



Hard Times as Bodie: the allegorical functionality in E.L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960)

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Abstract

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"Welcome to Hard Times" (1960), E.L. Doctorow's first novel, differs from the rest of his oeuvre because it is not set in a metropolitan context like New York. References to historical events that contain an apparent "mixture" of "factual" and fictional elements that are typical of Doctorow's oeuvre are less prominent than in his other fiction, though definitely not absent. An analysis of the pioneer setting, the town Hard Times, reveals that other settings (including metropolitan ones like New York) are not merely representations of specific contexts, but portrayals with allegorical elements. Criticism of Doctorow's fiction does not sufficiently point out the rationale of Doctorow's fiction in relation to his first novel: it is not just the basic level that contains the true topicality but also the underlying causal and thematic relationships. This article sets out to explore "Welcome to Hard Times" as a case in point. The objective of this article is therefore also to show that an analysis of this novel provides a valuable basis for understanding the allegorical character of his fiction. Angus Fletcher's theoretical analysis, "Allegory: the theory of a symbolic mode" (1964), serves as a useful starting point for the analysis of the allegorical value of space and the town Hard Times as a microcosmic or symbolic society, as well as the "daemoniac agents" in the town and the role of causality.

Opsomming

Hard Times as Bodie: die allegoriese funksionaliteit in E.L. Doctorow se *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960)

"Welcome to Hard Times" (1960), E.L. Doctorow se eerste roman, verskil van die res van sy oeuvre omdat dit nie in 'n metropolitaanse konteks, soos New York, geplaas is nie. Verwysings na historiese gebeure wat 'n skynbare "vermenging" van feitelike en fiktiewe elemente bevat, tipies van Doctorow se oeuvre, is minder prominent as in sy ander fiksie, hoewel dit beslis nie afwesig is nie. 'n Analise van die pionieruimte, die dorp Hard Times, toon dat ander ruimtes (insluitend metropolitaanse ruimtes soos New York) nie bloot representasies van spesifieke kontekste is nie, maar uitbeeldings met allegoriese elemente. Kritici wys nie genoegsaam die rasionaal van Doctorow se fiksie in die lig van sy eerste roman uit nie: dit is nie net die basiese vlak wat die ware aktualiteit bevat nie, maar ook die onderliggende kousale en tematiese verhoudings. Hierdie artikel het ten doel om "Welcome to Hard Times" as 'n pertinente geval te ondersoek. Die doelwit is daarom ook om aan te toon dat 'n ontleding van hierdie roman 'n waardevolle basis kan bied vir die verstaan van die allegoriese karakter van Doctorow se fiksie. Angus Fletcher se teoretiese analise, "Allegory: the theory of a symbolic mode" (1964), dien as 'n nuttige vertrekpunt vir die analise van die allegoriese waarde van ruimte en die dorp Hard Times as 'n mikrokosmiese of simboliese gemeenskap, sowel as die "demoniese agente" in die dorp en die rol van kousaliteit.

1. Introduction

E.L. Doctorow's criticism of President George W. Bush in a commencement address at Hofstra University in 2004 and his piece "The unfeeling president" published in the *Easthampton Star* (9 September 2004) may influence readers to view Doctorow's fiction, like his latest novel *The March* (2005), as "political" and of "historical" significance. As Williams (1996:65) points out, the critical reception of Doctorow focused on the political and historical concerns of an author with an inclination for experimentation. He has been called a "radical Jewish humanist" (Clayton, 1983:109) and compared to Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller, who are also "distrustful of and yet spellbound by the misuses of power" (Fowler,

1992:1, 6). The abuse of power is certainly a prominent theme throughout his oeuvre.¹

Despite appearances, Doctorow does not actually blend fictional and (f)actual historical spaces, events and figures. Levine (1985:52) notes that to Doctorow, objective history is a chimera. The author argues in his essay "False documents" (1977) that "there is no fiction or nonfiction ... [t]here is only narrative" (Doctorow, 1994:163). Referring to Barthes' "Historical discourse", Doctorow concludes that a visitor from another planet could not by studying the techniques of discourse distinguish composed fiction from composed history (Doctorow, 1994:161). According to Doctorow, historical figures like Union General William Tecumseh Sherman in *The March*, Boss Tweed (William M. Tweed) in *The Waterworks* (1995), J.P. Morgan in *Ragtime* (1974) et cetera are just as fictional in history books as they are in his novels.

History books and Doctorow's novels both narrate events about characters with the same or altered names (for instance, the Rosenbergs that "become" the Isaacs in *The Book of Daniel* (1971). Experimentation within the logical boundaries of the fictional context is a famous Doctorovian characteristic. It is striking in novels in which history is prominent, like *The Book of Daniel* and *The March*, and equally so in his first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960). His first novel differs from his other works in terms of setting and the *apparent* absence of fictional figures based on "real" historical figures. However, this article will argue that such figures are not completely absent in the first novel either. Although Trenner (1983:3) observes that the Dakota territory setting in *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) is "foreign to the New York City of the thirties and forties that was Doctorow's childhood world" as in *World's Fair* (1985), it should be kept in mind that most of Doctorow's fiction is ultimately about the social impact of power relations.

Welcome to Hard Times tells the tale of the relationship between a community and the "Bad Man from Bodie", a figure that is representative of the community's fears. The initially nameless town in the Dakota Territory, a stark desert landscape, owes its existence to the income of workers of a nearby mine camp. This wasteland suggests the idea of not only material, but also of spiritual poverty. The novel begins when the Bad Man rapes the prostitute Florence and kills

1 This concern has received critical attention, for example, in Friedl (1988).

several people, including Fee, her boyfriend, who is a carpenter and the father of Jimmy Fee. After pillaging and burning down the town, he disappears, leaving behind the constant fear of his return. After the attack, Blue (who is regarded as the mayor of the town due to his record keeping), nurses Molly Riordan (a prostitute who sustained severe burns), with the help of an Indian, John Bear. Molly resents Blue for not having stood up to the Bad Man. Blue encourages Zar (a Russian merchant and a pimp who was attracted by the light of the devastating fire) to start a new town with a saloon and his prostitutes, and they begin to rebuild the town. After a harsh winter, the inhabitants begin to prosper, but then news reaches the town that the mine will be shut down. The Bad Man finally returns and again causes havoc which is part of the allegory's manifestation of the fear in *Hard Times*. He is killed, but not until many others have died. Under Molly's influence, Jimmy emerges as the "new" Bad Man.

Early critics described Doctorow's first novel as an allegory of good and evil (Williams, 1996:19-20), while his later works – especially *The Book of Daniel* and *Ragtime* – are commonly regarded as reinventions of more recent history with a political slant. Bevilacqua (1989:89) points out that the hyper-realistic presentations of the desert landscape confers on it the significance of a symbolic "Wasteland" in which one also recognises social breakdown, individual powerlessness and enslaving feelings of doubt, loss, and disorientation. These are certainly also themes in the author's later works.

Yet, in an interview with the author, McCaffery (1983:36) observes that *Welcome to Hard Times* and *Big as Life* (1966) both "lie pretty far outside the realm of traditional, realistic fiction". The suggestion that the setting in *Welcome to Hard Times* is "less realistic" – and therefore perhaps less historical – than those portrayed in his other novels might be due to Doctorow's choice of the Western as a genre. However, Doctorow's New York novels are certainly not more "credible" because the author is a native New Yorker and because he admits that he had never been west of Ohio at the time of writing the novel (McCaffery, 1983:33). O'Connell (1988:86-87) indicates that a characteristic of modern allegories is that realism is abandoned in favour of imaginative projection. Despite the allegorical features in Doctorow's fiction, he subverts this specific characteristic of allegory to an extent. He retains in all of his novels, certainly also in *Welcome to Hard Times*, a strong sense of realism that is part of the imaginative projection. His rationale for his ap-

proach in *Welcome to Hard Times* involved "... that I liked the idea of using disreputable genre materials and doing something serious with them. I liked invention. I liked myth"² (McCaffery, 1983: 36). The West is the vehicle of the counter-theme in *Welcome to Hard Times*. Likewise, a setting like New York is also the vehicle of the counter-theme in, for example, *The Waterworks*.

But why did Doctorow choose to write a Western? His inspiration for his first novel came from reading screenplays for a film company. He developed what he described as a "contrapuntal idea of what the West must really have been like" (McCaffery, 1983:35). On the surface the theme of *Welcome to Hard Times* is the destruction of the town, Hard Times, followed by its re-construction. The counter-themes are fear and excessive self-interest that lead to a community's downfall. Arnold (1983a:94) concludes that the town, Hard Times, charts the rise and fall of civilisations and that the reason for its downfall is its immorality and lack of religious values. The real subject matter is the way in which the relationship between the powerful and the powerless in a society impacts on that society. Like Doctorow's other fiction *Welcome to Hard Times* pretends to be "reality" or "history" that are "contorted" and "unreliable". However, *Welcome to Hard Times* is similar to many of Doctorow's later works in that the surface meaning is subordinate to the counter-theme of the allegory.

Like some other critics, Core only fleetingly refers to *Welcome to Hard Times* (in a collection of reviews on a dozen Western novels) as an allegory of good and evil that has the stark symmetry of a morality play (Core, 1981:393). Morris (1991a:29) remarks that the features of the Bad Man (his shadowy first appearance, his associations with "Bodie", and the ambiguous "true name") prompt consideration of the novel as an allegory in which the Bad Man serves as an example of embodiment or personification of fear and evil.

This article therefore probes the literary purpose of the allegorical mode in *Welcome to Hard Times*, the role of the metaphoric, causal and thematic relations, and its relevance to the rest of Doctorow's oeuvre. An analysis of his first novel would help the reader to

2 In the light of the allegorical quality of the novel it would make sense that Doctorow (lightly) implies that his narrative and classical Greek myths have the similarity in common of explaining "why the world is as it is and things happen as they do" (Abrams, 2005:178).

understand his oeuvre as a whole better. As a "Western,"³ the text *appears* to be different from his third novel⁴ and subsequent fiction. However, this article argues that all Doctorow's works share the common feature that they are portrayals of specific contexts with "universal" implications. Reading a text as having universal value has come to be regarded as a Eurocentric vice in a postcolonial world: Bassnett (1993:19) describes this "vice" as "common trans-cultural sharing of emotional experience" and observes that it "disregarded the vicissitudes of literary history". This reading of Doctorow's work, however, does not propose disregarding the uniqueness of individual cultures. Rather, it intends to point out that the factuality and realism in Doctorow's work are not in support of "historical viability", since his fiction has allegorical elements.

The aim of this article is to read the novel as an allegory in order to show that the value of his work is imbedded in the metaphoric, causal and thematic relationships. The novelist's aim is subjective logic; not the pretence of "factual" or "historical" credibility.

This article will firstly discuss the concept "allegory" in relation to Doctorow's first novel. The article will then explore how real or historical and allegorical spaces and events reflect on a society; the role of the daemonic agent and its allegorical and real levels; and causality and magic as the links between the primary and secondary levels of meaning. Finally, discussing some of Doctorow's metropolitan novels, it will indicate that it is a principle in Doctorow's oeuvre that the "immediate" account serves as a basis for figurative meaning.

2. Allegory

In his article "Formalism and its malcontents: Benjamin and de Man on the function of allegory", Hansen (2005:670) remarks that artworks in which characters appear to embody virtue or lust simply and unproblematically always seem a bit forced, to say the least. However, personification is only one characteristic of modern allegory that is far more subtly and indirectly used than in earlier

3 The genre generally implies a "cowboy story" that celebrates the "frontier spirit" characterised by bravery and a clear division between good and evil. However, this article will show how Doctorow subverts these conventions of the genre.

4 Doctorow has ceased publication of his second novel, *Big as Life*, a science fiction novel about two giants that find themselves in New York harbour, as he regards it as a failure.

allegory (O'Connell, 1988:87). This is indeed the case in *Welcome to Hard Times*.

Ullén indicates that allegory depends a lot on the reader. He argues that any genuine allegorical interpretation “must proceed on the assumption that what the interpreted text is ultimately about is the way it is read ...” (Ullén, 2001:195). Furthermore, allegory cannot escape being caught in the middle of lying and telling the truth:

It lies, in pretending to set free a meaning it cannot deliver; and it does not lie, in making itself out to be simultaneously the source, constraint and emancipation, of allegory and *allegoresis*. (Ullén, 2001:195.)

Although Ullén acknowledges that allegorical interpretation is indispensable, he concludes that it is metaphorically true, yet metonymically false and the only means to fulfil its attempt at totalisation is through the means of synecdoche.

A reading based on the principles in Angus Fletcher's book, *Allegory: the theory of a symbolic mode* (1964), would certainly not presume to strive towards totalisation or “positing the anagogical sense of the text as yet another sense to be found *within* the text” (Ullén, 2001:187; his emphasis). Although more than 40 years old, Fletcher's book still provides a valid basis for hermeneutic analysis – especially with regard to its treatment of space, names, the daemonic agency and the use of magic in allegory – that enables the reader to access the metaphoric level of a text to a greater extent than before.

O'Connell (1988:86-87) distinguishes characteristics of modern allegory in her dissertation, *Traditional allegory and its post-modernist use in the novels of J.M. Coetzee*. She describes allegory as consisting of multiple levels, namely the literal or surface level, and underlying levels of meaning. This corresponds to Fletcher's theory that secondary meaning arises from the primary surface of a literal narration (Fletcher, 1970:220-221). A characteristic of allegory is that realism is abandoned in favour of imaginative projection. Furthermore, allegory is often ironical and satirical, and also largely psychological, concerned with inner rather than external conflict. It uses subtle and indirect personification, and it examines relationships between the powerful and the oppressed. Like most of Doctorow's fiction, allegory delivers disguised political and social commentary. It reflects people's alienation and their futile search for meaning. Allegory also often uses universal themes.

Traditionally there are two levels present in an allegory: the basic context and the reader's interpretation of that context. The allegorical story of the town, Hard Times, entails much more than the difficult circumstances of a nineteenth century pioneer society. The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is not merely specific, but like a parable or a model for an idea that serves as universal political and social commentary.

Welcome to Hard Times creates the impression that very little of its content could be regarded as "factual". Doctorow recounts that he received a letter from an elderly woman in Texas who wrote:

Young man, when you said that Jenks enjoyed for his dinner the roasted haunch of a prairie dog, I knew you'd never been west of the Hudson. Because the haunch of a prairie dog wouldn't fill a teaspoon. (Weber, 1985:25.)

This illustrates Doctorow's subordination of fact to invention and his belief that the novelist's imagination is autonomous (Weber, 1985: 25).

The "realistic" descriptions of spaces, objects, humans, animals, et cetera in the novel are almost entirely imaginary, yet the setting is the "real" Dakota Territory of the 1880s⁵ (Freese, 1987:204). However, the story invites one to suspend one's disbelief consciously when reading it on the primary level in order to interpret the "deeper" meaning of the text. Fletcher (1970:7) points out that one does not need to read an allegory exegetically because it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself. However, he remarks that it is worthwhile to do so because owing to the "peculiar doubleness of intention" it becomes much richer and more interesting if given interpretation. The meaning of the text depends on how ambitious the reader is in excavating the possibilities of meaning in the text.

Welcome to Hard Times can be read as a Western which portrays the suffering of a pioneering community due to a merciless environment and the destruction brought about by the external "Bad Man from Bodie". However, social qualities form the centre of the allegory when one considers the causes of the events in the novel. Bevilacqua (1989:87) maintains that Doctorow's argument casts a

5 Freese (1987:204) explains that the action must take place between 1861, when the Dakota Territory – of which the town Hard Times is part – was organised and 1889, when both Dakotas achieved statehood.

shadow over the fundamental qualities of the American character – their rugged individualism, egalitarianism, self-reliance, practicality, and materialistic outlook on life – and that *Hard Times* is far from being free from the limiting and corrupting institutions of the metropolis. What applies to *Hard Times* is also relevant for New York because the same individual and collective qualities that determine the course of action in *Hard Times* are also present in, for example, Billy Bathgate's New York.

Like many of Doctorow's other novels, *Welcome to Hard Times* is a social commentary that represents universal tyranny and victimisation in which the tyrant and the victim are metaphors for other tyrants and victims. For example, in *The Book of Daniel*, the tyrant, the state, and the victims (the citizens) reflect the relationship between the state and its citizens in America in the 1950s. This theme links *The Book of Daniel* to many of Doctorow's other novels.

A specific form of victimisation, namely enslavement, is the result of a typical agent in allegorical fiction. Fletcher (1970:286-287) calls it a daemon for whom freedom of active choice hardly exists. Whether this threat is external or internal, that is, psychological or combined, the meaning of one text is seldom if ever exclusively specific, but extends to other contexts. Doctorow's fiction often serves as "mirrors", not to present historical and present contexts, but the causality that formed them.

Hard Times does not escape its compulsive behaviour of being "possessed" by an idea (Fletcher, 1970:287), namely that the inhabitants are powerless and the Bad Man is invincible. The allegory uses the physical characteristics and history of a real town as a vehicle for the daemon.

3. Space and society⁶ in the historical Bodie and the allegorical *Hard Times*

The difference between the real and the allegorical becomes apparent in a comparison between the historical mining town, Bodie, and the physical space of the fictional town, *Hard Times*. Bodie's history (like *Hard Times*'s physical space), the people's actions, physical appearances and names point to the impoverished spiritual condition of the town's inhabitants. Although the rise and fall of

6 All the information about the Californian town, Bodie, is taken from Wolle (1955:130-134), unless otherwise indicated.

Bodie might approximate the fictional town's course, the novel is not a simple adaptation of Bodie's history, but extends beyond a specific historical context.

Most critics refer to the novel as a demythicisation of the image of stereotypical American heroism, which was made popular by Frederick Jackson Turner.⁷ Turner claimed that the frontier experience helped produce the rugged self-made individualism in the American character (Shelton, 1983:7-8). Saltzman (1983:76) describes the West in the genre of the Western as "a romanticised country of ruggedly self-reliant men, virginal-yet-intrepid women, and utter moral clarity". However, *Hard Times* allegorically reflects an unstable state of affairs based on an actual, historical town that approximates the history of many other mining towns.

The history of *Hard Times* is presumably based on Bodie, in California, although the fictional town is set in the Dakota Territory. Bodie's location is 50 miles south of Lake Tahoe, in California, near Bridgeport and the Nevada border (Anon., 2006a:1). Clayton (1983:115) describes *Hard Times* as "super-real, as stark, and nearly as self-contained as a Beckett landscape". This is similar to Wolle's description of her journey to Bodie: "We passed a few old mine properties before we reached the barren flat in a high mountain hollow, where the skeleton camp of Bodie bleaches and rots away." (Wolle, 1955:130.) This does not differ much from J. Ross Browne's description. He was the travel correspondent of *Harper's Monthly* who visited Bodie in August 1865. He refers to Bodie Bluff and the surrounding country as destitute of vegetation, with the exception of sage-brush and bunch grass.

7 Like Bevilacqua, critics often regard Turner's thesis as overturned. Freese (1987:213) observes that the Bad Man's name, Clay Turner, could be an ironic hint at Turner and his frontier thesis. Parks (1991:21) remarks that the novel is a serious revision of the myth of the genre and that it does not so much look forward to John F. Kennedy's "new frontier", but rather penetrates the mythic layers of the old frontier. Bakker (1984:141) maintains that Turner's address to the American Historical Association, "The significance of the frontier in American history", accounts for the creation of the American identity and lists characteristics formed by the frontier myth such as competitiveness, strength, practicality, inventiveness, materialism, coarseness, restlessness, democratic sense and rugged individualism. Gross (1983:128) concludes that the novel wishes to debunk the traditional Western myths. Lee (1997:12) calls the novel a parody of a Western and Harter and Thompson (1990:1) describe the novel as an "anti-western".

The allegorical value of the space that Doctorow represents does not only involve its physical barrenness, but also its history: William S. Body was a member of a party of prospectors who explored the mountains east of the Sierra, where they found gold in a high, hidden valley in 1859. When supplies ran low, Body went to Monoville to fetch supplies but died on his return trip. He was buried on a hill overlooking the emerging town, which the men immediately named Bodie⁸ in honour of the prospector. Subsequently, gold was found on Bodie Bluff in July 1861 and this attracted more miners. By July 1864, most of Bodie's mines have been merged and were held by the Empire Company of New York. Bodie may therefore also be considered as an extension of New York.

A new gold rush started in the 1870s, when other veins were opened. The population grew rapidly and soon there were sixty saloons, gambling halls, many hotels and lodging houses. However, the mines closed during the winter of 1877. One miner wrote: "There's nothing to do but hang around the saloons, get drunk and fight, and lie out in the snow and die." (Wolle, 1955:133.) Bodie experienced a boom in 1879 and already had buildings, a church, three breweries, a bank and three newspapers. Yet, the *Bodie Free Press* described "the colorful life of the raucous camp" as having been "punctuated with shootings, brawls, and stabbings" (Wolle, 1955:133). This view of the town gave it a reputation of a "shooting town" in which criminals were rarely brought to trial and many people died of bad whisky, insufficient medical care and shooting scrapes. Due to its breweries, saloons, opium dens and a prosperous red light district, the town was also known as "Sin City" (Willoughby, 2006:2). Killings, robberies, stage hold-ups and street fights became the norm in Bodie.

The natural barrenness and the chaotic history of both Bodie and the fictional town suggest spiritual "drought". Doctorow reports that while working on the novel, he read a geography book by Walter Prescott Webb called *The Great Plains* in which "Webb said what I wanted to hear: no trees" (McCaffery, 1983:39). Fletcher (1970:92) explains that imagery of trees and forests produces a type of natural banner or flag. The absence of trees in *Welcome to Hard Times* does not only mean the absence of water, birds and animals and

8 The difference between the spelling of the name of the town and that of the prospector is attributed to a sign painter's mistake (Anon., 2006a:1).

industry: thus, physical life, but symbolically, and Biblically, it indicates an absence of spiritual growth.

Here one also needs to consider the name *Hard Times*. The magic of names is a vital linguistic phenomenon in an allegorical work (Fletcher, 1970:294). The name reflects the physical reality of the town and was suggested by Zar, when he and Blue fetched building materials from a neighbouring ghost town with the name *Fountain Creek*: "Frاند, you see the peril. Always the ghost city is one with name full of promise. Is that not so? We must have care in our naming not to make this mistake ..." (Doctorow, 1996:65.) He entertains a superstitious and irrational hope that the name *Hard Times* would lead to an opposite fate. Blue comes to the ironic conclusion that acknowledges the circumstances in a resigned way: "... I thought why I have a safe name for this town, we'll call it Hard Times. Same as we always called it" (Doctorow, 1996:67), because "only a fool would call anywhere in this land a *place* and everywhere else a journey to it" (Doctorow, 1996:66; his emphasis). The cause of the "hard times" in the town is the Bad Man. The space and the agent of destruction are therefore synonymous.

Apart from its relation to F.J. Turner, the Bad Man's name is also associated with other interesting interpretations. Arnold's analysis of the Bad Man's name includes a relationship between the town and "Clay Turner". In the Bad Man's name "Doctorow also makes clear connections between the earth's turning – and taking Hard Times with it – and the absence of religious values among people in the town" (Arnold, 1983a:89-90). Saltzman (1983:76) views "Clay Turner" as appropriate for someone who sends people to their graves. Arnold sees Clay Turner as an "agent of Fate" who comes a second time as the town again enters a death phase (Arnold, 1983a:89-90). Accordingly, Arnold (1983a:89) concludes that the rebirth of Hard Times after the first destruction is a sham and that despite prosperity, or even because of it, the town again becomes a hellish place where decency in the forms of religious values of love and faith are undermined (Arnold, 1983a:94). This is also an instance where Bodie's history merges with that of Hard Times, through the figure of the Bad Man from Bodie.

The title of the book *Welcome to Hard Times* implies that Hard Times refers to more than just a geographical location: "It is an invitation not just to a place but to a condition." (Parks, 1991:27.) Bevilacqua (1989:90) recognises this in Molly: her hopes to improve her lot are thwarted, she ends up being a prostitute and sees the Bad Man as a personification of her "sinful destiny" to transform

Jimmy into the new Bad Man. The one (Jimmy) turns into the other (a Bad Man), since both are spiritual extensions of Molly.

It is ironic that by encouraging Jimmy towards violence so that he can protect her from Clay Turner, she turns Jimmy into precisely the kind of person that she fears. Freese (1987:213) points out that the illusion of self-realisation in the West is built on the faulty premise that evil is outside. Like the other inhabitants, she loses her life due to her obsession and the misconception that the Bad Man is an external threat.

The people of Hard Times “democratically elect” their victimiser. The Bad Man is an evil spirit that resides within their collective and individual psyches. The evil spirit is not the common Christian idea of a daemon with horns and a pitchfork, or a devil; and daemons could be good spirits as well (Fletcher, 1970:41-42). Because good, courageous and/or moral spirits do not “possess” people, this community has many inhabitants that are physically grotesque. Jack Millay is a limping man with one arm and Avery is the fat barkeep (Doctorow, 1996:4-5). Arnold (1983a:94) observes that “after the town has begun to take shape, it is peopled with grotesques, outcasts, and the physically and spiritually deformed”. On a spiritual level they could be considered the “children” of Clay Turner, who also has a grotesque appearance which complements his spiritual state.

Like the inhabitants of Hard Times, characters such as Winston Smith (in *Nineteen eighty-four* by George Orwell) and Pincher Martin (in William Golding’s novel with the same title; Fletcher, 1970:365) also find themselves in a treacherous physical space, as they find themselves in a psychological treacherous condition. The space in *Welcome to Hard Times* is the opposite of inviolability, purity and spiritual sanctuary. Fletcher identifies prisons, Prometheus’s rock, the bottomless pit of Christian mythology and the islands in Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and *Pincher Martin*, as hells in literature (Fletcher, 1970:213-214). Hard Times similarly approximates hell since the town’s inhabitants are “damned” in their hopeless space and suffer punishment for their actions and for their lack of love and morality. Trenner (1983:8) agrees that Doctorow uses physical details to symbolise moral conditions. The community of Hard Times is based on the legacy of the criminal and debauched Californian mining town, Bodie, because the space is a symbolic reflection of the inhabitants’ spiritual state: “The material bareness of the landscape they inhabit thus becomes the objective correlative of their spiritual poverty.” (Bevilacqua, 1989:89.) The characters neither

leave the town nor believe that the town could prosper, and subsequently do not experience liberation from the spiritual imprisonment.

4. The daemonic agent: the allegorical Bad Man of Hard Times and the character Clay Turner

The basis of the evil in the town may be found in its inhabitants' outlook on life. Many of the people of the town have no civilised social consideration for one another and their ambition is unsustainable and destructive, because it is a self-centred, unhealthy and selfish form of capitalism, marked by fear of loss and demise. Through self-centredness, fear is identified as the hegemonic daemonic agent that expresses a wish for great power, whether for good or evil purposes: both the satanic and messianic minds are daemonic, but the first seeks power through diabolical agencies and the latter through angelic agencies (Fletcher, 1970:337). The Bad Man's destruction of the town is a form of the inhabitants' "suicide" because of their obsession with self-preservation.

Certain oppositions may also be identified here, like construction versus destruction, life versus death, compassion versus selfishness, and courage versus fear. Arnold (1983a:87-88) describes the basic conflict as one between civilisation and the wilderness and between order and disorder. There is a kind of theological dualism, namely the opposition of absolute good and absolute evil, such as one finds in a variety of Manichaeian doctrines (Fletcher, 1970:222). This conflict between good and evil resides in Blue, whose hope is that the town would develop into a large settlement, but human history is "the story of human confrontation with the wilderness, both exterior and interior, with the unknown, the unexplained, the untamed" (Arnold, 1983b:208). Although some inhabitants' intentions seem empathetic at times, as when Blue nurses Molly, it is more common to find instances where self-preservation is in opposition to helping and protecting each other.

All the characters in the novel journeyed to Hard Times with certain personal ambitions. When the town starts to prosper, they wish for abundance, power and fame. Bevilacqua (1989:88) points out that the town's capitalistic ethos is evident in the nature of personal relationships that are based primarily on economic transaction and that a sense of affection or fellowship rarely triumphs over feelings of competitiveness and suspicion. The manner in which they strive

towards these goals distinguishes the characters with regard to the daemonic agent that shapes their destinies.

The town's capitalism leads to its downfall. The absence of mutual social and economic consideration is a symptom of the subversion of basic religious values, which Arnold (1983a:88) blames for the town's demise. Blue concludes that "the story of the demise of civilization" is "a result of individual corruption and the failure of faith, generosity, and charity to prevail against doubt, greed, and hate" (Arnold, 1983a:88): this is the "true wilderness" in *Hard Times*.

The personification of the wilderness, the Bad Man, has two sides. Historically, Doctorow's "Bad Man from Bodie" is a composite of criminals by the names of Tom Adams and Washoe Pete (Anon., 2006a:1) that became a bogeyman used by nineteenth century mothers to frighten their children into behaving (Anon., 2006b:1). The daemonic agency that controls the Bad Man – as probably the men that this character is based upon – is the same fear that the town experiences. Clay Turner is an individual like anyone else in *Hard Times*: his solution to avoid victimisation is to become the victimiser. Fletcher (1970:55) observes that the weakened hero often desperately tries to join hands with a tyrant, even though he may hate his oppressor. An example of this is Avery's laughter when he spits out teeth and blood after the Bad Man had hit him while he was drinking from a glass (Doctorow, 1996:18). The prime example, however, is Jimmy Fee, who turns into Turner's successor and the kind of man that killed his father. In this way, fear determines both the fate of the oppressor and the oppressed.

The Bad Man is an embodiment or personification of the fears of the town. An allegorical character is a daemon if he/she is "obsessed with only one idea" and appears "to be controlled by some foreign force, something outside the sphere of his own ego" (Fletcher, 1970:40-41). As such, the Bad Man is the town's daemonic agent. The root of the metaphor "Bad Man from Bodie" is the violent nature of the town, Bodie (Willoughby, 2006:2). Since *Hard Times* is modelled on Bodie, the Bad Man is ironically not from a far-away town in California, but from *Hard Times* itself. Blue remarks: "He never left the town, it was waiting only for the proper light to see him where he's been all the time." (Doctorow, 1996:195.) Freese (1987:213) also points out that when he returns, he is no intruder from outside but the logical result of the strife and the disintegration of the townspeople.

Fletcher (1970:42-43) explains that the word *daemon* is derived from the Greek verb *daiomai*, meaning to distribute or to divide. The Bad Man is the distributor of destinies and becomes Hard Times's god (Fletcher, 1970:43). The demise is a form of self-destruction. Bevilacqua elucidates the psychological or inner threat by pointing out that Doctorow uses a fellow settler to destroy the town that subverts one of the earliest frontier stories, the massacre by Indians:

This massacre ... is perpetrated not by Indians but by a white man who acts with more barbarity and viciousness than that usually attributed to the 'savages' (Bevilacqua, 1989:83).

The Indian, John Bear, is a stoic character that helps to nurse Molly back to health after having sustained burns during the Bad Man's rampage. Thus, the enemy is not the "other" that colonialism has seen as a threat, but collectively the inhabitants of the town become their own enemy.

The community resists courage and humanity, the antithesis of the Bad Man. Gross (1983:137) juxtaposes "the arbitrary cruelty, the absolute amorality and cynicism represented by the Bad Man from Bodie" and what the town needs, namely "ties of love and obligation which could fuel some courageous, intelligent opposition". Instead, Hard Times is a daemonic agent of fear that causes both destruction and self-destruction, although the characters seem to experience it as an external attack. This illustrates the principle that an individual shares in the responsibility of his/her community's fate through a cause-and-effect relationship.

5. Allegorical causality and magic

The question whether a figure like General William T. Sherman in *The March* is historically "reliable" is irrelevant because Doctorow's focus is not on factuality, but on the principle that everything that happens has a cause. His novels, from *Welcome to Hard Times* to his latest one about the Civil War, have the ability to illustrate, like myths, how the world functions through the causes and effects that have formed history. This does not exclude the use of "magic". As in Christ's parables, the purpose of magic is to make a point. This is the allegorist's approach. Whitman (1987:21) explains that to explore a text does not merely mean to find its underlying meanings, but also the underlying principles of the world – this is a common feature of allegory and myth. Arnold (1983b:216) also observes that *Welcome to Hard Times*, like *Ragtime*, is a testimony to recurring human stories of greed, exploitation, hope, courage, cowardice,

recklessness, love, need, revenge and death. The resemblance between the settings of the later texts and the real New York and USA emphasises the implications of causality and it serves as a commentary on human society.

Doctorow suggests that the principal threat to civilisation is the capitalist system and the greed and self-interest that it promotes in individuals (Lee, 1997:22). Parks (1991:27) and Morris (1991a:27) maintain that Doctorow's title alludes to Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (1854) that condemns industrial capitalism and its disregard for how people are treated. *Hard Times*, like Coketown, is a microcosm that explains "the rise and fall of civilizations" (Arnold, 1983a:87) due to a disregard for the welfare and dignity of others.

Aristotle declared that we only think that we know something when we know its cause or *aitia* (Whitman, 1987:21). However, allegories may present a mixture of plausibility and magic. The agents of allegory can help, hurt, change, and otherwise affect each other "as if by magic" (Fletcher, 1970:182); likewise, the Bad Man returns "magically". The ancients assumed that so-called accidents were always the work of daemons, and that they therefore had an occult cause (Fletcher, 1970:187). A coincidental event, like the Bad Man's return, therefore has a causal dimension as in Aesop's fables and Christ's parables because, as Fletcher (1970:105) indicates, in spite of visual absurdity of much allegorical imagery, the relations between ideas are under strong logical control.

Allegories require a suspension of disbelief in magic and magical causation (Fletcher, 1970:182); yet the reader is aware that the story illustrates a principle of the world. Fletcher invokes Paracelsus' (1493-1541) concept of "mana", which involved that people's imagination holds the power of symbolic causation: "If he [the magus] thinks of fire, he is on fire; if he thinks of war, he will cause war." (Fletcher, 1970:194.) The Bad Man's return is therefore a symbolic actualisation of the destruction brought about by the obsession with fear.

6. Allegorical elements in Doctorow's oeuvre

Allegorical elements in Doctorow's oeuvre includes the multi-level nature of meaning (the literal level and the secondary meaning that arises from it); the symbolic and/or representative use of space and history and the presence of a daemonic agent and magical causality. Although not every work of fiction by Doctorow is allegorical to the same extent or in the same way as in his first novel, an

awareness of the allegorical functionality in his first novel allows the reader to understand the relationship between the fictional level and history and realistic settings in his oeuvre.

Doctorow's particular brand of allegory involves a modification of the custom that, in allegory, realism is abandoned in favour of imaginative projection (O'Connell, 1988:86-87). New York in *Ragtime* (1974), *Billy Bathgate* (1989) and *The Waterworks* (1995) are realistic, but are also part of the imaginative projection. This is the reason why historical references are often "doubtful" or "faulty". This is particularly apparent in *Ragtime*, which relates the thoughts and actions of historical figures like Henry Ford and J.P. Morgan.

This kind of fiction is still in line with the allegorical mode, namely to convey political and social commentary by representing relationships between the powerful and the oppressed. Allegories present symbolic power struggles (Fletcher, 1970:23), whether they are struggles between the Bad Man and the town community in *Welcome to Hard Times*, between the state and the individual in *The Book of Daniel* or between races in *Ragtime*.

It is not the genre that distinguished Doctorow's oeuvre, but the author's interest "in the psychological or existential truth of the historical event, truth which transcends the limitations imposed upon historical truth by prevailing ideologies" (Bakker, 1985:465). His city novels portray contexts that are representative of a specific city and of American life, but which, like *Welcome to Hard Times* – also have universal qualities.

6.1 Ragtime

The social context in *Ragtime* is marked by numerous intersections of the lives of characters and is allegorical in nature, since it could also stand for historical and current American and other national contexts. In *Ragtime* these intersections also involve oppression that lead to psychological or inner conflicts. Coalhouse Walker Jr. revolts against the effects of the intersection of his life with that of the fire chief, Willie Conklin. Conklin allowed his firemen to vandalise Walker's car after he had refused to pay an illicit toll. Conklin becomes for Walker the personification of injustice, while Walker is obsessed with having his vandalised Model T Ford repaired. The fire chief thus becomes a daemonic agent in *Ragtime*.

In the experience of a social system in the Coalhouse Walker Jr. story, the multi-level nature of meaning with universal qualities be-

comes apparent, because this is a variation of Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810/1811). Kleist's story of a citizen's relentless attempts to achieve justice is in turn based on the "real history" of Hans Kohlhasen. Knorr (1976:226) notes that class discrimination in Kleist's text becomes racial discrimination in Doctorow's text. Doctorow's "translation" of *Michael Kohlhaas* illustrates the ability of allegory to "fit" into a range of situations that share similar features.

The allegorical nature of space is accentuated by images of railway lines (Doctorow, 1985:74, 76, 77), "the tracks made by the skaters, traces quickly erased of moments past, journeys taken" (Doctorow, 1985:92) and by patterns made by the people moving through the station which are erased by a porter's broom (Doctorow, 1985:100). In this way, space in the novel becomes metaphoric of the omnipresent intersections of lives. As in *Michael Kohlhaas*, the intersection of lives have the potential to cause distinct and permanent changes.

6.2 Billy Bathgate

At its basic level, *Billy Bathgate* presents a world of gangsters. This world implies a secondary meaning, as it is metaphoric of other power structures. The notorious Arthur Flegenheimer, known as Dutch Schultz, leads the world of gangsters. Billy Bathgate becomes a reliable assistant in the mob and dreams of becoming one of Dutch Schultz's gangsters. In the novel, the "real world" and the "gangster world" 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 (Doctorow, 1989:305). 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 (Doctorow, 1989:257).

This verdict may be attributed to the manner in which the public experiences Dutch Schultz. Ironically, the public has compassion for him as they envy the way he lives:

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. (Doctorow, 1989:320.)

Billy Bathgate is therefore an allegory for the real-world business activities marked by acquisitiveness, greed, takeovers, buyouts, sell-outs and money grubbing (Parks, 1991:119). The novel implies that in the "real world" of business activities and politics, a criminal class emerges because of the choice to victimise rather than to be victimised.

In this sense, Billy Bathgate is a Jimmy-figure. Dutch Schultz is the personification of the power with which Billy Bathgate is obsessed: Schultz is therefore the daemonic agent in this novel. Billy Bathgate is proud to have been called "capable" by Schultz, even though Schultz is distinguished by words like "dangerous" and "maniacal" (Doctorow, 1989:4). However, the obsession with physical safety and financial security is an illusion because, like the Bad Man who finally dies in *Welcome to Hard Times*, Dutch Schultz is also killed and the gang is wiped out. Yet, Billy Bathgate recognises that " ... nothing was over, it was all still going on, the money was deathless, the money was eternal, the love of it was infinite" (Doctorow, 1989:318).

6.3 The Waterworks

The Waterworks is set in New York in the 1870s. Like Billy Bathgate's New York of the 1930s, this novel's literal level also implies the relationship between victimisers and their victims at a secondary level. One could apply this to a New York of another age or other cities in which there is an abuse of power.

The threat of political power in, for example, *The Book of Daniel*, *Ragtime* and *The Waterworks*, has an allegorical character like that in fiction by Franz Kafka, George Orwell and William Golding. Fletcher (1970:54) argues that pride, strength and the struggle for power comprise a unity of concerns that frequently demonstrate in the clearest possible way the daemonic character. He then continues to list modern allegories that take up the problem of political power, among them *Nineteen eighty-four*, *Animal Farm*, *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *Lord of the Flies* (Fletcher, 1970:54). One could add *The Book of Daniel*, *Ragtime*, *Billy Bathgate* and *The Waterworks* and other fiction by Doctorow to the list.

The suggestion of darkness in the city, i.e. of space, is part of the allegory, for example Geary's report of a man walking about at night "offerin' to buy up loose children" (Doctorow, 1995:87). The clinic at the New York reservoir is a central space in *The Waterworks* – here blood, glandular matter and bone marrow are extracted from street

children and used to treat old, terminally ill men so that they can continue to live (Doctorow, 1995:226). Yet, New Yorkers used to stroll on the parapet of the reservoir and were ignorant of what happened there. Like trees, water is also metaphorically connected to the concept of life. In the novel, water is not absent but “contaminated” by the mysterious events, similar to trees in *Welcome to Hard Times*.

Dr. Hamilton maintains that the children’s health was never impaired. Yet, they mysteriously or “magically” die. The cause of death which he proposes is fear. Just as the Bad Man “magically” appears, the children, representatives of victims of exploitation, do not die because of the medical procedures. Hoffert (1994:111) reports that Sartorius’s methods are commonplace medical procedures today. Thus, the children do not die due to the procedures, but to make the point (as is done in allegories) that an injustice is done to them: their dignity was disregarded because they were neither acknowledged in the procedure nor given a choice. It is therefore evident that the daemonic agents are the fear of death and self-centredness, of which one of the old men, Augustus Pemberton, becomes the personification.

The events are marked by an abuse of money and power (because the families of these old men are left penniless) and are shrouded in mystery. These circumstances are in the novel itself a metaphor of the wider New York context: The mayor, Boss Tweed, oppresses the New Yorkers financially and therefore also emotionally. This approximates the relationship between the old men (like Augustus Pemberton) and the children. Boss Tweed is like Augustus Pemberton: physically alive, but spiritually dead. McIlvaine says of him: “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.” (Doctorow, 1995:9.)

7. Conclusion

Doctorow writes naturalistic fiction with, historically speaking, “false” information. Although it is a “verifiable truth” that Henry Ford and Morgan are significant figures in American history, the characters given these names in *Ragtime* are not intended to be “verifiable” representations of the persons that the actual historical figures were when they lived. Doctorow asserts that he does not make any distinction between the events and circumstances in *Ragtime* that are historically verifiable or not: “I’m satisfied that everything I made up about Morgan and Ford is true, whether it happened or not.

Perhaps truer because it didn't happen." (Levine, 1983:69.) The purpose of the allegorical mode therefore lies in the combination of the "factuality" that seems familiar, but is only pretence and which has a deeper, universal level:

In more modern fiction we often speak of the 'plausibility' of the action, by which we also understand a reference of the fiction to an external standard of publicly shared experience. ... What Frye has called the 'criterion of plausibility' further implies that fiction seems always more real, more true to life, if it assumes the guise of factual reporting. It will often be useful to speak of this guise, when the artist sets out to be a naturalistic author, in the manner of Defoe. (Fletcher, 1970:181.)

According to Doctorow, the cause of failure and injustice lies in the social forces "that ineffably combine with hearts and minds to *make* individual destinies; chief among them: politics, economics, and class hierarchies" (Trenner, 1983:6; his emphasis). This is apparent in almost all of Doctorow's fiction, whether it is Boss Tweed who abuses his political power in *The Waterworks* or Joe's ultimate decision to follow in the capitalist footsteps of his spiritual father, F.W. Bennett in *Loon Lake* (1980).

At first, Blue believed that the Bad Man would be discouraged from coming if the settlement were large enough. However, he finally reaches the same fatalistic conclusion as Molly, who believes that the town will remain a wilderness regardless of its size. Since the wilderness is an internal threat symbolised by the Bad Man (Arnold, 1983b:213), a large community is not impenetrable. In his ledgers, Blue addresses a fictional city reader and implies that there is not a distinction between the wilderness of a city and that of a small town: "Do you think, mister, with all that settlement around you that you're freer than me to make your fate?" (Doctorow, 1996:184). The forces that lead to destruction, like selfishness and oppression, are the same everywhere – whether interaction between people take place in New York City (as in *The Book of Daniel*, *Billy Bathgate* and *The Waterworks*) or on the Dakota prairie.

Bakker (1985:472) concludes that the ideas in *Welcome to Hard Times* derive from experiences that belong to the twentieth century, for example the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, which have put Doctorow in a position to deal with psychological and existential truths that bear witness to what is inherently tragic in the human condition. As such, genre and setting are irrelevant.

When asked in an interview whether there is “one Doctorow” that is continuous from *Welcome to Hard Times* up to *Billy Bathgate*, Doctorow identified three similarities: the beginning of a violent disturbing act which propels the narrative; the many children that populate the books and the young boy that becomes attached to figures of evil (Morris, 1991b:450). In *Welcome to Hard Times* the figure of evil or daemonic agent is the Bad Man. In *Billy Bathgate* it is Dutch Schultz. This illustrates that the author’s interest does not only lie in individual historical events, but also in the interconnection of events. This causality in Doctorow’s fiction reflects daemons and spiritual Bodies that also emerge in national and international events of destruction caused by human hands, as reported to us by the media every day.

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Key concepts:

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Doctorow, E.L.: oeuvre
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space
Western

Kernbegrippe:

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demoniese agent
Doctorow, E.L.: oeuvre
Doctorow, E.L.: *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960)
Fletcher, Angus: allegorie: *Theory of a symbolic mode* (1964)
gemeenskap
oorsaak en gevolg/kousaliteit
ruimte
Wilde Weste-verhaal

