged as a scholar holding in his hands fragments of Mosaic scrolls, or a parchment of Homeric verse, or a Shakespeare folio (W, 144).

The mystery surrounding Augustus Pemberton is only completely solved when the sheriff of New York, James O'Brien, approaches McIllvaine with evidence of the extortionate dealings of the New York government. McIllvaine finds it difficult to get the information published, but he insists "that journalistic honor would prevail" (W, 145). When it is published in the *Times*, a taxpayers suit follows and the Ring begins to collapse. But what the novelist communicates is that the reader knows even before the "factual" confirmation is delivered by O'Brien that Boss Tweed is guilty. The novel does not need such confirmation to make the distinction.

The author/narrator "hides" the evidence on purpose to illustrate how difficult it is to get to the truth. What marks the investigation that McIllvaine and Donne undertake, is that comprehension constantly escapes them. What they do find out is relevant, but, in practical terms, useless because they are unable to contextualize what they find out. The represented context therefore has a fundamental capacity to conceal its true meaning. The police officer says to McIllvaine: "The way enlightenment comes ... is in bits and pieces of humdrum reality, each adding its mosaic bit of glitter to the eventual vision" (W, 84-85). However, the bits that McIllvaine and Donne collect are not those that lead to the full picture.

Donne adheres to the principle of the profession of police officer: his object is, despite working in a corrupt context, to perform his duties for the sake of justice. McIllvaine is aware of the limitation of Donne's abilities to arrive at the truth, because Donne's profession dictates to him how to go about his investigations. When McIllvaine begins with his search for

Martin, he decides not to go to Harry Wheelwright as he perceives him as an unreliable source. However, Donne wants to interview Wheelwright without hesitation:

Of course that was the logical next step. ... As astute as Donne was, he was a policeman, wasn't he? With a policeman's simple tools of thought? In a way it was like having Dr. Grimshaw as a partner -- I mean with that sort of theological rope around my neck (W, 91).

The most questionable behaviour that Donne exhibits is when the case has been solved and he feels that Dr. Sartorius should not get a legal process. Nevertheless, this police officer is an example of "all of us against everyone else" (W, 91). He is the official representative of the virtuous category trying to decode the results of the dealings with Dr. Sartorius: "An act ... had been committed a deliberate act or series of acts ... by which we could recompose the world, comfortingly, in categories of good and evil" (W, 135). The impression that the reader obtains from Donne is that he is reliable and focused on acquiring knowledge systematically: "... Donne might have been a scholar working in the silence of a library" (W, 84). His first action is to determine whether Martin is dead. When McIlvaine and Donne do not find Martin at the morgue, he says: "'This rules out nothing,' ... 'But it rules out something'" (W, 84).

However, despite McIlvaine's criticism, his investigation is repeatedly just as unsuccessful as Donne's. For example, he sends a reporter to Saranac where Augustus Pemberton was supposed to be treated by Dr. Sartorius. McIlvaine comes to a conclusion that is correct, yet not useful for a specific purpose:

Of course I would not find any Dr. Sartorius in the registry of doctors ... any more than I had found Eustace Simmons in the waterfront saloons ... or Martin Pemberton up the stairs in his room in Greene Street. Linear thinking would not find them (W, 111).

Along with the limited insight of the others interviewed, namely Dr. Grimshaw, Emily Tisdale and Sarah Pemberton -- Harry Wheelwright gives a testimony indicating that it is likely that Augustus Pemberton -- at the time of the interview with Harry -- is indeed alive. Harry tells that he and Martin were sitting in a tavern shortly before his disappearance and that Martin suggested to dig up his father's grave. When they did that they found the corpse of a small boy in the coffin. This is also a confirmation of the strangeness of the circumstances and that Augustus Pemberton is probably alive. However, it is not knowledge that contributes to solve the case.

The next bit that adds to the unintelligible mosaic is when Knucks Geary, a scoundrel who maintains to be reformed, comes to Donne to give him information in exchange for a meal.

He tells Donne: "I aver an' detest there is a man going about these nights offerin' to buy up loose children" (W, 87). Donne gives Geary the order to befriend the person so that he might inform him later again. Geary is hesitant to get involved in "such dark matters as these" (W, 89), but Donne pays him and encourages him to continue investigating with the assurance that "[n]o harm will come to you. You are in the employ of the Municipal Police of the City of New York" (W, 89). This information regarding the children is also not even slightly useful in discovering the truth regarding Augustus Pemberton. McIlvaine and Donne look in all the right places, but they do not find the answer to the mystery. Summoning Harry and asking the barkeep and a little girl to describe the man who fought Geary does not lead them to the truth.

Geary's murder is another mystery that ensues. Donne follows up a witness: McIlvaine accompanies him to the Black Horse. Donne had commissioned Harry to come and draw an Identikit of the man who fought Geary with the description of the barkeep and a little girl. McIlvaine in retrospect indicates that it is Dr. Sartorius' right hand, Wrangel, the driver of the omnibus. But they do not know that at that stage:

As we all stood looking over his shoulder, he drew and erased and redrew for their recognition, and composed from the combined words, what we would not know until much later was an astonishingly accurate portrait ... of the driver of the white omnibus ... with its complement of old men in black ... that Martin Pemberton had twice seen riding through the streets of Manhattan. So we were on my freelance's case after all. Not, I emphasize, that we consciously knew it at the time. We did not look at the sketch and know it was Dr. Sartorius's driver and all-round handyman, Wrangel. We were looking at a sketch of the stolid, shaven-headed killer of Knucks Geary (W, 117).

Although Donne does not unravel the mystery, the nature of his quest, i.e., to search for the truth, counter crime, choose the occupation of searching for truth and remain uncorrupted in a police force permeated with corruption, contribute to establish him, in terms of the actantial model, as a supporter of the virtuous group of characters. Furthermore, his remorse over Geary's death and his compassion for a little flower seller at the Black Horse, when he buys her least fresh flowers, present him as a compassionate character.

Protagonists like Donne, McIlvaine, Emily Tisdale and Noah Pemberton are invariably "types": they are unproblematically "good". The novel's antagonist characters are also "types" by simply being evil. However, Martin is a more complex character. He is basically virtuous, but struggles with his "darker side". Ultimately, the conflict in itself and his victory affirm that he is virtuous.

Dr. Grimshaw is not a specifically complex character. But he does present a discrepancy. He is a minister, a principled Christian, but in such a narrow-minded way that the reader does not associate him with the virtuous group. His presence in the novel is significant as he serves as a touchstone for characters like Martin, McIlvaine and Donne. In comparing him with, for example, Martin, one recognizes how different their objects are from one another.

One sees Dr. Grimshaw as a dupe of individuals like Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed. His remark that "Martin is one of those troubled souls yet to look up and see his Saviour awaiting him with open arms" (W, 32) is ironic seeing Dr. Grimshaw does not understand Martin as an individual. Martin is, in fact, more moral than Dr. Grimshaw who "had the respect of his peers and the cosy devotion of his well-to-do parishioners" (W, 30), because Martin fights evil actively. By professing salvation passively, Dr. Grimshaw accommodates individuals of the evil class without the knowledge that he and his church are used to hold up a hollow social identity of virtue.

This leaves Dr. Grimshaw a spiritually poor person: "Apparently, from their role as 'beggars', churchmen develop the same sympathies for the moneyed class as politicians do" (W, 29). It is therefore not surprising that Dr. Grimshaw is also blind to the truth when it concerns Martin. Dr. Grimshaw's conception of truth is rigid loyalty to those who have external power. His understanding of the truth is simply that Augustus Pemberton is dead and that Martin's mind is at risk (W, 7).

Martin comes to Dr. Grimshaw in April 1872 with the request to testify that Augustus Pemberton is dead. Martin had seen his father in an omnibus on Broadway among other old men. This request appears retrospectively as an investigative step, but it also seems to display a longing for confirmation due to uncertainty.

However, this sighting has not been the only one. McIlvaine tells that the first sighting had been a month earlier, namely in March. Emily tells him that Martin told her that he had seen his father: "... while he was walking past the holding reservoir on Forty-second Street" (W, 48). When Dr. Grimshaw says: "Obviously the apparition of his father was a torment of his mind. A phantom event summoned up by his guilt ..." (W, 40), he rationalizes what Martin has told him. Dr. Grimshaw also speculates that the group of old men could have been a learned society. He attributes their inertia to old age, but when he is unable to explain why Martin had seen his father, he reverts back to the rationalization that Martin's mind has conjured up the image of his father. He tells McIlvaine that he said to Martin: "I think, for

the explanation of what it was you saw, we must look into your history” (W, 41). Martin’s reaction was: ““Into my mind, you mean? Into my poor plagued mind? Is that where we look?”” (W, 41). It seems that Dr. Grimshaw lacks the compassion and sensibility that ideally should be features of the character of a Christian minister.

McIllvaine is skeptical of Dr. Grimshaw’s sense of Christian compassion. The minister makes no effort to see Martin since he came to him. McIllvaine asks: “So what was the nature of his faith and the degree of his concern?” (W, 44). No doubt exists that his loyalty belongs to Augustus Pemberton. Once it is not possible any longer to defend Augustus Pemberton, Dr. Grimshaw blames the whole family and once again the point of the minister’s blindness is raised. Martin vehemently criticizes Dr. Grimshaw’s blind Christianity:

‘I affiliate you with death, Reverend, not merely because you’re the family eulogist, but because you’re the priest of a death cult.’ ... ‘Your Jesus is all death and dying, though you attribute to him everlasting life. Every communion partakes primevally of his death, and the presiding image of him, even right there dangling down your vest, is his painful, agonized, endless death ...’ (W, 34).

The minister considers these words to be blasphemous, however, they do not attack basic Christian principles. Martin criticizes “Dr. Grimshaw’s Jesus”, i.e., the interpretation and presentation of something that is supposed to be divine, but is reduced to spiritual emptiness. This explains why Martin interprets Christianity to be a “death cult”.

When Dr. Grimshaw finally understands the full purport of what has happened his words once again indicate flawed understanding:

‘I feel the need to pray to begin to understand, and to call upon God ... to let me hear the soft summons of Jesus Christ somewhere from this ... from this ... this family of Godless Pembertons ’ ... ‘that is so magnetically awry as to threaten to destroy all of us who have circled about them ... including the ministry’ (W, 136).

By referring to the Pembertons as “Godless”, he indicts them of spiritual poverty. This is, however, only a valid criticism against Augustus Pemberton whom Dr. Grimshaw has given most of his loyalty because of his status as wealthy patriarch. He falsely criticizes Martin, Sarah and Noah and therefore fails to distinguish between categories of individuals that are representative of good and evil.

As a minister, Dr. Grimshaw’s role is supposed to represent spirituality, but does not. He, an official of the Christian church, serves as a puppet of the evil category, those who want the world to be “unknown”. Martin and McIllvaine feel that truth has to be represented firmly and precisely. McIllvaine confesses that he is a lapsed Presbyterian. He says: “It’s the

diction that did it, finally, the worn-thin, shabby, church-poor words, so overused they connote to me a poverty of spirit, not the richness of it" (W, 31). This refers to rhetorical church language and the selection of themes that appear to be insincerely "ceremonial" which are foreign to natural, everyday language. This use of language is a ritual that only shows devotion to the capsule of Christianity and neglects to contemplate issues that deal with truth in an honest and effective way. The implication is that church Christianity may become a façade whilst the practice of journalism is much closer to the objective of true Christianity, namely to distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil.

One of Doctorow's concerns is to make his readers aware that a government can be a threat to its society. He once argued in an interview that "[i]t seems to me certainly a message of the twentieth century that people have a great deal to fear from their own governments" (McCaffery, 1983:46). Personalities like the New York mayor, Boss Tweed, and Augustus Pemberton are not always recognizable as the real danger that looms over a context.

Martin's father and the New York mayor are counterparts of each other which illustrates that a community functions like a family context. Augustus Pemberton's character signifies irresponsible authority. What Martin's father does to his family is what Boss Tweed does to New York: they abuse contexts for which they are responsible. One would expect that a person like Dr. Sartorius would be employed by a responsible government in the best interest of the community.

Having considered the various characters who make up the "moral" group in the novel, the following section examines the immoral group of characters represented by the influential Augustus Pemberton, who is early in the novel described as a callous person whose estate, Ravenwood, is described as the Ozymandias of the slave trade (W, 78):

Martin had come from wealth. His father was the late, notorious Augustus Pemberton, who had done enough to shame and mortify their line for generations to come, having made a fortune in the war supplying the Army of the North with boots that fell apart, blankets that dissolved in rain, tents that tore at the grommets, and uniform cloth that bled dye. Our name for this was 'shoddy', used as a noun. But shoddy wasn't the worst of old Pemberton's sins. He had made an even bigger fortune running slavers (W, 3).

Martin's father is associated with corrupt personalities: "... the city's leading dignitaries showed up at the funeral, led by Boss Tweed himself, along with the members of the Ring -- the comptroller, the mayor -- several judges, dozens of Wall Street thieves ..." (W, 4). When

his activities became questionable in a legal sense, Augustus Pemberton simply used his connections and/or bribed his way out of trouble and was able to remain dishonestly respectable on the outside (W, 69). McIllvaine finds an article on the arrest of Eustace Simmons, Augustus Pemberton's right hand, for breaking the laws on slave-trading. Augustus Pemberton paid his bond and the case was dismissed on grounds of lack of evidence which suggests help from fellow criminals in powerful positions.

Juxtaposing the way in which Augustus Pemberton became rich to McIllvaine's virtuous activities, one comes to the conclusion that Augustus Pemberton's behaviour is not only calculated, but psychopathic. McIllvaine says: "I was not myself complacent about our modern industrial civilization" (W, 2). Augustus Pemberton is complacent about his civilization and exploits it for his own benefit.

His wealth is his achievement by which he is remembered. The ways in which he accumulated his wealth categorizes him as being more ignoble than the spiritually poor rich people that Joe of Paterson sees in New York. McIllvaine says of Augustus Pemberton: "We celebrated the fact of his arrival in America as a penniless, unschooled Englishman who hired himself out as a house servant under a contract that required his labor for seven years" (W, 28). Augustus Pemberton went to America as a materially poor man and became a spiritually impoverished millionaire.

This is also the cause of the final break between Martin and his father which came about when, during his student days, Martin wrote a thesis exposing the corruption of his father's business. Sarah tells that Augustus called his son in response to his rebellion "a callow idiot" (W, 68). After this incident he refused to keep Martin at university and disinherited him. This is also evidence of his spiritual poverty.

Ultimately, the "spiritual bankruptcy" is finally fulfilled when Augustus Pemberton accepts the conditions to be treated by Dr. Sartorius. McIllvaine tells that when Noah became older, he spoke to him about his father. Noah tells:

I was learning that my father had impoverished us in a willful act. It had been deliberate. We were poor and without a home because he wanted it that way. And all his money he had put somewhere else -- nobody knew where (W, 129).

Eustace Simmons also represents the kind of person who is able to commit such a crime. He is an "extension" of Augustus Pemberton whom Martin calls an older step-brother, implying that Simmons is Augustus Pemberton's spiritual son (W, 197). Augustus Pemberton and

Boss Tweed are also connected to each other via Simmons. Simmons worked for Boss Tweed as a deputy chief clerk in the Office of the Port Wardens: "Simmons would have shared in that (*the income of this municipal office*) and been assured a long, profitable employment, which meant Augustus Pemberton's offer had to have been very attractive to lure him away" (W, 27; my parenthesis -- PvdM). However, even after this change of employment, Simmons is associated with Boss Tweed. To find his father, Martin looks for Simmons first and finds him at a dinner held by Boss Tweed. The physical description of Simmons reflects his evil nature and those with whom he associates: "The dimmed light brought out the ruin of his face -- he is pitted and pocked, the skin under the eyes is black, the head of wiry hair graying and combed across from ear to ear, and the whole aspect of him, somehow ... dirty-looking" (W, 174).

Personalities like Simmons and Augustus Pemberton are influenced by their context. McIlvaine says: "... Augustus Pemberton had been nothing if not a representative man. If you can imagine what life was like in our city. ... The Augustus Pembertons among us were sustained by culture" (W, 7). This context then also produces other men such as these who share the identity of being patients of Dr. Sartorius.

When Martin sees the omnibus with the passengers that are old men, the description characterizes them as representatives of "spiritual death". This is also what Delbanco (1994:47) points out:

Pallid and glazed-eyed, the old men whose dying is retarded by Dr. Sartorius have a zombie inertness that seems the final stage in the natural course of their lives -- lives that have been spent in a moral obtuseness that, when they were young, might have taken the form of insouciance or arrogance or blinding greed. The parasitism of their dying is not fundamentally different from how they lived: as bloodsuckers indifferent to the human cost of their getting and spending.

They are self-centred individuals. This even extends to their final zombie-like state: Martin "has the strange impression that if they are in mourning, it is for themselves" (W, 37).

The depiction of spiritual death is congruent with the political leader of this society, Boss Tweed, who creates the nature of the city context:

Everyone doing business with the city -- every contractor, carpenter, and chimney sweep, every supplier, every manufacturer -- paid from fifteen to fifty percent of the cost of his service back to the Ring. Everyone who wanted a job, from the school janitor to the police commissioner, had to pay a fee up front and then forever kick back a percentage of his salary to Boss Tweed (W, 8).

Like Augustus Pemberton's actions that cause existential angst in Noah, Boss Tweed's actions cause similar distress with regard to the livelihoods of New Yorkers. He is a power magnate who oppresses people financially and consequently, emotionally. Ironically, the demise of Boss Tweed's government is initially not entirely auspicious as it has for many New Yorkers dire financial repercussions. Boss Tweed has manipulated the city's economic life in such a way that the citizens became dependent on him and in order to avoid disastrous reverberations, they subsequently allow their mayor to oppress them. McIllvaine comments on this oppression:

But what he accomplished was murderous in the very modern sense of the term. Manifestly murderous. Can you understand his enormous power, the fear he inspired? Can you imagine what it is like to live in a city of thieves, raucous in its dissembling, a city falling into ruin, a society in name only? (W, 8).

Ironically, in the history of the novel, Boss Tweed does not create the impression of a villain. He is jovial and he creates the illusion of being generous. However, McIllvaine makes a very important statement about him which connects him to Dr. Sartorius's patients: "But in the odd moment when there was no hand to shake or toast to give, the eye went dead and you saw the soul of a savage" (W, 9).

This is similar to how Augustus Pemberton is presented. The novel refers to him as a businessman, but he is more prominent in the novel as a patient of Dr. Sartorius. He sits completely apathetic in the omnibus and when Martin is taken to him in Dr. Sartorius's clinic, he is entirely inert and seems not to recognize his son. McIllvaine's relation presents the most direct representation of his existence in the novel. All the other experiences -- like Martin's references -- are indirect. The most direct appearance which Augustus Pemberton makes through McIllvaine's narration is when McIllvaine finds his corpse at Ravenwood. It is meaningful that Augustus Pemberton does not "live" in the novel. In an interview about this character and his moral counterparts, Boss Tweed and Eustace Simmons, Doctorow observed:

If you think about it, the old man Augustus Pemberton is never seen alive. His existence is reported secondhanded from the newspapers or the fact that his son saw him. His factotum, Simmons, is found only after he's dead. As for Tweed, you never see more than a glimpse or two of him. He's a ruling ethos, a configuration of the clouds. As McIllvaine [sic] says, you can't really get your hands on these people (Tokarczyk, 1995:36).

There is no doubt that Boss Tweed and those like him are the architects of the condition of New York. McIllvaine says to his fictional addressee, presumably an early twentieth century audience:

You may think you are living in modern times, here and now, but that is the necessary illusion of every age. ... I assure you, New York after the war was more creative, more deadly, more of a genius society than it is now. ... We were three-quarters of a century into the Industrial Revolution (W, 9).

Strategically the following page tells about the poor in New York including children: "Vagrant children slept in alleys" (W, 10). Here the reader finds the implication that the novel is also relevant to our own times: progress may create the illusion of general progress, but savagery nevertheless persists often. Governmental intervention to help the poor could also only be a façade. There are references to institutions and orphanages "out on the edges of town" (W, 10). The purpose of this sentence can be seen in perspective, keeping *Loon Lake* into account: the poor is taken care of to an extent -- by the rich -- but only to accommodate the rich.

There is a further juxtapositioning of wealthy and poor people in chapter four. McIllvaine tells of an episode when he attended a ball held by the "Improvement Society" on account of his work. Martin is present as he has to report on the "inane social doings of the class of new wealth" (W, 19) for his livelihood. At the entrance of the hotel where the ball is held "drunks, louts and harridans" (W, 20) gather, making insulting remarks. McIllvaine distinguishes himself by not identifying himself with the rich when he says that he feels "in spirit like one who belonged behind the cordon" (W, 20). Martin is as one would expect quite uncomfortable at the ball. McIllvaine says: "... my freelance looked peaked, wilted, almost greenish" (W, 21). Martin approaches a Mrs. Ortley whom he asks to describe her dress. She begins to describe it in the greatest detail which is nothing less than immodest bragging. He finds it difficult to keep up with her description and she persists tenaciously in describing her dress and jewelry even after Martin has made attempts to disengage himself from her. As Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish's party in *Ragtime*, this episode shows the discrepancy between the sections of society.

However frivolous this superficial behaviour may seem, Mrs. Ortley belongs to a section of civilization that is sustained by dangerous individuals. McIllvaine and Donne have engaged themselves in war with these people by investigating the disappearance of Martin Pemberton, himself "at war". This war is between the basic values of good and evil. McIllvaine says: "... though churches were numerous ... not Christ's, but Tweed's image inhered in the shifting formation of clouds ..." (W, 141).

Augustus Pemberton's compassionless behaviour towards his family which constitutes a microcosm, is similar to how Boss Tweed exploits New York, the macrocosm. McIllvaine

understands Martin's statement that his father is alive (W, 1) to mean that he refers to the existence of evil in general. He concludes: "In misunderstanding him, I found the greater truth, though I would not realize it until everything was over and done" (W, 9). Solotaroff associates Augustus Pemberton with Boss Tweed via McIllvaine's statement by saying that McIllvaine takes Martin's remark as "another of his metaphors for their 'city of thieves, raucous in its dissembling'" (1994:786).

Seeing that the reign belongs to Boss Tweed, Dr. Sartorius "belongs" to the antagonist group like a physical object with an extraordinary use. Dr. Sartorius's enterprise is financed by the New York government: "They bought that mansion and fitted it out as an orphanage. They had the protection of the Municipals ... the endorsement of the city fathers" (W, 184). On the basis of this, Dr. Sartorius may be seen as a member of the group. Yet, the main distinction is that unlike Boss Tweed and Augustus Pemberton (subjects) Dr. Sartorius (subject) is not interested in either money or power (objects).

The most misunderstood character of the novel, Dr. Sartorius, is linked to the buying of children and keeping terminally-ill old men alive. His "product" of extended life serves as the direct cause of these men to "disinherit" their families for the sake of their own survival. However, he cannot be held responsible for decisions made based on the choice of others, but one does need to ask what motivates Dr. Sartorius. What is his object? Is Dr. Sartorius a spiritual brother of Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed? Are they "subjects" of a kind?

Tokarczyk distinguishes Dr. Sartorius as follows:

Sartorius's evil, however, cannot be traced to greed or any concrete desire to make his life more comfortable. Rather, Sartorius's vice is intellectual *hubris*: he believes he is such a great scientist he can defy mortality itself (1996:43).

He is indeed not materialistic. However, neither does the total description of Dr. Sartorius seem to present anything that would suggest that he is not realistic in his expectations of what he can achieve. Hubris causes such fanaticism, but when one of his seven patients die, Dr. Sartorius does not display anything that might suggest that he thinks that is able to "defy mortality itself". On the contrary, he admits that he cannot determine how much the treatment has helped. He only knows that the patient had lived longer than he was naturally inclined to and, in fact, deserved death (W, 188).

There are more resemblances between Dr. Sartorius and Martin than between the scientist and Augustus Pemberton. The narrator presents him as a preoccupied, misanthropic genius who is far too rational to be either excessively self-confident or delusional. Dr. Sumner Hamilton tells McIlvaine that it is not possible to say whether Dr. Sartorius's mental state could be described as insane or not. He says that the words "sane" and "virtuous" are limited in their ability to describe Dr. Sartorius. He says a glass of wine may be "damn good." Then it is "sane" seeing that it is "virtuous" (W, 225). Dr. Sartorius is indeed "damn good" in his profession, but what he does is so foreign to the world which is unable to deal with his genius. Sante summarizes his achievements:

During the war he invented numerous surgical procedures, rejected the use of collodion dressings in favor of fresh air, devised a new kind of hypodermic syringe, successfully innovated with aseptic solutions, and generally represented an extraordinary farsighted approach to infections and their remedies. Later in his career he turns out to have invented means for blood transfusion, dialysis machines, procedures for transplanting bone marrow, and, at the end, he is preparing to carry out heart transplants (1994:10).

Dr. Hamilton says to McIlvaine that New York is like the mob that chased the Columbia medical students and wanted to lynch them for dissecting cadavers in their anatomy classes a hundred years before and he maintains that the New York civilization is not much further along (W, 226).

If there were anything evil about any of his research above, it would be if someone were harmed by it. Tokarczyk's view can therefore not be seen as the last word on Dr. Sartorius:

There is one striking parallel between the Nazi experiments and Sartorius's: in each case a segment of the population is judged unworthy of life and sacrificed to experiments intended to benefit those deemed worthy. *The Waterworks'* unworthy are its throw-away children (1996:44).

There is another side to the coin which Sante brings to the fore without denying Dr. Sartorius's part in the evil workings of the context:

For all the trappings of villainy that surround him, Dr. Sartorius is not the real bad guy here. He even has an alibi for the most serious charge that can be lodged against him -- that he victimizes street children. Apparently all he does is extract 'fluid' from them, and otherwise keeps them sheltered and fed; the corpses with which he replaces his undead plutocrats are those of victims of accidents, such as the boy at the reservoir. But he and his shadowy domain throw into relief the two invisible realms that bookend urban society and serve to define it (1994:12).

The fact exists that there are orphans who died. The logical conclusion is indeed that the children died in the place of the old men when one hears what is being done with (or to) the children, namely that blood, glandular matter and bone marrow were extracted from them to

be used to treat the old, terminally ill men to continue living (W, 226). Yet, Dr. Hamilton maintains that they died "[n]ever by his hand. Physically, the children's health was never impaired" (W, 226). Solotaroff says:

When Donne arranges a police raid on the Home for Little Wanderers that Sartorius founded, it turns out to be a model of enlightened institutional child care. On the other hand, some of the children are missing and most are prematurely aged (1994:787).

The cause of death which Dr. Hamilton proposes is fear. This is only a theory and although easy to believe, seeing that Emily Tisdale finds the orphans to be "uncharacteristically quiet" (W, 162), it seems that Dr. Sartorius is at least not a murderer with premeditated intent.

Be it any harm, either psychological or physical, or death, if fear were the cause, Dr. Sartorius has no doubt part in being guilty of their fate. The impersonal way the children were treated may have caused injurious fear. Nevertheless, assessments like De Koven's (similar to Tokarczyk's) are against the given background questionable:

The harbinger of Sartorius' demonic obverse Eden at the Waterworks is his 'Home for Little Wanderers,' the seemingly benign but in fact lethal orphanage where children are housed in order to die into the unnaturally prolonged lives of plutocrats (1995:87).

The orphanage is not a concentration camp and Dr. Sartorius does not harbour any malice towards the children. When Emily goes to look at the children she finds that they are well-nourished and that they say they have not been beaten (W, 162-163).

Dr. Sartorius is not malevolent, savage or villainous like Boss Tweed and Augustus Pemberton. He is asocial which implies spiritual poverty like Susan's final state. Doctorow comments about Dr. Sartorius as follows: "His elusiveness ... is not physical, it's intellectual. A man with his own standards, not society's" (Tokarczyk, 1995:36). Dr. Sartorius has managed to transcend all emotion whether it be anxiety, joy, love or hate. His exclusive motivation is to amuse himself during the time at his disposal with medicinal experimentations. He reduces human beings to "toys", yet, bears no desire to "break" them. Taking Schama's assessment into account, he sees himself as well as others as beings without souls (which must have causes as well, but they are not mentioned in the novel):

But his message is, in fact, the exact opposite of that which Thomas Carlyle puts into the mouth of Professor Teufelsdröckh in 'Sartor Resartus'. For where the metaphysical Teufelsdröckh argues that the tailored garment of our bodies is but a fabric for our divine spark, Mr. Doctorow's stitcher and weaver of bodies, Sartorius, who has won fame by the merciful speed of his battlefield amputations, insists that we are nothing but our biological matter (1994:31).

Dr. Mott says of Dr. Sartorius: "He was the kind of doctor who didn't care what he treated, a man or cow, and hadn't a trace of gift for the soothing word, the comforting assurance that patients need from us as much as our medications" (W, 122). Sante describes Sartorius in the following way when addressing how Martin experienced him: "The doctor himself is not the monster he had expected, but a rational if bloodless savant who shows him around the plant and allows him to watch procedures" (1994:10). Whilst Augustus Pemberton and Boss Tweed are defined by evil because of their selfish motives, Dr. Sartorius is defined by his quest for purely scientific knowledge *per se* which is gained hidden from society. His ambitions do therefore not include either elevating his social status or material worth. He is driven by the Faustian activity of gathering knowledge for the sake of gathering knowledge. Solotaroff (1994:787) confirms this by his description of Dr. Sartorius:

A preternaturally gifted surgeon who arrived from Germany in time for the Civil War, he turned his field hospital into a laboratory for revolutionary techniques that could treat head wounds and restore joints, amputate a leg in nine seconds, an arm in six -- no small mercy at the time. But mercy was not his motive: knowledge was.

This motive distinguishes him as not being a component of the evil category. However, it is Dr. Sartorius's consistent callousness and his disinterested disposition regarding countering the crimes of which he is a witness that distinguishes him from Martin, McIllvaine and Donne. He is only interested in continuing with his work. McIllvaine says of Dr. Sartorius: "Sartorius mentioned his requirements and left it up to others to fulfill them ... on the model, I suppose, of God giving free will to the human race" (W, 119).

The Waterworks is therefore not "a thriller, a Stevensonian detective drama about an evil genius, Dr. Sartorius, who lengthens the lives of the corrupt rich by preying upon the city's thousands of poor orphans" (Wilhelmus, 1995:148) Dr. Sartorius's "ruling thematic power" (Greimas, 1971:167) is a wish to devote himself to scientific work as opposed to Boss Tweed and Augustus Pemberton who are ruled by the group of the following powers: greediness, stinginess, longing for wealth, luxury, pleasure, surrounding beauty, honour, authority, amusement, pride and fear of illness and death (Greimas, 1971:167).

The novel is about evil rich individuals who exploit a completely "neutral" individual. Solotaroff (1994:788) calls Dr. Sartorius a Faust whose Mephistopheles has become the power structure of the state, in this case the New York government, and funds his program. What one should be wary of is not to confuse Faust and Mephistopheles when considering Dr. Sartorius by believing that Dr. Sartorius is a Faust with Mestipholes within himself. The real

threat is not the few eccentric individuals like Dr. Sartorius, but the Boss Tweeds and Augustus Pembertons.

Disallowing society to benefit from Dr. Sartorius's genius is an example with which Doctorow provides his readers to illustrate a self-sabotaging tendency of a government. The scientist is supposed to be the servant of the citizens. If a society cannot benefit from the potential of the scientist's knowledge due to a corrupt administration, it can either have no value at all or harm a civilization. It is therefore not the scientist who should be blamed like the myopic Dr. Grimshaw does (W, 138), but those that misuse the scientists to their own advantage.

It is not always possible for the scientist to promote his research himself and those in the novel who have the power to do so, refrain from carrying it out:

You will wonder, as I did, how someone so careless, someone so uninterested in putting himself forward, or seeking advantage, could ... marshal ... the immense resources needed for his work. But he doesn't -- he simply allows things to happen around him. He takes what is to hand, he accepts what his ... devotees press on him (W, 176).

Dr. Hamilton destroys Dr. Sartorius's notebooks and he is sent to an institution for the criminally insane. Because genius cannot be used constructively, it becomes safer to destroy his research. Only, the irony is that what Dr. Sartorius had found out was eventually developed by later researchers as Hoffert (1994:111) remarks: "The twist, of course, is that Sartorius's methods are commonplace medical procedures today."

The central idea of chapter 24 is that Dr. Sartorius is the servant of the rich, old men. However, the relationship between Dr. Sartorius and the corrupt men that finance him is also a metaphor for the New York civilization. Dr. Sartorius makes physiological existence possible for the rich old men. The poor do not benefit from Dr. Sartorius's knowledge. One also has to keep in mind the "casualties" like the children that are not intentionally harmed, but die possibly because of fear. Dr. Sartorius finds it interesting that human life can sustain losses: individuation of character, speech, volition -- without becoming death (W, 208). These wealthy men are therefore themselves metaphors for those that they oppress. Dr. Sartorius makes this evident when he says that: "... they were hardly more pathetic than people you will find strolling on Broadway ..." (W, 208). Dr. Sartorius as an outsider is able to come to this conclusion. Spiritual strength is defined by rebellion like Martin's. Dr. Sartorius is in this sense -- determined by not wanting to be a member of society -- not like Martin, but he is no Augustus Pemberton either.

McIllvaine says in the beginning of the novel: "We were in the post-war" (W, 4). In terms of causality, the kind of crimes that were committed related to a national situation. People exploited the contexts which the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution produced. The effect of being "in the post-war" which New York citizens suffer is reminiscent of Daniel's observation that he and Susan are "alone in the Cold War" when they run away from the orphanage. McIllvaine acknowledges the power of causality here when he says: "Where you'll find mankind not *shackled* in history is Heaven, eventless Heaven" (W, 4; my emphasis – PvdM). One sees it time and again in Doctorow's fiction that various forms of "imprisonment" is the result of the misuse of power.

Ironically, it often happens, as the novel illustrates, that the characters are not able to understand the origin of the effects and to recognize the manipulating personalities. Some critics, for example, De Koven and to an extent Tokarczyk, even associate Dr. Sartorius with characters like Boss Tweed and Augustus Pemberton. This is clearly erroneous if one uses Greimas's model to analyse the characters' objects. The actantial model also enables one to recognize that Martin, although struggling with the remnants of the tyrannical Pemberton personality in himself, and his father should be distinguished from each other.

Not only the broader social spectrum of New York, but Donne and McIllvaine whose professions require investigative and analytical skills fail to make the interconnections in order to gain a "bird's eye view". The mystery of the novel is summarized by Donne when he speaks to Grimshaw:

Neither father nor son where they should be ... one dead but not in his grave or certified dead in the public records ... the other, a presumed lunatic, off chasing his phantom ... the surviving family, heirs to a fortune that no longer exists ... (W, 135).

However, what McIllvaine realizes is that "Donne's researches had provided an answer of a kind" (W, 135):

... that, where, before, all had been chaos and bewilderment and hurt, now it was clear that something understandable ... an act ... had been committed ... a deliberate act or series of acts ... by which we could recompose the world, comfortingly, in categories of good and evil (W, 135).

Because the intermediate element of causality between fiction and reality is implemented as a narrative device, the novel becomes a valid form of historical documentation. The novel purports that when power is misused, we might receive unintelligible bits of information, but

that we are often left not knowing their origin. The inclination to misconstrue individuals' relationships with society is therefore present in the author's fiction, yet, it is not foreign to reality. The novel does not rigorously adhere to factual documentation, but it does tell how history is formed by the forces of good and evil.

CONCLUSION

Doctorow is well-known among critics and readers for his extraordinary transfiguration of historical "facts". Critics often take cognizance of Doctorow's political beliefs that appear to be "liberal" as reflected by his non-fictional writings and the interviews with him. They also readily acknowledge that Doctorow's fiction undeniably reflects the "the real world". For example, Alexander says:

The confusion of fiction and history is most evident in the 'Coalhouse Walker' story. Unlike the other fictional characters (Mother, Tateh), Coalhouse and Sarah are named, and historical figures -- Pierpont Morgan, Booker T. Washington -- are assigned roles in their story. This inevitably created the possibility that the the [sic] 'Coalhouse' story will be read as though it were history. It is certainly given more weight by the historical detail of the context: if it did not actually happen, it could have happened (1990:137).

However, the way in which the novelist views the real world and the way he conceptualizes credibility for fictional contexts are rarely, if ever, clearly brought into relation with each other. Although detail adds to a novel's credibility, such detail alone cannot create authenticity without depending on "objective historical facts" as Doctorow does. Consequently, this study set out to examine how the author presents causality in the selected novels and posed the specific question as to what the role of causality is in relation to context. This was done by analysing events, their effects and their implications with regard to the nature of the context and consequently reality and history.

The first aim was to examine the effects of events and interpret the meaning of both the effects and the events. A second but equally important aim was to examine the nature of represented contexts which determines seminal occurrences. In explaining these aspects, the premise was that the author uses causality as a method to create a reliable reflection on and critique of history as well as the present.

One of the major points of confusion among critics regarding Doctorow's fiction is that it purports to be a valid view on history, yet displays artistic representations of how the world functions. This study has attempted to shift the attention away from verifiable facts, "the power of the regime" (Doctorow, 1994a:152) towards simulations of causative human behaviour, for example, the misuse of power which leads to events that form a context or reality.

In *The Book of Daniel* (1971), the main character, Daniel, presents an analysis of the effects of the execution of his parents, the Isaacsons, on himself and his sister, Susan. The focus is

not exclusively on the causative actions preceding the execution, but on how the identities of this couple's children, Daniel and Susan, are affected. The conclusion is that an individual can only survive within society if he or she manages to accept himself or herself as a social entity without condoning society's crimes. Daniel therefore scrutinizes the connections between society at large, institutional authority, the morality of the parents' political involvement and the fate of the children. Daniel's responses to his surroundings and events indicate that he developed an instinctive expectation that the nature of his context is marked by abuse. He describes not only his past and present contexts painstakingly, but also his reactions to discrepancies between his expectation and situations that could be considered by someone else as normal. This "study" is part of a process which enables him to remain a social being and come to terms with his parents death. Susan withdraws herself from society, which inevitably and ultimately causes her death. Daniel's examination of society therefore enables him to survive.

The irony of heterogeneous coexistence is prominent in this novel. Daniel's depiction of society means simultaneously living together, and being isolated from one another. A self-reliant citizen may experience the lack of involvement in his or her life by fellow citizens as his or her right to privacy. However, an individual who experiences hardship could experience this lack of involvement as cruelty. Daniel and Susan are not only exposed to this aspect of reality, but their lives are adversely affected by the hostility motivated by bias and disinterestedness.

Daniel recognizes that he associates America, but also the whole world, with the death of his parents. The analytical nature of the character allows him to present himself truthfully as an unpredictable, unstable, dangerous individual which stems from being "subjected" to peaceful spaces. This creates confusion as such situations seem false to him since his experience of reality has been marked by hostility.

The meaning of all events is determined by the past and Daniel's identity is formed by a dialectic between past and present. The only way that Daniel can combat self-destruction is not by trying to change the world, but by aiming to understand it. He therefore tries to come to terms with his context through writing in order to remain a social being despite the hazards involved.

Ragtime (1974) continues Doctorow's examination of how reality functions by refraining from the pretension of presenting correct historical facts, and by re-creating a political climate

which prompts causative processes. The focus of the novel's central "causative process" is the story of the black musician, Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s persistent search for justice in a racist context and the subsequent effects. *Ragtime* (which includes an adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*) is set in a carefully described context. Doctorow's novel presents prolific examples of how people of all socio-economic, racial and cultural backgrounds are interconnected with one another. It becomes clear from the narrator's representation that it is never possible to predict how causality is going to manifest because of society's tremendous diversity.

The author also foregrounds the "textuality" of the novel through the technique of prolepsis, which illustrates that the narrator/author is in control of the creative or artistic process. Furthermore, historical figures like J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford, Harry Houdini, Sigmund Freud, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, et cetera, are characters that interact with the novel's "ordinary" characters. This emphasizes that it is more important to demonstrate how history is formed by depicting tendencies in human behaviour than to render an incomplete if not questionable factual account of the past.

Loon Lake (1980) shares certain similarities with *Ragtime* and *The Book of Daniel*. It represents a character like Daniel whose identity is formed by the context in which he grows up. Joe of Paterson attempts to escape his hometown and begins to search for an ideal "world", or context. But he finds that each new context with which he comes in contact reflects the same aspects of his original context, Paterson, which is marked by spiritual poverty. Constant disappointment due to a spiritually-impoverished America leads Joe to the alternative decision of relinquishing the hope of finding fulfilment and submitting his life to the philosophy of *Loon Lake* which means to lead a capitalist's life separated from the rest of society. Joe's final spiritual destination therefore approximates that of Susan's in *The Book of Daniel*.

The narrative of *World's Fair* (1985) simulates life: it appears as a collection of loose-standing incidents. However, there is an underlying structure that comments on how reality functions. The main character, Edgar, experiences a continuous, Joycean cycle of events in which favourable incidents follow disasters and potential disasters that are followed by disasters, et cetera. The implication is that contexts are neither defined exclusively by either good or bad, construction or destruction, fortune or misfortune.

A further attribute of the characters and events in this novel is that they bear certain similarities with those in *Ragtime*. People are never disconnected from one another. For example, Edgar's consciousness is formed by an awareness of incidents like the death of a stranger, a woman hit by a car and the tremendous impact of the Second World War on the international context.

Whilst *World's Fair* pays much attention to context and history, causality appears mainly in two ways: firstly, by Edgar's mother's statement that the family's lives could have been different if different decisions had been taken earlier. For example, if Edgar's father had taken advantage of an opportunity to become a Hollywood actor. However, this implies that if this had been the case, then Edgar would have been a completely different person and not the child whom the reader gets to know in the novel.

Secondly, as in *The Book of Daniel*, an important facet of the individual's consciousness is how he or she experiences (his or her) reality which determines the development of his or her identity. *World's Fair* presents a detailed description of a childhood context and events that bear resemblances to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* which could easily be used as a substitute title for Doctorow's novel. Doctorow's sixth novel is widely known as his most autobiographical representation, in much the same way as Joyce's novel reflects on his own childhood and youth. The context in which the future novelist grows up functions like that of Stephen Dedalus, namely as a "collective cause" of the individual's development.

The Waterworks (1995) presents the story of the disappearance of Martin Pemberton, a freelance journalist. This sets the scene for a quasi detective novel. The newspaper editor for whom Martin writes, McIlvaine, leads the investigation with the assistance of an upright police officer, Captain Donne. The reason for Martin's disappearance and his preoccupation with his father's mysterious "return from the dead" which nobody believes, initially not even the narrator of the tale, is unknown to the reader. This mystery illustrates that people are usually unable to recognize the origin of causative processes active in their contexts. The "purpose" of the novel is, as Doctorow says, that it illustrates all modern industrial cultures' presumption of continuous modernity, "and the extent to which modernity is an illusion" (Tokarczyk, 1995:35). The citizen living in a society marked by feats, for example, technological or medicinal progress -- whether it be the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first century -- will be faced with what Doctorow calls "the elusiveness of villainy" (Tokarczyk, 1995:36).

The minister, Dr. Charles Grimshaw, plays a significant role in the novel. His lack of insight and inability to distinguish between characters like the protagonist, Martin Pemberton, and the antagonist, Martin's father, the evil Augustus Pemberton, are representative of the blindness of the context in which he lives. Dr. Grimshaw is supposed to be the spiritual leader of his community, but he is unable to distinguish between the moral fibre of the scientist, Dr. Sartorius, and the evil group of characters represented by Augustus Pemberton and the exploitative mayor of New York, Boss Tweed. Whereas Dr. Sartorius is only interested in acquiring knowledge, Martin, McIlvaine and Donne possess a sense of principled morality which includes compassion and concern for the members of their context.

While all of E.L. Doctorow's literary publications certainly reflect on how reality functions, it seemed sensible to limit this study to novels that portray causality and context more concretely than the play, short stories and novella do. The three novels not dealt with in this dissertation are *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), *Big as Life* (1966), *Billy Bathgate* (1989) and the recently published novel, *City of God* (2000). The first three novels mentioned here were omitted as they bear obvious genre qualities which the selected historical socio-political novels, despite differences among them, do not present. The first novel is a Western, *Big as Life* is science fiction and *Billy Bathgate* is a gangster novel. It is, however, perhaps important to consider these other novels (except *Big as Life* as Doctorow has stopped its further publication), "Drinks Before Dinner" (1979) and *Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Short Stories* (1984) in a more cursory way as they also contribute to the total "context" of Doctorow's *oeuvre*.

Welcome to Hard Times (1960) is significant as it was not only Doctorow's first novel, but also his first literary successful venture which portrays how a context functions. Arnold argues that confrontation between both exterior and interior wilderness may "take more meaning from the interpreting intelligence of the recorder than from any actual occurrences" (1983:207) which she motivates as follows:

We are all living what will one day be history, but what finally will be said and taken for fact about our era will be the interpretative work of persons who draw conclusions from their own memories and from recorded observations of participants (themselves interpreters), after the fact. ... Doctorow uses the settling, the destruction, the resettling, and the reconstruction of a Western frontier town, *Hard Times*, for his metaphor (1983:207).

The novel begins with the arrival of Clay Turner, "the Bad Man from Bodie", who kills several inhabitants of a small, isolated town and puts fire to the few buildings. Doctorow says that the "violent disturbing act, which propels the rest of the narrative" functions as the formal

connection between his novels from *Welcome to Hard Times* to *Billy Bathgate* (Morris, 1991a:45) (and certainly *The Waterworks* which followed *Billy Bathgate*).

It is important to understand precisely who this "Bad Man" is in terms of causality. The non-elected mayor of the town and the novel's narrator, Blue, professes to believe that the town has the ability to prosper. However, the Bad Man has symbolic meaning: he is the catalyst that causes destruction once despondency and pessimism about the town's future sets in. The person who believes the most firmly in the Bad Man's return even when the town actually does enjoy prosperity is Molly, a prostitute. Blue pretends that she is his wife, when she has sustained burn injuries after the Bad Man's first reign of terror, in order to alleviate her suffering by enjoying more respect. Molly remains angry at Blue for having neglected to kill the Bad Man. Unconsciously and through her fear, Molly prepares the orphan, Jimmy, to become the new Bad Man. In *Ragtime* Emma Goldman professes that the poor class does not long for justice, but wealth. Tateh does not adhere to his socialist ideals. It is simply easier to choose a position which offers external power once it is attainable. Jimmy, whose father had been killed by Turner, has the choice to either overcome his fear of being victimized or becoming an aggressor. The Bad Man from *Bodie* therefore signifies realized fear.

Once it is established that the mine in the vicinity of Hard Times does not produce gold anymore, Blue, the shopkeeper, Isaac Maple, and the Russian saloon owner, Zar, do not leave town. Blue's flaw is that he, like Joe of Paterson, believes that everything is the same everywhere. This indicates a basic pessimism despite his efforts in the interest of the town which gives him the reputation of an optimist. Blue says to a trader, Alf, that "[t]he town will be up like a weed before you know it ..." (WHT, 77). Alf responds by saying: "Well now Blue I always liked you, yessir. If you was hanging by your fingers from a cliff you'd call it climbin' a mountain" (WHT, 77). Yet, the end of the novel reveals Blue's irrevocable hopelessness when he addresses a fictional reader living in a city:

Do you think, mister, with all that settlement around you that you're freer than me to make your fate? ... Your father's doing is in you, like his father's was in him, and we can never start new, we take on all the burden: the only thing that grows is trouble, the disasters get bigger, that's all (WHT, 184)

The irony of the story is that once Blue has managed to kill Turner he realizes: "He was just a man, my God! I felt his weight, I felt the weight of him over my shoulder ..." (WHT, 207). The reader realizes in retrospect that Blue had been able to kill him the first time when he had come to Hard Times:

Right then my hand began to move and I meant for it to go for my gun. But it went instead for the glass on the bar; I felt at that moment that I wanted to please him, I was almost glad to drink (WHT, 18).

Blue's dying moments are characterized by fear. He says: "The first time I ran, the second time I stood up to him, but I failed both times, no matter what I've done it has failed" (WHT, 212). This is an incredibly bleak representation of how reality functions. However, it is the reader's responsibility to recognize that the inhabitants' of *Hard Time's* approach is rigged by certain causative powers:

Welcome to Hard Times is a testimony to human stories that keep repeating themselves, stories of greed, exploitation, hope, courage, cowardice, recklessness, love, need, revenge, death. This is human history, this is what keeps the earth turning back in its tracks (Arnold, 1983:216).

The truth of human history is primarily based on the causes that are represented. In *Welcome to Hard Times* the most important cause of the town's first and second downfall is fear of the possibility that all one's efforts will be in vain.

"Drinks Before Dinner" (1979) is a play which seems on its surface to be far removed from Doctorow's first novel. However, one finds the similarity of the concern of "the end": in *Welcome to Hard Times* the end of a Western frontier town and in "Drinks Before Dinner" the end of the world. The play portrays a period of time before dinner when a man who shares Doctorow's first name, Edgar, hijacks a dinner party, forcing the people attending it to see what the society in which they are living is really like. Edgar begins to analyse society in the company of his friends and identifies the clichés, pretensions and moral vices of society. He then takes a handgun from his breast pocket and all the guests flee away from him, leaving him isolated. This is meaningful metaphorically with regard to the position of the artist who is critical of the society in which he or she lives, as Edgar is similar to an artist. The gun that he is holding represents a threatening gesture, but is also a mere fiction as it is not loaded and unable to perform any physical harm. His action to bring forth a gun is to him merely a logical action:

CLAUDETTE ... And you knew you were going to pull it.

EDGAR No, I had no idea! In fact, I had almost forgotten I was carrying it until Joel perceived I was inconsolable ... (DD, 27).

Edgar's inconsolableness strangely enough has a positive twist. The guest of honour, Alan, presumably the fictional American Secretary of State, is tied down to a chair. When he

confirms Edgar's concerns that the end of the world is approaching, Andrea, a character who is willing to discuss Edgar's ideas, says:

Somehow your words are ruining the end of the world for me! I supposed the idea of ending the world contained the idea of replacing it with something better. But I don't get that feeling from you. I get the feeling of the dead end from you ... (DD, 44).

As is the case in *Welcome to Hard Times*, the pessimism is overwhelming considering the story as Blue's assessment. Yet, it functions as a touchstone for the reader with regard to how to approach reality. In "Drinks Before Dinner" one recognizes the necessity for politicians to be optimistic and determined to be active in creating a harmonious international context, whilst artists, like "Edgar", are supposed to be as graphic as possible in their criticism in describing the context of the class of which they are part.

Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Short Stories (1984) continues to analyse the role of the writer. The book's six short stories written by the fictional writer of the novella form an exploration of the nature of writing itself (Matterson, 1993:113). The first story, "The Writer in the Family", presents the scenario in which the novella's narrator/writer, Jonathan, writes fictional letters from his deceased father to his grandmother on request from his aunts. These aunts do not want to reveal to their mother that her son had actually passed away. The fictional letters impart a sound and enlightening representation of Jack, Jonathan's father: "'The Writer in the Family' concludes subtly with a complex and dual message: although fiction is deceit, made-up stories, it can reveal truths that facts alone cannot" (Matterson, 1993:113). Aunt Frances says to the young Jonathan: "You're so right, he loved to go places, he loved life, he loved everything" (LP, 5). However, the gist of the story is that it is Jonathan's unavoidable obligation to stop writing the letters as these fictions which do convey truths stand in the service of a lie. Jonathan then rejects the lie by writing a last fictional letter which informs his mother that he is dying "... of the wrong life. I should never have come to the desert. It wasn't the place for me" (LP, 17).

The second story, "The Water Works", is about a child that drowns at the waterworks in New York. Workers take the corpse out of the water and a "black-bearded captain" rushes off with it. This story is enveloped by mystery which one understands having read *The Waterworks*. Events and actions as this one allow insufficient understanding due to a lack of perspective and serve as examples of the limited degree of our understanding of history.

The third story, "Willi", is about a boy's mother who commits adultery with his tutor, Ledig. This seminal event affects Willi's personal context. He is confused and feels that he cannot

continue in his context any longer: "How, in that rural isolation, could I be expected to go on?" (LP, 31). He is compelled to indirectly tell his father what has happened. His father subsequently beats his mother which has an irrevocably destructive effect on their family life. Willi's concluding observation is: "This was in Galicia in the year 1910. All of it was to be destroyed anyway, even without me" (LP, 35). The causative process leads to the disintegration of the family, yet, an external development also ensures an end of the life that the family has known. One cannot omit the possibility of self-deception here -- due to the implication that the War has a consoling effect.

The following stories, "The Hunter", "The Foreign Legation" and "The Leather Man" are strange tales that relay elusive events. "The Hunter" is about a female school teacher whose actions seem to be very unusual. Matterson points out that the novella reveals that Jonathan had or has an affair with a woman who had taught in a grade school to pay for her university tuition. The story represents Jonathan imagining her situation. It is "... concerned with the writer's empathetic ability to enter and understand other lives ..." (Matterson, 1993:119).

"The Foreign Legation" presents the character, Morgan, a failed family man, whom Doctorow identifies as a "surrogate writer" (Matterson, 1993:120) who waits for something to happen. He seems to be conscious of the heterogeneous coexistence of his context as he senses that something has happened in his own or an adjoining neighbourhood (LP, 54). He deliberates on the multicultural composition of the city and he goes to a diner (which evokes the image of the locale where Susan attempted suicide) where a multicultural menu is handed to him. However, most of the story is mysterious and ends with the surprising end of a bomb explosion which could also be viewed as a product of Morgan's imagination. His reaction following the explosion is: "Did I do this? he said, trying to smile, trying to make himself presentable, smoothing his hair with his bloodied hand" (LP, 63). This concern reflects the inability of the self-examining writer to be separate from the world (Matterson, 1993:121).

"The Leather Man" is a tremendously complex story which Doctorow acknowledges has puzzled a lot of readers (Morris, 1991b:449). It presents a derelict figure, the Leather Man, who signifies the situation of the writer as well: "The Leather Man's sense of estrangement identifies him, of course, with the modern artist whose perceptions are also sharpest when he feels detached" (Levine, 1985:82). Although inseparable from the world, the artist is simultaneously an outsider like Edgar in "Drinks Before Dinner" who becomes isolated from the party guests while rendering his views on society while an illusion of physical danger exists.

The impression which the novella "Lives of the Poets" creates, is that its narrator, almost like Daniel, attempts through analysis to come to terms with his context and his role in it. It is a piece that represents a writer's study of his personal context and its often shallow, ominous and amoral aspects. The novella creates the impression that it is autobiographical as one recognizes observations and anecdotes that appear in "Drinks Before Dinner", whose main character is Doctorow's namesake, *World's Fair*, Doctorow's undisputed fictionalized autobiography which covers approximately the first ten years of "Edgar's" life, and Doctorow's 1990 essay "James Wright at Kenyon", published in *Poets and Presidents: Selected Essays, 1977-1992* (1994a). However, Harter and Thompson warn not to read Jonathan as finally, simply Doctorow and offer this explanation as to what the gist of the novella entails:

Invoking Dr. Johnson's deadly serious *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) for savagely ironic purposes, Doctorow clearly wants us to see the world of the contemporary artist as narcissistic, frequently shallow, and, more often than not, nonproductive. All the artist couples Jonathan knows are virtually mirror images of all the others: multiple marriages and affairs, flights and escapes into one panacea or sect or another, endless self-indulgence (1990:101).

Billy Bathgate (1989) is a novel that presents a context famous for its corruption. It is about a boy who becomes part of a Mafia world lead by the notorious Arthur Flegenheimer, known as Dutch Schultz. The story is also set in a "recognizable historical America". However, the focus of Billy's narration is on the context of the Mafia world.

The novel contains many descriptions of gangster behaviour which adds to the entertainment value of the book. The novel is well-crafted, yet, despite impressive and shocking descriptions of murders, it contains also comic elements, namely portrayals of clichéd gangster logic, language, custom, and justice.

Billy Bathgate is nevertheless as profound as Doctorow's other novels and *The Waterworks* that followed it five years later. Williams also points out that it is a repository of previous Doctorow themes and characters:

In addition to the setting (New York in the 1930s) some of Doctorow's familiar themes surface: the Oedipal struggle from *Loon Lake*, the boy's rite of passage from *World's Fair* and others, an orphaned narrator constructing a new identity or worldview from *The Book of Daniel*, *Loon Lake*, and *Ragtime* (1996:134).

The novel contains noteworthy elements with regard to causality, context and history. Billy tells Bo Weinberg's girlfriend, Miss Drew, that he comes from a criminal Bronx background. The boys of his environment are proud that Dutch Schultz has a beer drop in the

neighbourhood and Billy says early in the novel that he is proud to have been called “capable” by someone who is distinguished by words like “dangerous” and “maniacal” (BB, 4). Billy says: “It was juggling that had got me where I was” (BB, 22). This is the first event which draws Schultz’s attention to Billy. Billy becomes a reliable assistant in the mob and dreams of becoming one of Dutch Schultz’s gangsters.

The main character does not seem to be as timid as Jimmy in *Welcome to Hard Times*, but one could argue that fear also motivates him. Being a gang member would offer protection in many respects and greed for financial security is recognizable once the Schultz gang is wiped out: “... nothing was over, it was all still going on, the money was deathless, the money was eternal, the love of it was infinite” (BB, 318).

The most prominent connection between the “real world” and the “gangster world” is that the latter is a metaphor for real world business activities as Parks (1991a:119) points out. In the novel itself these worlds exist parallel to each other, yet are mostly detached from each other. When the public becomes aware of gangster activities, it is usually accompanied by thrilled amazement: “... murders are exciting and lift people into a heart-beating awe as religion is supposed to do ...” (BB, 305). The same admiration that Billy’s neighbourhood boys have for Dutch Schultz is apparently shared by a jury, representatives of the general public, when the gangster is found not guilty of tax evasion. The judge is horrified and says to the jury:

‘Ladies and gentlemen, in all my years on the bench I have never witnessed such disdain of truth and evidence as you have manifested this day. ... You are dismissed with no thanks from the court for your service. You are a disgrace’ (BB, 257).

This verdict may be attributed to the compassion which the public experiences for Dutch Schultz as they recognize themselves in him and envy the way he allows himself to live. Billy says: “And something like a revelation had come to me through my school lessons: I was living in even greater circles of gangsterdom than I had dreamed, latitudes and longitudes of gangsterdom” (BB, 320).

Considering D.H. Lawrence’s dictum that one should trust the tale and not the teller, a study of E.L. Doctorow’s fiction, non-fiction and critical writings on his fiction and non-fiction, leads one to two conclusions. Firstly, one can indeed trust Doctorow’s tales in as far as they provide an insightful and reliable representation of the past and how it was formed. Secondly, it seems that one can also trust the teller when one compares the principles of his essay “False Documents” to his fiction. “False Documents” and the novelist’s literary works remind one that fiction is a form of discourse that has the ability to facilitate an understanding of history

and reality. Understanding, dependent on the reader's ability to recognize causative processes and what motivates them, is accommodated by the language of fictional writing. Doctorow says in his essay:

As a writer of fiction I could make the claim that a sentence spun from imagination, i.e., a sentence composed as a lie, confers upon the writer a degree of perception or acuity or heightened awareness -- some additional usefulness -- that a sentence composed with the most strict reverence for fact does not (1994a:152).

Doctorow continues to distinguish between two kinds of "powers" in language. He calls one "the power of the regime" or information presented by a "rational mentality" (1994a:152) which provides facts that can be verified. The other is called "the power of freedom" which is the opposite of the former as its truthfulness cannot be verified, yet, which possesses the ability to convey truth.

This study has argued that the essential facet in the power of freedom lending credibility to fiction is causality. Doctorow refers in the opening passage of "False Documents" to the transaction between reader and writer and concludes that "[a] novel is a printed circuit through which flows the force of a reader's own life" (1994a:151). The novel requires the reader to compare the represented context to reality -- even if the novel in question represents a culturally foreign context -- with his or her own knowledge, experience and sensibility. This ought not to be a problem: when Milan Kundera was asked whether it was important to know the history of Czechoslovakia to understand his novels he responded: "No. Whatever needs to be known of it the novel itself tells" (Kundera, 1990:39). This is also the case in Doctorow's novels because his narratives are not in essence re-creations of historical periods *per se*, but perspectives on how reality is formed and functions.

The power of freedom implies that fiction functions differently from any other kind of discourse. Compare the following statements by Doctorow and Kundera:

Fiction is not entirely rational means of discourse. It gives to the reader something more than information. Complex understandings, indirect, intuitive, and nonverbal, arise from the words of the story, and by a ritual transaction between reader and writer, instructive emotion is generated in the reader from the illusion of suffering an experience not his own (Doctorow, 1994a:151).

In its own way, through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one ... (Kundera, 1990:5).

Reading novels is a learning process which has directive aspects in educating the reader about various aspects and dimensions of human existence. A significant difference between the powers of the regime and freedom is that the first has a limitation regarding education. It is

supposed to be understood as it is presented, and once grasped, not to be interpreted differently. The power of freedom, on the other hand, allows countless ways to understand. The error of the "industrial society" which counts its achievements by focusing on the discoveries of science, empirical thinking and precise calculations (Doctorow, 1994a:152) is that it suffers from the narrow mentality of wanting to learn only in "one way". Doctorow's protest is that

[i]n our society there is no presumption of truth in the art of storytelling except in the minds of children. We have complex understandings of the different functions of language and we can all recognize the aesthetic occasion and differentiate it from a 'real' one (Doctorow, 1994a:154).

The bias towards the power of freedom does not mean denial of the real world. On the contrary, Doctorow argues that a society which is more focused on business may very well marginalize the artist as an influential presence, but a country in the throws of conflict is sensitive to the writer's subjective views: the focus is "not hard currency here, but ideology, conviction and existence" (Doctorow, 1994a:158):

In those countries which are not advanced industrial democracies the writer is treated with more respect. In Burma or Iran or Chile or Indonesia or the Soviet Union, it is understood that a writer using the common coin of the political speech or the press release or the newspaper editorial to compose facts in play has the power to do harm (Doctorow, 1994a:158).

The irony underlying this comment implies that during times of industrial prosperity, people focus on an existence passed on by material prosperity. This inevitability leads to ignorance fostered by an attitude that regards a "factual account" as a representation which conveys absolute truth. John Carlos Rowe points out that both postmodernism and poststructuralism that coexist with sophisticated industrialism share a rejection of absolutes and a view that language structures reality (Williams, 1996:6). In whatever way the factual world is represented, it is not going to be the real world anymore. Doctorow has expressed this sentiment by saying that there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction, but only narrative (1994a:163). Similarly, he commented on the "factuality" of history by saying that "[t]here is an objective event, but it is construed, until it is evaluated, it does not exist as history" (Levine, 1988:184).

After the world has been "processed" in the novel form, the world is not the world anymore, but as a written text a vehicle which brings one to an understanding of the real world and existence, even if it only functions as a touchstone for the reader's own opinions. It is

significant that Kundera emphasizes that the novel deals with existence when he says in "The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes":

In its own way, through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one: with Cervantes and his contemporaries, it inquires into the nature of adventure; with Richardson, it begins to examine 'what happens inside', to unmake the secret life of the feelings; with Balzac, it discovers man's rootedness in history; with Flaubert, it explores the *terra* previously *incognita* of the everyday; with Tolstoy, it focuses on the intrusion of the irrational in human behaviour and decisions. It probes time: the elusive past with Proust, the elusive present with Joyce. With Thomas Mann, it examines the role of the myths from the remote past that control our present actions. Et cetera, et cetera (1990:5).

The reader will find that Doctorow's fiction has the "purpose" of sensitizing the reader with regard to aspects of history and reality and, as a matter of course, Doctorow does not have any ambition to let his documents function as "absolute truths". The novelist's opinion is that

... there is a saving grace: since history can be composed, you see, then you want to have as many people active in the composition as possible. A kind of democracy of perception. ... I think you may hope to reach the objective view with a multiplicity of witness; the important thing is to have as many sources of information, as many testimonies as possible -- because if you don't, history turns into mythology. If you don't constantly recompose and re-interpret history, then it begins to tighten its grip on your throat as myth and you find yourself in some kind of totalitarian society, either secular or religious. So the test of any society is its resistance to the subjective. That is the way to truth and freedom (Levine, 1988:184).

Doctorow's fiction offers rich material to generate other fictional as well as critical writings. This dissertation has argued that *The Book of Daniel* implies that one can only survive in society as a social being and that a victim of injustice therefore has to find a constructive way to do so; *Ragtime* suggests that people's fate is considerably dependent on interaction, while one recognizes in *Loon Lake* that the greater part of a broad national context is subject to spiritual poverty. *World's Fair* provides one with the insight that the context in which one lives is defined by both tragic as well as auspicious facets -- but never by one alone. *The Waterworks* presents the reader with the awareness that contexts often do not allow a "bird's eye view" which obstructs one's ability to understand history and/or reality and the people that share a context.

In all of Doctorow's novels one recognizes that the relationship among human beings on the planet implies interconnectedness. As a result, causality is a very unpredictable power and not only governmental and institutional authority, but people in general neglect their responsibility to behave in a civilized and humane way. For example, a result such as death is meaningful when one understands what the motivations are that have preceded the result. Doctorow says: "... it seems to me there would be no moral ascription to any death without

an understanding of the cause of the death, the means of the dying, or the circumstances of it" (Morris, 1991b:441).

Williams opens his book *Fiction as False Document: The Reception of E.L. Doctorow in the Postmodern Age* by supporting Stephen Mailloux's complaint that the American critical enterprise has neglected how historical factors shape assessments (1996:1). He furthermore points out that the *avant-garde* kept English studies in -- to borrow Frederic Jameson's term -- the "prison-house of language" (1996:1). Causality is a historical factor that should be taken into account. In order to understand the present and the past one should focus on the reason for certain actions and why events take place. The result would not be a "false" document if a writer manages to re-create a recognizable context and employ the power of causality -- or the power of freedom -- instead of "precise referentiality" -- or the power of the regime as Doctorow does:

Doctorow's use of the phrase 'false documents' reeks of irony: fiction masquerades as the factual in order to work through facts to a deeper truth. The phrase affirms the power of literature, but has meaning only if literature points to something beyond itself. If it cannot tell the truth, however problematic the truth may be, then it can hardly be ultimate discourse. When the latest postmodern criticism engages the work of Doctorow, whatever else it may do, let us hope that it preserves questions of human value and meaning, for without that purpose, criticism can hardly hope to convince anyone of the value of fiction (Williams, 1996:154).

The optimism of the novelist lies in the hope that humankind's battle between good and evil will not incontrovertibly be lost by identifying the processes that form our world and showing them to the world.

This dissertation has hopefully given some indication of the strong foundation that exists for future studies. While its focus has been on the relationship between Doctorow's fiction and how historians document past events, it would certainly be beneficial to the existing corpus of Doctorow studies if historians would join the academic "multiplicity of witness" by comparative analyses. South African perspectives -- seeing that our country often mirrors the social diversity of the United States -- would also offer fertile ground for investigation and comparison. It would also be interesting to examine Doctorow's latest novel, *City of God*, published by Random House in February 2000 with regard to its relation to the seminal aspects of Doctorow's fiction discussed in this dissertation.

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