NARRATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS IN WILLIAM FAULKNER, JOHN BARTH AND E. L. DOCTOROW

THESIS SUBMITTED TO
MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, KOTTAYAM
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNDER THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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SEPTEMBER 2002

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Narrative Consciousness in William Faulkner, John Barth and E.L. Doctorow" submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original bonafide work of research, carried out by Mr. Babu P.K. at School of Letters under my guidance and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date : 26.9.2002

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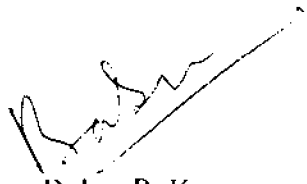
DECLARATION

I, Babu P. K., hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Narrative Consciousness in William Faulkner, John Barth and E. L. Doctorow" submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original bonafide work of research, carried out by me at School of Letters under the guidance of Dr. V. C. Harris and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma



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Acknowledgement

I express my gratitude to Dr. V. C. Harris, Reader, School of Letters for guiding me through my research work. Services offered by Indo-American Centre for International Studies, Hyderabad and USIS, Chennai have stood me in good stead. The free access to the computer facilities of Unity Women's College, Manjeri provided by the principal has been invaluable. This work was completed on a UGC fellowship under the FIP scheme. I am also indebted to the Director, Staff and the Librarian of the School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University, for their whole-hearted support.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction: Narrative Consciousness

Narrative consciousness is a term capable of denoting two senses: a narrative-leaning consciousness as well as a consciousness-leaning narrative. It implies a narrative which records and reflects a consciousness in the making and a consciousness which conceives and constructs a narrative in the making. The study takes up the approximations of narrative and consciousness towards each other as they struggle to evolve into meaningful polarizations as textual and human entities. A literary text, a narrative, is seen as attempting to realize itself as a totality, as a self-contained unit of meaning, an organic wholeness, through an individual who longs to erase the creases of existential anguish for the consciousness to consolidate its selfhood through a narrative. Thus the fictional process and the human presence are seen to be indulging in similar pursuits "which suggest that the creation of a fiction resembles the creation of a human self, real or imaginary" (Edelstein 99).

The term narrative consciousness carries duality written into it as the term refers to narrative that is conscious of itself/its own narrativity or a consciousness, which is related to/consists of a narrative. It is a study of a kind of narrative matrix in which issues of selfhood, narrative and society

interpenetrate resulting in a text which depicts a consciousness ever in the process of becoming--simultaneously the consciousness of an individual seeking definition within the erected fictional bounds and the consciousness of a text with well-marked narrative structures. Hence the struggle is dual but symbiotic as well. This "liquidity" (Weinstein 189) defines the narrative consciousness, as both are manifestations of an individual's struggles to define oneself.

The goal of this study is to analyse three American novelists, William Faulkner (1897-1962), John Barth (1930-) and E. L. Doctorow (1931-), to trace out the narrative consciousness. William Faulkner, a quintessential modernist, John Barth, an apparent postmodernist, and E. L. Doctorow, a postmodern neo-realist-- all of them traverse the Moebius strip of self-narrative-society-self. The texture of the consciousness, which envelops the self-art-society/ideology-self continuum, engages their creative energy. It is this unity of meaning that is the subject of this study. The attempt is to trace the dynamic called narrative consciousness by studying these connected elements which constitute it. Their novels basically deal with their protagonists, seething with inner dilemma, courting narrative expiation. The linguistic and social obstacles, which they themselves court with the hope of self-realization, sabotage the voyage towards self-discovery. The precarious integrity of self and the need to redress it through a

narrative, the fragility of the narrative arising from the non-transparency of the medium, the social denial of self to realise itself--all these are central to the dynamic of narrative consciousness. Society and the self-generated spiritual inertia thwart attempts at building an identity while the language, the tool, which helps build it, exposes its own unreliability and inability, dismantling the effects of the text and the man to compose a discernible whole. The resolution they all end up with is one of incomprehensibility of self and an imaginative denouement in which the effort replaces the entity sought, the effort is taken to be the entity. The consciousness which goes after its own affirmation sans dubiety and the narrative that tries to assert its own entirety both fail in effecting a closure, and hence, definition. The texts leave the fluidity of narrative (and) consciousness, locked in generative tension, as they "mutually create one another, mutually constitute themselves *as elements in a holistic structure*" (Mortimer 6). The study takes a prefatory look at the fiction of Faulkner and Barth before dwelling at length on selected novels of Doctorow.

This apparently dual identity quest, which characterises the narrative consciousness, is reflected in the self-conscious nature of the novels of the authors taken up for study here. This self-consciousness is reflected in the rabid self-absorption of the protagonists as well as the self-conscious nature of the narrative too.

> "Self-consciousness" can mean consciousness of a self, of an "I", of a core unity, or it can refer to the consciousness of oneself by an entity (a person, a novel).... If a text flaunts its own artificiality, if its own provisional reality is constantly undercut, if its authors presence *in* and not *behind* the text is constantly being emphasized, it is commonly called a self-conscious text. The cohesive function the underlying organizing intelligence whether of the author or the narrator, imbibed within the text can be considered the "self" of the text. If this textually created self is in some ways analogous to a human self, perhaps the human self is only a "linguistic configuration" rather than an ontological entity (Edelstein 99).

It is this problematic which energizes the fiction of Faulkner, Barth and Doctorow. Their major characters are caught in the dilemma caused by this apparently dual search for selves--that of the text and the author. They embark on a voyage to decipher themselves and compose narratives to that effect. But the scepticism of existence spreads and the exploration spreads to the nature and meaning of narratives, and by extension, to that of language itself. The quest of the man to know oneself triggers a narrative. The narrative, which is meant to explore the man in his social surroundings, causes an exploration of its own identity. The result is the

narrative consciousness which encapsulates the art-life tension at one level and the creative-evolutionary dilemma at another.

Self or identity is an omnipresent term in the every day discourses of life. The language of self-reference has become the staple of common vocabulary of modern life. Identity encompasses all aspects of, activities in, life. To have an identity is "to be like others and yet also to have qualities that make one different from them...It is to maintain a balance between similarity and difference in the face of individual development and social changes, so that one can assimilate to self demands for change or adjustment but also fulfill an inner desire for constancy," states Hewitt (152). But it is imperative to differentiate between the ordinary use of the term from the more important, intellectual uses of it. There are certain core experiences which bring the consciousness of one's self to the surface. Shock, failure, defeat, victory, death, crime, injustice, loss, adversity--events of these kinds can cause the problematisation of self. The taken for grantedness of life is rejected and the search for alternatives begin--alternatives which would help the self-realisation in the renewed context. Adversity thus causes the problematisation as well as the need for reaffirmation of self. This adversity can take the guise of inner uncertainties of philosophical kind as well as those unjustly thrust by the society. The crowded composite of consciousness that contains and

constitutes language can hardly sever its ties with the society too. The individual's narrative descent into the past automatically gathers the social scenario and the way he feels betrayed by the rather constrictive norms it has imposed on him. As the individual's self-seeking narrative exfoliates into linguistic and social ones, it does so only to relapse into the textual liquidity of everything--the flux that is narrative consciousness.

Narratives contain and constitute an act of communication. Etymologically the word narrative comes from the Greek root 'gnarus' meaning 'to know'. The novels of the writers under study are always attempts at knowledge, means of communication, with oneself and the world. In a very basic way, the narrative endeavour in their fiction is tied up with questions of self and/or identity. Because, "fiction is (like other forms of narrative), the privileged site for celebrating the enactment of individual identity. Fiction is one of the arenas in which the culture tells its fables of selfhood, of the successful negotiation between a self, on the one hand, and a world, on the other" (Weinstein 175). Hence the centrality of articulation in the definition of personhood can't be ignored. In many ways the novels studied here are expressions of a psyche in turmoil, a consciousness grappling with itself to be. Instead of presenting the whole of an entity confronting life, they reveal a process of selection and omission, acceptance and rejection, cognition and perception, confusion

and conception of an ever evolving consciousness--a consciousness in pursuit of what Jung has called "the dream of totality"—the self (qtd. in Garzilli v). These novels attest that "Selves are texts, motley tissues woven from reminiscences and borrowings" (Weinstein 2-3).

Since language embodies consciousness without clearly revealing it, the representation generally held to be self in reality is an ever-evolving consciousness manifesting itself through language. As consciousness is circumscribed by the idea of language, it foregrounds itself in the course of the individuals narrative push for definition. "Characters constitute their consciousness as they invent suitable forms of language" (Mathews 31). Self is revealed as a kind of representation, "more or less random and more or less ingenious combinations of images and identifications" (Weinsten 2-3), heavily enmeshed in linguistic endeavours. Yet, ironically, the major irritant in the narrative/existential quest for moorings by the consciousness is language itself since the protagonists of the fiction investigated find out that "there is no common measure between mind and language" (Mathews 37).

The brooding, pathological self-consciousness of these self-seeking protagonists aggravates the linguistic scepticism. Language proves an unreliable instrument as the narrative mines into the depths of existence for meanings. The meanings of meanings tend to delay infinitely the quest. Hence self-conscious narrative leads into linguistic consciousness and vice

versa. This elusive signification exposes the hollowness of the attempt at narrative expiation. The sense of inner vacuum which initiates the need for textual consolation results in heightened exasperation at the fluid core of language too. The questor finds that "writing doesn't respond to loss, it initiates it; writing itself is as much a kind of loss as it is a kind of compensation" (Mathews 19). Because "language and the act of writing are so bound to the idea of loss--of the word's referent, the writer's self, even of time itself" (Lockyer 3). An act of verbal self-composition hence is the making of an unmaking, a spiral which, as it is wound at one end, gets undone at the other. Thus the self-consciousness of the protagonists/ narrators turns into self-consciousness of the narrative and soon into self-consciousness of the language resulting in the making of the narrative consciousness.

William Faulkner (1897--1962), one of the foremost among modern American novelists, is preoccupied with what Gail L. Mortimer terms the, "dilemma of desire" (121). The way realization nullifies the sweetness of a desire haunts the man. The spiritual, political and narrative counterparts of the dilemma--the simultaneous necessity of participation as well as isolation, convinced of the effective sterility of both--present itself in the body of his fiction. William Faulkner's creative energy is fuelled primarily by the articulatory and identity concerns. His fiction basically deals with

the upheavals of a consciousness attempting a core identity. This is the epicenter that splinters into the linguistic, metaphysical and the social dilemmas of existence. The characters of William Faulkner's fiction are embroiled in the struggle to delineate an integral sense of themselves in the racially fractured social psyche of the South. Their birth and growth in the slavery-infested South mould them into precarious entities as contentless vessels. But the self-narratives of Faulkner are also stuck with the agonies of articulation as well. The bottomless void that the articulation attempts to bridge simmers in their consciousness as they venture to relate their past and their tale. The integration of self is under-realised not just because of the linguistic scepticism, but also because of the denials spread by the prejudiced society too. Hence the story is always of an individual's abortive attempt to take stock of himself/herself, via a narrative recall/diagnosis of the past and the society. This "dilemma of desire" (Mortimer 121), reflective of the stated approximations of the poles of the creating consciousness, defines the simultaneous flight and pursuit of the Faulknerian hero and Faulkner the writer.

John Barth (1930--), eager to be simply known as a teller of tales, ends up being the teller of tales of tales, thanks to obsessions like that of Faulkner operating at a different level. A reluctant postmodernist, Barth endeavours to replenish the narrative exhaustion of the contemporary

period by choosing to dwell on the theme of exhaustion itself. His fiction attempts "up-bringing novels" (FB 132) of his orientation-seeking protagonists and settle down to be counted as "down-bringing-novels" (FB 132). The key term in the fictional scheme of Barth is self-consciousness and the key area that of narrative voice. Whatever the thematic and contextual variations, the Barthian hero is invariably on a mission to discover himself. The mission ultimately boils down to one of communicating oneself the meaning of one's existence. In this narrative voyage ironies abound, the central one being the frailty of the destinations and the untrustworthy nature of the means of the voyage: the container and the contained seeking each other, in a way. The experimentative vein of Faulkner vis-à-vis the narrative voice rises to untested heights in Barth. The hunt for voice and the search for narrative alternatives merge in the turmoil of the consciousness of the fiction. The articulatory crises are chronic in them, as chronic as the metaphysical and existential anguish. In the "narrative equals language equals life" (FB 236) motto of Barth is contained the elusiveness of each segment which constitutes the fiction of self. The frequent trips his fiction makes to the mythic literature of the past, to especially his mascot Scheherazade, are part of the narrative-existential role taking exercise. From Todd to Ebenezer, Meneleaus to the Siamese twin, the query is as to this essence, the personhood. The dormant strains of social criticism submerged in the ironic appraisal of the narrative, literary traditions of the

past, surface strongly in the later novels of Barth, forming the self-society-language matrix of Faulkner. It is the matrix which houses the mutually combatant, mutually containing narrative consciousness.

In a similar vein, E. L. Doctorow (1931--) wants to know how he can make use of the disreputable genre materials of the past in the present scenario. His very first attempt, a western, sets the configuration of his fiction: self-composition through narrative exposition and social analysis in a vicious cycle. From Blue, his first protagonist to the latest, the self-narrative-society circularity persists. Doctorow, a contemporary of Barth and in whom this study peaks, is the one in whom the mentioned constituents of the flux of the textual/human consciousness remain in a more or less balanced state. The three major chapters of this study dwell in depth on the narrative consciousness of his selected fiction--Welcome to Hard Times, The Book of Daniel, Ragtime and Loon Lake-- investigating separately into the self, narrative and Society segments of the phenomenon.

Doctorow has brought out nine novels, a play, a collection of stories and a novella, and a collection of essays, not to mention the innumerable essays through which he has commented on the major socio-political issues of the contemporary America. His literary career begins with Welcome to Hard Times (1960), published while he was working with the Dial press. To launch himself as a novelist, he writes the story of the destruction,

construction and re-destruction of a western frontier town. It is also the story of Blue who seeks the futile narrative consolation of recalling the history of the town through his sceptic ledgers. Big as Life (1966) which came out next followed the Doctorowian policy of using disreputed genre materials to tell his stories. If it is the western in the first novel, it is science fiction in the second one. The novel revolves around the arrival of two giant humanoids in New York and the way people react to it. The basic assumptions of life get tested and threatened as a consequence. In 1971 Doctorow's seminal piece of fiction, The Book of Daniel came out. Here the novelist turns to history and fictionalises one of the landmark political events of the American past--the Rossenberg case. The novel depicts the struggle of the Isaacson children, children of the fictionalised Rossenbergs, to come to terms with themselves, their past and their parents. Though it has become an obsession for the writer to explore the American past in his subsequent novels, nothing he ever did afterwards aspires to the same literary height and similar creative fervour. If critical attention is drawn to Doctorow by his The Book of Daniel, it is Ragtime (1975) which has ensured the real arrival of the novelist in the popular conscience. Ragtime, winner of National Book Critics Circle Award for 1976, tells the story of three families against the backdrop of the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century America. At the end the Black, the Jewish and the WASP families become one melting pot. Drinks before Dinner (1979) is

the result of Doctorow's attempts at a radical theatre of ideas. As the author puts it, it is a drama turned inside out, exploring our idea of a character. In his next novel Loon Lake (1980) he again dwells on his, by now, favourite exercise of fictionally revising the American history. It portrays Joe's initiatory journey in the background of the depression America of the 1930s. Lives of the Poets (1984) is a rollicking narration of the crises of a writer flowingly presented in a deceptively lighthearted intertext. Though subtitled as "A novella and six stories," the book reveals at the end as containing six stories by the writer who is the protagonist of the Novella. The novella, which gives the collection its title, throws quaint links and the subtle weaving to hold the text together. It is rather late that we find Doctorow incorporating his own life in a big way into his fiction, namely in World's Fair (1985). True to the Doctorowian pattern, the book explores certain key cultural emblems of America while revealing the story of the growing up of a small boy in straightforward narrative voice. Billy Bathgate (1989) is a bildungsroman of kinds. Adding one more to Doctorow's little heroes, the novel depicts Billy's initiation years and his involvement with the notorious New York criminal Dutch Shultz.

The play of/for the narrative consciousness in Doctorow's fiction is to be explored from three perspectives. All the leading characters of his fiction are self-seekers. Dissatisfaction, the all-consuming passion that

drives Doctorow, is crucial in the struggles of all the protagonists of the writer. They exhibit a tendency to hop from the physical to the philosophical with confusing ease, especially when caught between the need to act positively and the impossibility of finding anything positive. Taken together, the mentioned components of his fiction very acutely reflect, repeatedly, the writer consistently grappling with himself and his views. The opening chapter on Doctorow shows how the whole of his fiction is investigating the struggle of/for the self from various angles and in differing contexts. The quasi-existential struggles of his primary characters, his themes, the struggle for voice--these will be the parameters to test the afore stated interests of the writer. It will prove, by extension, how these demonstrate the extent to which the author struggles to develop a sense of belonging in the cosmic polity of knowing and being.

Of equal relevance is the need to study the artist heroes as each novel of the writer is in the form of an artist/writer trying to remember the defining period of his life. Since the effort proves to be fruitless, it is also a limited testimony to the author's faith in the inability of the language to embody any reality/the inability of man to make language mean. Starting with Blue, the ledger keeper-narrator of his first novel, every narrator deals with the difficulty of representation This need to represent and the futility of such a need are emblematic of Doctorowian narrators. All the de facto

historians of his fiction are actually writers who are put to the task of writing by the force of the circumstances. Whatever be the driving force of their need to narrate, their overriding feeling is of one doomed to represent. In a world in which linearity itself is suspect, it pays little to lean on causality. They end up representing the unrepresentability of their mission--whether it is the truth regarding the accusations against the Rossenbergs or the sense of the evil within in the frontier novel. But at the same time these artists concede the fact that often the only way out of the impasse is through imaginative resolutions. So the following chapter investigates the narrator/artist heroes of the writer to bring out the element of fight/flight for identity in them. It will also study the tension unresolved in these narrators/artists owing to their inability to narratively compose a realizable text/self.

The third chapter on Doctorow studies the role played by state/society in the creation of this unresolvable question of identity. "The fundamental referent of identity is social location," in the words of Hewitt, as "identity is a matter of objectification by others as well as self objectification" (150). It is imperative to determine the extent of influence of the state/culture in rendering the self problematic as all the protagonists of these novels, in one way or the other, are fighting for justice, fighting against the state's imposition of itself on the self. Doctorow has stated the

way he is upset by the element of injustice and of the extent of its reach. Yet the fictional diagnosis refuses to place the blame squarely at the doors of the society. It only underlines the dilemma of knowing and being since the tools of communication are incapable of composing the truth. The individual and society are seen as both paired and opposite. The individual is threatened by society and the social order is undermined by the individual disorder. On the other hand they are mutually constructed too. This is where the political and the philosophical meet and often collide in Doctorow. The activist in him fights the injustice of impositions as the artist concedes the necessity of the same imaginatively. It has been the social commitment of the author that made him often select the key moments of the American culture as the gist for his fictional mill. Doctorow's revision of the theme of American dream in Welcome to Hard Times, Depression years in Loon Lake, the Rossenberg case in The Book of Daniel and the ethnic question in Ragtime--all overwhelmingly point to this. In Doctorow's scheme of things, one of the principal forces responsible for the disintegration of the self, thwarting it's potential realizations, is Culture--the counterfeit values imposed by Culture. Hence, his explorations of freedom and justice are linked to explorations of self and the ways in which it is/is not realized.

> There is a presumption of universality to the ideal of justice--social justice, economic justice. And it is a platonic ideal too--that every one be able to live as he or she is endowed to live: that if a person is in his genes a poet, he be able to practice his poetry. Plato defined justice as the fulfillment of a person's truest self (qtd in Harter and Thompson 7),

states Doctorow in an interview. The plunges of Doctorow in to the past, therefore, are to examine why individuals/groups/races are denied justice, refused their freedom to realize themselves. The enquiry always leads, though not unambiguously, to the social set up, the transparent betrayals of the right to life. The chapter looks into the way the set values embodied by America, by extension humanity, make a mockery of people's sense of self, defiles their sense of identity, as revealed in Doctorow's fiction.

Ethnic/Immigrant voices raise similar queries regarding the dilemmas of the self in Doctorow. The American society has always been a society of actual, potential or imagined mobility. The novelist lays necessary emphasis on this as he depicts the Ethnic as well as the non-ethnic, who nonetheless are in flight. On the one hand the presence of the ethnic elements and characters could be explained as the logical off shoot of the writers concern for the society, for social justice, aiding America in realizing the potential of melting pot status. On the other, the point made by the novelist not

necessarily taken up by any, is the question about the Eternal Immigrant called Man. Since Doctorow shares with his hero Daniel the dictum that fully connected things don't exist, he is juxtaposing the immigrant in the American context against the immigrant in the cosmic context, life as the eternal immigration. If the problem for the immigrant is one of meaningfully incorporating himself into the host community, preserving one's core intact, similar is the anguish of the nationals of the country. Those who are technically believed to belong to the land of heir birth are no more sure of themselves than those who feel alienated on account of their distant origin. This juxtaposition helps the novelist to make the two play against each other as he makes the artist impulse play against the activist one. Ultimately it boils down to a question of the fluidity of identity in every case. These novelists approach the liquidity of existence in which "connections proliferate and meanings drop away" (Saltzman 16). Narrative consciousness becomes the receptacle of these explorations with "interrupted catalysts" of self, narrative and society, to use the term used by Merriwether to describe the fiction of Faulkner (83).

Chapter 2

William Faulkner: Interrupted Catalysts

I

William Faullkner's has been one of the defining presences in the American fiction. His immense productivity, both in terms of its breadth and innovation, has placed him on a pedestal not equalled by many in the world of fiction. Recording the ebb and flow of the emergent America through the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, his imaginative recreations of the race-infested Mississippi present the life of a man divided within the twin pulls of artistic inclinations and ideological/social compulsions. The oeuvre of Faulkner, hence, is consistently engaged in investigations of form and content, of identity and ideology, of ontology and epistemology, of life and art. Though predominantly portrayed as a spokesperson for the modernist American fiction, Faulkner essentially embodies the American obsession with concerns of selfhood and articulation. This chapter therefore makes a prefatory study of the major fiction of William Faulkner with special emphasis on the self-narrative-society-consciousness continuum in it.

The purely individual strains and complexities of one's art and the taxing struggle to make it reside amidst the social compulsions, the self-implied defeats inherent in such efforts and the final destination of all such struggles--these amount to travails of a coagulant consciousness in the

writers studied here. For Faulkner, as Andrei Bleikasten states, "the urge to write sprang from a passionate desire for self affirmation and self realisation. Boldly asserting his authority, insisting on his demiurgic powers with almost Balzacian self confidence, Faulkner was determined to create a 'cosmos of his own', existing for and by itself, of which he would be the sole owner and proprietor" (viii). This intention permeates and is shared by the major figures of his fiction. His fiction represents, "a consciousness, deeply self-aware and even self-beset" (Beck 6). Faulkner tries to take both poles of perception into account at once, the subjective and objective worlds, as functions of each other and his fiction reflects this struggle of a consciousness to evolve itself into being.

As in the case of Barth and Doctorow, what precipitates the creative impasse in Faulkner is the contradictory pulls of a consciousness powered by schisms of life and art, societal responsibility and artistic compulsion, the felt promise of narrative vent and the inner certainty of its futility. The protagonists of Faulkner are seekers of integrity of being. Bemused by the guiles of existence, they are frantically on the look out for means of deciphering themselves. Society/family beguiles them at one level and they turn to narrative as part of the quest for relief. But the plurality of meaning only aids further entrapment of their already warped psyche. The intense anguish of the question of existence throws the debate concerning the

genuine roots of the dilemma open: is it the angst inherited, one generation serving as the hapless, helpless receptacle of the deeds of a previous one? Is it a feeling attendant on the sickly perceptions of a troubled mind? Or can the cause be attributed to the tragic inability of the medium to deliver? Rather than help establish the locus of the dilemma, these texts only traverse the network of potential causes/sources *regressus ad infinitum*. In strikingly similar statements Doctorow, Barth and Faulkner have dwelt on the dangers of thrusting ideological function on the shoulders of creative art. Yet, such protestations notwithstanding, the thickly marked political contours of Faulkner's fictional writing speaks loudly on the conflicts in which his career is caught, a major one being the question of race in the slavery-ridden American South. These were the "demons" the demon-driven writer in Faulkner fought with to affirm himself, to successfully quantify himself, to also find what it means to be an American. This is further rendered complex by the strong influx of existential flavour in his works, the sceptical faith in the power of language and mind to capture reality, in spite of his professed faith in endurance and prevailment. The life and philosophy of fiction as envisaged by Faulkner, at times though hazy, point to the same concerns possessed by Barth and Doctorow regarding questions of selfhood and creativity. This is why Bleikasten calls the novels of Faulkner "monuments to a self ever to be" (2).

> Faulkner's genius flourished at a time when there was new, exacting and important work in the understanding of human perception and human consciousness and in the growing awareness that art originates in the human response to events rather than in the external world of discontinuous act. With his age, Faulkner recognized that the world was continually being reconstructed by the perceptions and conceptions of people interacting with it. It is this awareness that allows him to place something so mysterious and mischievous as the human consciousness within what is, after all, the art of a man who maintains an architectonic sense of his craft (Kinney xv).

As a writer Faulkner always took his fiction-making efforts as efforts progressively towards an ultimately unrealisable state of perfection, much similar to the view embraced by Doctorow. This explains his feeling that the great works, as far as far as he is concerned, whether it be from him or the writers he admires, are "splendid failures" (Meriwether 180), like his The Sound and the Fury. This argument is akin to the theory of identity as revealed in the fiction of Barth and Doctorow too, not to mention many such instances in the fiction of Faulkner itself. If it is socio-economic, philosophic elements which contribute immensely to the concerns of personhood in Barth and Doctorow, it is the racial-linguistic

plight that receives marginal edge in the unachievable flight towards a stable sense of identity among Faulkner's creations. This is not to deny the existential dilemma, which many of the major characters of Faulkner embody. It becomes all the more problematic in a writer who seems to feel quite strongly the need for correcting the social imbalance caused by racial and economic segregation. The situation bred by this curious ideology-art mix is peculiar and it reappears in similar guises in the writers to follow. These currents of self, narrative and society flow into each other, defying a clear demarcation of the constituents of the consciousness.

Though extremely complex and stunningly innovative the creative career of Faulkner had been, it still carries certain stock features. Social uprootedness, spiritual orphanage, existential dilemma which springs out of these, acute sense of isolation, feeling of being hounded by the tragic past, varied queries as to the value of the real, the quest for truth, the themes of racial purity and the agony and inevitability of articulation--all these make their repeated appearances in various guises in his fiction. The present study investigates the narrative consciousness in Faulkner's selected fiction through the concerns of self embodied by the major characters, the quest for integrity by his narrative and the social hurdles in the achievement of the same.

William Faulkner's initial foray into the realm of fiction is with Soldier's Pay. It is a typical introductory work, indicative of a writer who is yet to find his voice. But it is valuable as it drops tentative indications as to the direction Faulkner's fiction is to take in the future. The intense forms of alienation, feeling disoriented or displaced in whatever location the characters find themselves, is certainly strong in early works like Soldier's Pay. Galligan has no apparent destination during the train trip with which The Soldier's Pay opens. Donald Mahon who returns from the war is equally unsure of the place he is retiring to. The sense of loss of identity in Mahon is understandable in his lack of verbal response and in his inability to recognise figures from the past. The returned soldiers in the novel, as Garry Harrington has stated, "suffer from deracination and dislocation... moving like disembodied shades engaged in a futile attempt to reestablish some sense of personal identity" (15).

Instances of confusing identity abound, pointing to a pervasive sense of loss of perceptions of individuation. Joe Galligan and Januarious Jones, the two figures with artist orientations, signal the core art concerns Faulkner will persist with in the novels to come. Faulkner's second novel Mosquitoes lays heavy emphasis on what is to emerge as the pivotal concern of the writer: "the extent to which language reflects, distorts, subsumes or creates life" (Harrington 24). Like Barth's Tidewater Tales, it

dwells on an outing on a yacht by a group of art-lovers. Though fairly grounded on discussions of art, the work simply shifts the backdrop without essentially altering the stage or the theme of his first novel. The fluidity of existence and the well-nigh impossible task of placing one's sense of belongingness to a sticking place are very much what the crisis of the text is all about. They drift about, vapid figures, spiritually dispossessed and vaguely self-defined. Talliaferro and Gordon, espousing and denouncing the significance of the word respectively, jointly tell the story of the sense of sterility the entire group of characters suffers from.

As I Lay Dying, Faulkner's *tour de force*, is a curious little work, with its style masking its stunning power, both in terms of what it says and how it is said. With its strange title, the novel, composed of sixty monologues involving fifteen characters, centers on death as well as life, on the process of meaning in a multi-voiced pursuit of /by language. The story involves the Bundren family and the fierce interpersonal relationships presented against the backdrop of the death of Addie Bundren, the mother. Though it hinges on the steadfastness of a family to honour the final wish of their dead mother, Addie, to be buried in Mississippi, to be united with her forefathers in the final rest, it has placed heavy emphasis on the issues of perception and meaning in/by language. If for the dead it is the ultimate journey of reunification, for the living, it is a journey of self-discovery, of

being born as the coffin is borne. When stripped of its innovative narrative scheme and intricate fictional pattern, the simplicity of the plot masks its innate depth. The tragic-comic journey, often horrifyingly stupid and at times scaringly tragic, provides the staple of the narrative. It restates and reaffirms the core concerns of Faulkner's fiction, constituting the polyphony of voices, the multiple perspectives of varying vision, varied intelligence and perception. These are often biased, eclipsed and informed by the personal intelligence, peculiarities and prejudices. Each monologue defines the nature of the character as well as his/her relationship with Addie. The journey, which they undertake to realize the wish of Addie, is a journey, which exposes their real nature. The differing hidden motives of the trip or the different ultimate gains from the trip (for Dewey, it is abortion; for Darl, a train ride; for Anse, a new wife, etc) attest to this. With the burial of Addie, all the members of the family are free to realize themselves in ordinary, unheroic fashion.

"Addie is the center of As I Lay Dying. It is she who motivates the funeral procession to Jefferson. The Bundrens' goal is to find themselves, and somehow their relationship to Addie is the key to their identity. They must explore themselves in terms of Addie" (Garzilli 60). Addie, a woman of passionate individuality, is denied of "herself" when she is married to Anse, a man who shelters himself in wordy speculation, rather than

worldly action. Interwoven with the predominant issue of the ability and efficacy of communication is the question of meaning--meaning not merely of language/novels that we use to communicate with, but the meaning of actions, of life in totality, of making sense of ourselves, of existence and reality. All these are made open to scrutiny through the conventional tools with which we subject the whole lot of life's processes to analysis and articulation. It is the word of the dead Addie, one who doubted the capacity of words to carry deeds on its back, that leads to the series of deeds that make up the novel. Hence it is a novel which sets the exploration of self in a background of death, a narrative on an attempt to bound being.

The Sound and the Fury is Faulkner's classic which marks the end of his apprenticeship and heralds the greater pieces like Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!--a long period of creative outburst. Like many other novels to follow, it contains a strong dose of violence, family feud, of people caught in the grip of evil heredity. An intense tale of family feud and brooding melancholy, it brings to fusion the thematic burden of Faulkner with innovations in narrative techniques. Divided into four sections titled after the particular dates, the novel spreads the action from the childhood of Quentin, Caddy, Benjy and Jason to the Easter Sunday 1928, the day on which Caddy, Quentin's daughter, runs away with a man from a circus show. With a twisted chronology, the novel challenges easy

comprehension. Still, at the heart, the text is intensely involved with the angst of a consciousness caught in the act of meaning--world as well as word.

The major bearer of the entangled, unextricated personhood, compulsively seeking a sense of self is Quentin Compson: "an alien body, a wandering mind, a dizzying sense of dissolved doings, feelings and sufferings" (Weinstein 173). The depiction of the last day of his life shows the man caught in the convolutions of tortuous thoughts as he struggles to free himself from the ambiguous relationship with his sister and the Compson family honor. Incest, miscegenation, honor, sex--the common ingredients which cause the imbalance in many a protagonist of Faulkner war in the character of Quentin Compson.

Identity necessitates a tenuous balancing of attachment and detachment in terms of a person's relationship with the people around him, with the community of which he is a part. Personhood can't be achieved through total isolation as it is bound to engender war in the subjectivity. This is because identity is as much a product of self-evaluation as it is a quantity formed in response to the evaluation of the community. Quentin's obsession with Caddy's virginity is linked to his personal/family honour. His attempt to convince his father of his supposed incest is part of his effort to put an end to the ambiguity and to withdraw from the world marked with

the taint of sin. As it happens in the case of all compulsive self-seekers, this will only lead him to isolation, triggering further violent cogitation. It never helps a man with Quentin's speculative bend of mind to be in the shadow of a father who feels that "a man is the sum of his misfortunes...one day you think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune" (TSTF 103). His father only fosters these sceptic/existential elements, a running thread in the fiction of Faulkner.

The pivotal preoccupation of Quentin, which reveals his anxiety of a fleeting sense of self, is his terror of the passage of time. Apart from honour and virginity, time is ironically the catalyst, component and deterrent of his monologues. As Gail I. Mortimer states: "the world itself undermines his efforts to keep things stable as it fragments, flows and charges through time despite Quentin's vigilance" (63). From the very beginning of his monologue, he expresses his struggle with time as he quests for the timeless and stable. The inexorable passage of time terrorizes him as it aggravates his feeling of futility and the fear of prolonging his existence, which he has already judged a failure. But the urgency of his desire to communicate and the fear regarding the uncertainty as to what is to be communicated keep him trapped in a hazy psyche. Hence the more potent portrayal of the struggle of Quentin is evident in the narrative anguish and anxiety he experiences.

Joe Christmas' plight in Light in August is the same but ingrained with a different orientation: "[H]is blood wouldn't be quiet, wouldn't let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself" (LIA 449). What rocks Joe's frail sense of sanity is not only the supposed mixing of blood, but it is the defining ingredient of his troubled subjectivity and the source of all his inner vacillation. Because, the basic problem of Joe in Light in August is not a matter of blood. His tragedy is, as Faulkner himself puts it: "not to know what he is and to know that he will never know" (qtd. in Gwynn 72). Joe's precarious sense of self makes it hard for him to find acceptance among others and this defines his behaviour towards himself as well as others.

The prime block on his road to self-discovery is the ambiguity surrounding his ancestry/blood. As Mortimer suggests, "in his search for a stable identity, Joe doesn't find it possible to live with both possibilities, that he is black and that he is white, because society possesses clearly delineated and irreconcilable expectations about how, in either case, he must behave" (16). The early years of his childhood he spent at white children's orphanage has clearly planted feelings of black inferiority and self-hatred in him. As is common in Faulkner's fiction, the emotionally turbulent childhood convincingly contributes to his disorganized sense of self and in turn accentuates the disturbing need to delineate a coherent

feeling of identity. The ensuing chaotic perceptions render him incapable of opting for either of the possibilities, the black or the white.

Joe illustrates the duality resident in every such protagonist from Faulkner--stasis versus motion, black versus white and self versus the other. Echoing the travails of the Doctorowian figures, he is severely lonely, every crisis forcing him to be on the move, sexually problematic, irate, carrying the hell of Lord Jim with him. The Southern American society he belongs to never delineates possibilities of existence other than as either wholly white or purely black. A mixed blood entity, where allegiance is fluid, is beyond the perceptive capacity of such a society. "Not knowing who he is in such circumstances leads inevitably to ambivalence about the very things he comes to recognize as 'self'" (Mortimer 16). This affects, in return, his perceptions of the world. This is how the tragi-circularity of the search for personhood takes its shape. Society has already incapacitated him from presuming a sense of wholeness and this has handicapped his perception of the people and objects around him. The eternal sense of becoming which the subjectivity is assured to experience has its origins here. Hence Joe feels that, "all the past was a flat pattern... all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow, to be and had been would be the same" (LIA 206) and he "never got outside of that circle" (LIA 321).

Externalisation of inner motives, self-objectification, self-division--all these exemplify in various ways the war within Joe. Like Doctorow's Daniel, again, it often happens in the novel that Joe repeatedly experiences his motives and passions as something foreign to his self. Time and again he refers to his body as "it" and watches things happening to "it," as when "he watches his hands fumbling at the door" (LIA 210). Similar is his comment when he tries to get out: "if I can just get it outside, into the air, the cool air, the cool dark..." (LIA 210). As a descendant of Quentin who is directly influenced by his nihilist father, it is inherent in Joe Christmas that aspects of his personhood act towards disorientation. This massive disruption at the core of the self and the resultant flight and terror are pronounced in another significant character in Light in August, Gail Hightower.

Quite a number of characters in Faulkner's fiction embody what Gail Mortimer calls his "one-is-two" formula, which manifests as dual nature of the characters (98). A novel like Light in August rests on the inner polyphony of the central characters. Gail Hightower and Joana Burden supplement Joe in the novel. They both lead isolated lonely lives, caged in the past, simultaneously excited and exacerbated by nostalgia. Hightower who seems to have "two faces" (LIA 89) and Joanna "a dual personality" (LIA 235) are caught between a need to hold on to the past

despite their faith in the futility of doing so in the present. In almost each respect, she constitutes a challenge in her ability to do a Joe. The currents which rock her inner calm are similar to those of Joe's and are suggestive of the disestablished self. This preoccupation with duality is not confined to the major characters in the novel. It seeps down to the very bottom of the narrative and finds its echo even in figures like Hightower's father or in Lucas Birch's two names. The narrative ingenuity and the experimentation in word formation reflect the stated rut of personhood quest into which the consciousness of these characters has fallen.

Apparently the story of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen, Absalom, Absalom! is a powerful novel that actually restates Faulkner's fictional pursuit of ontological and epistemological concerns against the context of personhood. Thomas Sutpen, a settler in the Old South, is a ruthless mixture of daring and shrewdness. As narrator after narrator attempts to explicate the motives of the design of Sutpen's existence, the mosaic of dilemmas and conflict that people the collective psyche of the community is brought to relief. The author has infused his routine ingredients of fiction like race, incest, miscegeny and violence in his exploration of the elusive concept of reality and truth, which could often be alternative terms for selfhood. Yet the remix throws up an enlightening and enigmatic revelation on the flux of personhood. On writing, on polity and

the cultural entity called life/man, it posits observations of awakening. Quentin, Shreve, Rosa, Sutpen, Born--all are characters who play and referee this game of meaning and being. Recall of the past to reconceive the present and to realign oneself continues.

Absalom, Absalom! unravels the issues of interracial complexity and identity in its entirety. Thomas Sutpen who selects Jefferson to seat his grand design of hundred acres of land and a mansion does so by trampling on the social conventions of the place and individual liberties. Born in the mountains of Virginia, it is the taunts of his early childhood that inscribe a design in him, a design with personally drawn racial boundaries and materialistic, predatory instincts. Hence Sutpen's personhood comes to be delineated in terms of the self-imposed "grand design" and recurrent jolts to it thwart his self-realization. There is something of Coalhouse Walker of Doctorow's Ragtime in the man as he approximates the fruition of the project at hand. Pushing sentiments to the margins, he moves forth with single-minded devotion. He is taciturn and his voice is buried under layers of narrative reconstruction. Quentin and Shreve think about him in retrospective. It is Sutpen--his arrival, his doings, his relationships, briefly his design-- that has upset the lives of the rest in the novel. Rosa Coldfield, the prime sufferer, has her troubles started, she says, after being insulted by

Sutpen, offering a marriage only if their union results in a male offspring. It intensifies, if not inaugurates, her self-alienation.

Identity implies invisible boundaries. Invisible because, the demarcation that delineates the realm of subjectivity is fragile, mutable and subject to imminent collapse. Moreover it is as imaginary as it is psychic. Characters who undergo scrutiny on account of their threatened center in this study do have difficulty in keeping in position this separation. Either the past or the figures of the past inhabit them, rendering them defenceless. Thomas Sutpen holds residence in the lives of Rosa, Quentin, Shreve and the like, colonizing them and their times to the exclusion of everything. Rosa Coldfield fits the Faulknerian world in many ways. She is the unwanted child, born "at the price of her mother's life and never to be permitted to forget it...a living and walking reproach to her father" (AA 46). As in the case of many a character in Faulkner, she lives with a father she hates and it hence causes a precarious sense of self in her from quite an early age. It is into such a life that Sutpen barges in her childhood.

Daniel Isaacson, Doctorow's hero in The Book of Daniel comments on the unsettling multiplicity of people around him, causing feelings of self-dissipation. An echo of this could be found in Quentin too. Quentin's "childhood was full of them, his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a

commonwealth... a barrack filled with stubborn, backlooking ghosts" (AA 7). Possessing an impotent freedom, he is as much baffled as troubled by the legacy he compulsively inhabits. Though he is keen to follow the legend to its end, Quentin is equally uncertain of its expected outcome. The feeling of being marked in life and the sense of repetitiveness permeate his life. "May be nothing happens ever happens once and is finished" (LIA 210), he muses dwelling on the all-encompassing, ever-pervading sense of inseparableness, futility: "Yes, we are both father. Or may be father and I are both Shreve, may be it took father and me both to make Shreve. or Shreve and me both to make father or may be Thomas Sutpen to make all of us" (LIA 210). Like Daniel again, Quentin simply can't keep the world barred, preferentially. As is the case of Light in August and The Sound and the Fury the problems of indeterminacy, self-delineation, repetition and meaninglessness are pervasive in Absalom, Absalom!. The ones like Judith, Henry, and Shreve--they are all under the influence of the same kind of logic. Judith feels caught in the strings of a giant puppetry which is humanity and Shreve is tormented by queries of multiple irreconcilable possibilities.

Faulknerian involvement with the constitution of subjectivity is not to be entirely linked with his Yoknapatawpha milieu or being part of a world lit by racial taint. Even in works like The Wild Palms or Pylon, set in

entirely different terrain, theme-wise and narration-wise, they reemphasise the same explorative intent. The Wild Palms is composed of intertwining narratives, alternatively arranged, titled "The Wild Palms" and "Old Man". Harry Wilbourne and an old unnamed convict are the protagonists who, except for the lack of concern as to their origin, subscribe to the conventional Faulknerian features. If the former is speculative, the latter is noted for being taciturn. But the opposition, the pairing, only throws further light on the author's relentless juxtapositions and parallelisms in his effort to explore personhood. Wilbourne, a medical student who left incomplete his internship, lives with Charlotte Rittenmayer, wife of Francis Rittenmayer. His unsuccessful effort to abort her pregnancy leads to her death and his incarceration. Later, he chooses to die in the prison. The old man, in prison for his attempt to rob a train, actually goes through the whirl of a flood, officially sent to save a man. He gets lost, is carried away by the flood. The man saves a pregnant woman, sees her through her delivery and returns to the prison, much to the confusion and chagrin of the jail authorities.

This fine counterplacing of loves/lives helps to shed light on the complex issue of self and subjectivity. Harry, the lover, is often racked by moments of severe uncertainty and the feeling that future holds in store for him only disasters manifold, "the immemorial blind receptive matrix, the

hot fluid blind formation" (WP 138). The nihilistic vein surfaces in him as the novel progresses. He states: "you remember. The precipice, the dark precipice; all mankind before you went over it and lived and all after you will but that means nothing to you because they can't tell you, forewarn you, what to do in order to survive" (138). This is clear reflection of the inability of deciphering life's equations, the failure to orient oneself and the conclusion that the past, even if mastered, offers no solace to the living. He is aware of the ability of life to tear him asunder and to perpetuate the war within. The old man perfectly balances the picture by offering the other half of the argument and hence the ceaseless tilt possible in the achievement /non-achievement of a tangible sense of belongingness. For the old man, to exist is to be in the prison. After thwarting every opportunity he had, he labours his way back to the prison and is rewarded with a long period of punishment. The tall convict muses: "Now there was a peculiar quality of repetitiveness about his present fate, how not only the most serious crises recurred with certain monotony, but, the very physical circumstances followed a stupidly unimaginative pattern" (WP 271). If Harry and Charlotte wreck the conventions of society in their attempt to assert themselves, the convict tries to be authoritarian in submitting himself to discipline and attempts to impose a pattern even on natural disasters like a flood.

Pylon, set entirely in town, is involved with the art of flying and reporting. In the final reckoning, though, it is as much about the reporter's struggle to articulate an event /life, as it is concerned with the travails and tragedy of fliers. The agonising inability to fathom life and render it coherent is powerful in the reporter. He is insufficient in comprehending the dimensions of the drama which unfolds before him, in distinguishing between journalism and fiction, fact and truth. The schism of consciousness evident in every Faulknerian text is seen in the ambivalent tone that the author embraces in the narrative. He is, "unable to reconcile his admiration for the fliers with his presentation of them as examples of dehumanising effects of the machine age" (Harrington 55). As it is, the reporter's attitude to life echoes those of the major protagonists of Faulkner. Life for him is "thinking about the day after tomorrow and the day after that and the day after and after that and... smelling the same burnt coffee and dead shrimp and oyster and waiting for the same light to change..." (PLN 176). He is impressed by the fliers' ability to evade the monotony of life circumscribed by the regimentation of time, whereas the novel presents a picture of the life of fliers with essentially little difference from that of the rest--equally monochromatic and boring. Monotony, sameness, the failure to salvage a perception of difference, of relevance in things and events or the lack of it, fuel the reporter's anxiety. Pylon, with

its aura of doom transplanted to a technologised backdrop, only puts the pet themes of Faulkner into another wary trial.

The ceaseless exploration of a conjectural pivotal to anchor ones life, hence, pervades the fiction of Faulkner. A novel like The Town or Go Down, Moses may not foreground the fissures of being alive like As I Lay Dying or The Sound and the Fury. But in such works, what Faulkner attempts in a subdued manner is not essentially different from the feverish approach of the issues in, for instance, Absalom, Absalom!. Doing away with the acute turbulence of the individual's inner life, it points to the public realm and the contrast only highlights his theory of "splendid failure" (Meriwether 180) applied to the concept of self. The difference is hence in degree, not in kind. They interrogate themselves to plumb into the past, attempting to access a decipherable past. The search splinters/deviates into a frantic hunt into the medium, sometimes as a consequence of the hazy nature of the goal sought and often because of the sceptic core the questors' possess. The private as well as public realms/functions of language are hotly contested in the polyphony of the narrative. Meaning and perception evoke queries of personhood as self quests for definition by narrative.

II

The word and the story are parts of a larger domain in which self is often sought. The art-centered, creativity-oriented nature of the works of Faulkner is a strong indication of the self-explorative quality of his novel writing. Faulkner's significance as a great novelist is perhaps eclipsed by his panache for experimentation with plot and narration. The novels which tell the tales of the men and women who seek the meaning of one's self, always ride on a narrative which attempts to perfect itself, which explores the possibility of reaching the perfect mode of communication. Quoting the terms of Garry Harrington, not just the non-yolknapatawpha novels, but every fictional piece from the writer has been "Fables of Creativity" (8). They are ruminations on meaning in life as well as art. Since they are the musings of a novelist stuck with the queries of personhood, the nature of communication and the fluent, unboundable realm of consciousness, these cohabit in mutual tension. The books become perfect fields where their mutual indebtedness and violations are captured.

Faulkner acknowledges the unbridgeable divide between life and writing as words can simultaneously represent and make us agonizingly aware that it can only "re-present". The struggle of man burdened with this consciousness is evident in his writing. "The problematic relationship of

language to outer and inner reality, its claim to referentiality and expressiveness, informs much of Faulkner's fiction" (Bleikasten 25). Because, as Bleikasten adds, "for Faulkner, the contradiction between language and life, if never finally resolved, could be coped with through the creation of another idiom: the idiom of art. What art is, how it relates to the world and to the artist's self" (25).

But what is to be asserted while agreeing with Bleikasten is that Faulkner is aware of the limitless nature of the search for the artistic communion as is he of the quest for personhood which drives him and his characters into a search for a poetics of art. Faulkner states during an interview that "Man is free and responsible, terribly responsible. His tragedy is the impossibility--or at least the tremendous difficulty, of communication. But man keeps on trying endlessly to express himself and to make contact with other human beings" (Meriwether 70-71). This is why Faulkner's "ruling concern was one of self definition in terms of life and art, not articulation of a theatrical creed of universal validity" (Bleikasten 28). Digging into the labyrinthine nexus that characterises the relationship between life and art, self and creativity, Faulkner seems to acknowledge Bleikasten's contention that "selves are fictions anyhow--more or less random, and more or less ingenious combinations of images and

identifications. Selves are texts: motley tissues woven from reminiscences and borrowings: the patterns may be new and original, the material never is" (3).

Faulkner is fascinated by the mutual empowerment, entrapment and emancipation of life and art. All his protagonists agonisingly approximate the reality via language, only to know the always known that the significance is more in the ritual of pursuit than in the capture of truth. But irresistible is the need and passion for the exercise as it defines their sense of belongingness. Erection of identity defi(n)es the capacity to narratively unravel the haunting past through their articulations. But the self called fiction never reifies into a sedimented entity at the bottom of the narrative. The liquidity persists. This explains John. T. Mathews' argument that "language--both as characters manipulated it and as they are constituted by it in the novels-- simultaneously erodes the autonomy and discreetness of selfhood even as it creates them" (16).

The tendency on the part of Faulkner to probe into the intricacies of the creative/artistic functions of language is pronounced right from the beginning of his career. In Soldier's Pay, Joe Gilligan and Januarious Jones are two muted artist figures, acting as complementaries. They represent opposed attitudes to reading and hence, language. If Gilligan is inarticulate, Januarious has a Janus-like facility with words. It clearly is the seed which sprouts in to full-blown language consciousness and narrative complexity

in the works to come. The attempt to bunch disparate material together during the narration is certainly the spade work for the modernist fractured structures of As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury. Mosquitoes, the very next novel easily accommodates the linguistic emphasis aspired to by the writer in Soldier's Pay. The cost of art in the creation of life and the price of life in the erection of art--a theme that holds all the three novelists under study here--raise its vigorous head here. It lays at the heart of the novel the extent of the ability of language to reflect life/reality. It debates the question of the binary function of language, as a signifier of everything and nothing. "It is a kind of sterility--words", Fairchild admits "you begin to substitute words for things and deeds... and pretty soon the thing or the deed becomes just a kind of shadow of a certain sound you make by shaping your mouth a certain way... but you have confusion too" (MOS 210). Talliaferro and Gordon symbolise the conflicting artistic pair in Mosquitoes. The use Talliaferro find in language is its ability to "balance desire and fear of satisfaction" (Mathews 46), reflecting what Gail Mortimer calls "the dilemma of desire" (127) in Faulkner. As John. T. Mathews expresses it, "Talliaferro repeatedly sustains and suspends his desire by representing it, to create intimacy out of intimation" (47). Other characters in Mosquitoes also contribute alternate views on art and creativity. Mrs. Maurier, Fairchild, Patricia, all of them involve in this discussion of art and life. It is the only novel from Faulkner which projects art as the prime theme whereas in the later fiction,

he masterfully weds the artistic experimentation and debates in the investigations of self-realisations.

Sartoris, later retitled Flags in the Dust, is a continuation of Faulkner's fictional musings on the language-experience conundrum. The novel, which brings the Yoknapatawpha into existence, confronts themes of representation and loss, articulation and accessibility, stitched to the Southern theme unlike in the novel of ideas like Mosquitoes. As in the case of Compson and Caddy in The Sound and the Fury, Horace and Narcissa Benbow are the sibling pair who uses language to present and prevent their incestuous urges. Judith Lockyer, writing on the connection between being and becoming in the novels of Faulkner, states:

> Horace Benbow shares more than a troubled sentimentalism with Quentin, Darl, Ike and Gavin. All five characters are bound by an intense, complex relation to words that often intersect with that of writers. Each one is tormented by his desire to do the impossible--to create, order and preserve the essence of experience in words. And each lives with the sense that he, too, is a kind of failed poet. To discover the genesis of that failure, Faulkner begins to challenge the limitations of language that make any meaning possible (3).

Horace Benbow, who makes repeated appearances in Faulkner's fiction, is a significant name in his career-long exploration into the limits and potentialities of language. "Born aloft on his flowing verbal wings" (FID 180). Horace preserves the dream of glass blowing the perfect vase, akin to the chaste Faulknerian dream of seamless articulation. He states: "I have always been ordered by words, but it seems that I can even restore assurance to my own cowardice by cozening it a little" (FID 98). The passage is emblematic of the ambivalent attitude Horace/Faulkner embraces in their approach to language. His characters are "ordered by words" (FID 98) as Judith Lockyer points out--both composed of and compelled by them. It is this obsession which renders his outlook romantic and partly makes him a failure. Turned by his immense faith in language to a self-commentator-cum-observer, his communication time and again becomes self-communication. As Lockyer puts it, "Horace Benbow is, of course, dogged by the fear that language is mutable and not only representational throughout Flags in the Dust especially. But the struggle between doubt and faith in the power of words invigorate Faulkner's writing" (25).

Composed of competing narratives that vie for authority, The Sound and the Fury is a milestone in Faulkner's fictional journey in the rather elusive terrain of articulation. The sense of hollowness felt by Quentin

Compson and the vacuity that he attempts to fling are generated by and in turn fed by the fear of articulation. Quentin is a Horace Benbow powered with added scepticism and linguistic urgency. His is also Faulkner's dilemma of resolving the dialogue of the self and the wor[l]d, and of retrieving roots from a troubled legacy and disturbing past. The mutually conflicting views he holds regarding the dual capacity of language to solve and dissolve the self make his quest perilous. Chronically withdrawn and severely upset, Quentin is pushed into suicide as he essays to decipher a circle of the consciousness circumscribed by the self-elusive ideas of language. This is why Lockyer calls Quentin, "the dark extreme of his author's continuing debate about language" (36).

A telling manifestation of Quentin Compson's linguistic dilemma is embedded in the incest story involving his sister with which he is in dalliance in his imagination. His desire is to have the story with which he grapples articulated and established. Like Horace in Flags in the Dust and Joe in Doctorow's Loon Lake, Quentin subscribes to the view that lying can aid survival. But, interestingly, Quentin wants to expose himself by exposing the verbal image that is stuck in him or in which he is stuck. Ironically he is bent on doing it while suspecting the outcome and success of it. In his fervent speculations, his monologues evolve both sides of the incest story and argue within himself. This constant friction, devoid of

ultimate fruition, contributes to the chequered identity. To confess having committed an act he is uncertain about, he thinks, will release him. But it as well releases him into the aftermath of having to chase the cause of the supposed act and the effects of the illicit imagination. Because, "for Quentin narrating is the art of asserting a self that is fitted with unarticulated, warring fears and desires" (Lockyer 42). This explains why language is held as a double-edged maker and unmaker of personhood by him. The incest story, the gap between the telling and the experiencing of it, its existence and legitimacy, keeps Quentin's selfhood in a life-denying flux. Expression is enactment and enactment is, ironically, bereavement. Quentin's nihilistic father only helps to confound the crisis as he advocates the fragility of language, further destabilizing the man's ideal faith in personhood revealed through language.

Every section of the novel is actually an analysis of varied aspects of a different approach to the mind-language duality. Each section emphasizes as well as explores the relation of consciousness and language. It only fits Faulkner's scheme of things that he opens his study with Benjy, the idiot. He, in the words of Faulkner, "is capable of only knowing what happened, not why" (qtd. in Merriwether 245). His is a consciousness that uses the medium of language without comprehending it. The reader/listener has to massively supplement the articulation of Benjy to derive his sense of

reality out of it. Through Benjy, Faulkner points to the isolation that lack of communication can cause. But simultaneously he also serves to contrast the limits of success of those who are not mentally impaired, like Jason or Quentin. Just as Benjy needs Caddy to formulate his thoughts and render them meaningful, they all rely on the interpretation and imposition of the ones around. The difference is in degree, not in kind. If Jason is plain and clear, his linguistic clarity often gives him away exposing the irony of his words. He knows the power of language and makes it a rule not to write anything down. He is a liar inveterate caught ironically in a need to decipher the letters of others.

Quentin Compson appears with less intense and urgent desire for life defining/denying communication in Absalom, Absalom! This anxiety is only subservient to that of Rosa Coldfield, who is inextricably caged in her own suffocating tale, seeking immediate narrative release. It obviously mars his peace but not as it did in The Sound and Fury. He speaks little and is a listener for almost three-fourths of the book. But in terms of intensity the novel belongs to Rosa Coldfield. Rosa, the compatriot of Quentin, ends in a coma if Quentin commits suicide. Rosa's hysterical narrative opens the war of perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!. She tells her story in a "grim, haggard, amazed voice" (AA 7). She is, like Quentin, obsessed with the Sutpen story, committed to telling and retelling her part and she replays

memory to substitute the present. Her "impotent, yet indomitable frustration" makes a captive of Quentin. As Quentin puts it, "because she wants it told" (AA 5). Nothing else explains her choice of Quentin or her passionate rendition except the fact that she wants it told. It is an obsessive-compulsive need. So contrary to her claim, she does hold a brief for herself.

Absalom, Absalom! is a novel in which subject matter is meaning-making, the experiential nature of language. If The Sound and the Fury confronts the question of communication and the evolution of reality through attempted depiction of varying and varied states of consciousness trapped in language, Absalom, Absalom! does the same through a handful of characters whose insecurity resides in their inability to get the past straight. It is the story of intrusion and violation of another kind. The Faulknerian kaleidoscope, filled with recurrent queries of self and the wor[l]d, is twisted to reveal a new pattern, equally intriguing and powerfully intimidating. Quentin, Rosa, Shreve, Sutpen--they all struggle to get the tale of Sutpen straight to illuminate the teller and the told. Meaning unfolds and grows richer as words accumulate. As sentences long to be instances of encapsulated eternity in their entirety, the feeling is one of being immersed in language.

From the perspective of the current analysis, Light in August might sound as an odd choice since it is singularly lacking in the stock narrative twists and experimentation in plots so characteristic of Faulkner. Presented through an omniscient narrator, the novel is narrated smoothly, except for an odd twist or two towards the end. In many ways Light in August reminds one of E.L Doctorow's Ragtime--from the apparent straight relation of the tale to the subject of race on which it is built. But the heart of the novel actually involves the fictional debate Faulkner has been concerned with through out: the relationship of life and language. Yet the angle through which the writer has chosen to effect the exploration offers a total change in comparison with the novels which have come earlier. Instead of placing for scrutiny the way language envelops consciousness by defying and restricting it, Faulkner approaches the public-private arms of the linguistic question. Language as cultural component and culture as linguistically determined rise to supremacy in the novel. To a great extent, this is a consequence of the central place racism enjoys in it. Certainly no text of Faulkner is without involving the issue of racism. But in Light in August, the novelist accords it the highest degree of prominence.

The leading characters of Light in August are aware of the hostility and necessity of words to them, even though in a less pronounced manner when compared to those like Quentin or Addie in As I lay Dying. The

public perception of concepts like Negro, woman, Bible is subjected to curious and stringent analysis here. All the major players like Joe, Joanna, Doc Hines, McEachen are stuck in the social distinction of these words. Hightower dwells in an old story of his grand father's wartime deeds. Books claim much of his waking hours. If he reads Tennyson, it is in the full knowledge that it is as effete as "listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not to understand" (LIA 350). Light in August represents an array of characters who deny the relational and contextual nature of language--Doc Hines, McEachern, Calvin Burden, Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, the first two being the foster fathers of Joe. Byron Bunch, another loner in Light in August, is beset with questions of delineating the complex relationship of the self and the polyphonic world around him. His effort is to make his word good. But he realises how ephemeral language could be. Hence Light in August is about the difficulties of perceiving relationships, of the impossibility of knowing people correctly.

Like Barth and Doctorow, William Faulkner too has targeted the formal versions of history as his fiction basically chronicles fictionally the South-Jefferson and Mississippi. As in Barth and Doctorow he blurs the distinction between fiction and history, which is another way of problematising the conception of the South, and that of language by

extension. The mingling of the imagined and the supposedly real informs the major bulk of his "invented historical novels" (Rollyson 7). In a passage reminiscent of Doctorow's views on history, Rollyson comments on the methodology of Faulkner's writing: "it appears that the central question in Faulkner's historical novels is what the character thinks happened in the past. What actually happened may never be entirely resolved" (11). Faulkner too refuses to subscribe to the finality/formality of conventional history. He takes on the sanitised regional history of the South and pushes his apocryphal version forward. In Light in August, all the major characters are besieged by what they think happened in the past. Their knowledge is more often than not at loggerheads with their past truths. Either the falsity of their knowledge or the limits of it anguishes them. The omniscient narrator, like that of Doctorow's Ragtime, as he attempts a recreation of the past through memory, acknowledges the public other of the private wor(l)ds. The word problematises life for Joe and the word "woman" does the same for Joanna. Joe's life is composed of "voices evocative of names and times and places" (LIA 115). As in Ragtime, the narration is repeatedly extremely ironical, which is one way of making explicit the dormant duplicity of language. The social restriction of lives through language is given thrust here. As Lockyer suggests, "the impulse to trust language absolutely irritates every one" (93). But language being the only tool, its inevitability has to be confronted too. This is why the

narrator repeatedly coins newer compounds to express himself. The novel hence alternates between linguistic fatality and necessity.

As I Lay Dying is described by Harold Bloom as "Faulkner's strongest protest against the facticity of literary conventions" (Urgo 6). Death, the presence of an absence in the life of the bereaved in As I Lay Dying is as much the absence of legitimate presence brought forth by language and communication. In the midst of jumbled chronology, multiple, fragmented narration and the varied consciousness through which the locale and the events clip along, the novel centers itself on the elusive trail that meaning leaves on human attempt at articulation. Because whatever else As I Lay Dying is also about, it forcefully foregrounds the question of being and meaning. From the chronically sceptic Addie, who dismisses the expressive, referential power of language, through the Verdamanesque realm beyond language to Cash's attempt to legitimate his talk, the novel takes a sound, deep look at the spectrum of human articulation. The novel, following the clear-cut division of the cast of Mosquitoes on the basis of their attitude to language, in fact, contains a whole variety of characters verifiable in terms of their passion for/prejudices against language. Anse, Cora, and Whitefield are those who find language reliable. Darl seems to be so perplexed as well as perturbed by their struggles to verbalize his experience. Vardaman is stuck at a

primitive level of mental experience with the language available. Cash is as precise as his carpentry is.

It is Addie who is pivotal vis-à-vis the question of communication in the novel. For Addie "words don't ever fit" (AILD 157). Cowered down by years of unpluggable gap between words and deeds, she spurns the authority of language. Addie's is the most outspoken denial of language but the stance she adopts is redundant. The polyphony of the cast, the shades of perception and the problems of articulation presented through them makes As I Lay Dying Faulkner's supreme exploration of the travails and tragedy of attempted communication. Darl, on the other hand, champions the cause of verbal communication. He is a man with intuitive power who first declares the death of Addie far away from home. Though mad, Darl's efforts to make himself understood, primarily to the world and then to the rest, to make himself linguistically rational, rationally articulated, make him embody the Faulknerian travails of articulation. His extra perception of the insane is juxtaposed with the precariousness of Vardaman. Darl puts such a high premium on the linguistic assertion of his self because "for him, the self and its relation to others exist when he can put them into words" (Lockyer 77). There are moments in the novel when he seems to be trapped by the words in which he seeks refuge to deliver himself. Expression and entrapment circle the contorted psyche of his. His

seeing of the barn on fire is an instance. His description of the fire indeed serves to point to the bizarre alchemy of the real and irreal, the sane and insane, in the imaginative realisation of creative act. It also comments on the hazards of truthful expression as it invariably slips into realms beyond and things unsaid in the fear of risking incoherence. Narration is an isolationist endeavour, an attempt to cut oneself off, to detach the viewer from the viewed, with the intention of possessing the optional distance for legitimising the viewed as truth. Darl's heightened efforts to narrate himself leads him into a lunatic asylum: "Darl has struggled throughout to intercept events by making them a coherent story but ultimately his language will not allow him to control events because he is also living the story he is telling. Once he removes himself, he can be objective, but that means the dissolution of himself" (Lockyer 81).

In Darl and Vardman, Faulkner has created a unique fictional study of the concerns of perception and articulation. Vardman is mentally deranged and Darl furiously sliding away from the shores of sanity. The difference seems to be one of quantity than of quality. But, as if subscribing to the Doctorowian flux to come, Faulkner leaves ambiguous the relationship regarding the cause-effect sequence. Is Darl mad because he is the receptacle of severe perceptions of an extra-sensitive psyche? Or is the psyche rendered thus because of a deranged mind? what is certain is

that the author has employed the couple of them to traverse the shifty equation connecting self and articulation, being and meaning.

Hence, the experiential nature of language is an explicit subject of his novels as Faulkner explores the link between consumer and language in the context of so much failed communicators/communication. The human instinct is to articulate the self, but again and again, we see that articulation is fumbled or choked off from an audience within the novel. For reasons as different as they are, none of the Compson brothers can communicate effectively. Language remains an interior tool for them and the effort is to articulate consciousness, not to seek solutions or to establish connections with the (people of the) world. Of the three writers discussed in the thesis, no one looks into the relationship between language and consciousness more thoroughly than William Faulkner. If Barth and Doctorow wrestle with the problems of narrative voice and articulation of reality, Faulkner places himself at even prior levels of consciousness in exploring the relationship of knowing and meaning. For Faulkner's characters, it is the language and its articulation which constitute this consciousness. "[T]hey create identities that cohere in the texts of their lives" (Mathews 31). They do not merely recall the past, they exist in them. Hence, "the problem of identity is confluent with the problem of the narrative presentation of perceptions" (Mortimer 7).

Thus in Faulkner the persistence of the writerly dilemma of constituting a narrated self while relying on an ever elusive medium of language, is cogent. All his major characters rely on and emphasise "a sense of the interplay of perception and identity" (Mortimer 4). All the texts of Faulkner are, in one way or another, linked to the agony and efficacy of transcribing oneself, one's life into a text, and thereby, in the words of Walter. J. Ong, "spatialising" it (110). Because, "a spatial orientation implicitly assumes that the location and definition of something (the conceptual drawing of a line around it) fixes it somehow" (Ong 110). "This illusion of control is implicit in the act of writing, which by virtue of its finitude--the words on a page, seems to help us to represent tangibly the entities we are trying to think about" (Mortimer 37). All his protagonists are involved, as Faulkner himself, in an extended struggle to fix their fleeting sense of being with narrated lives, spatialised, realised beings. The texts in which these characters erect their "splendid failures" (Meriwether 180) of self-construction, hence, are manifestations of a consciousness in play. The pulls and counter pulls of self and language, men and text, to mean and to be, reveal the shifting fissures of consciousness. The issues of race and colour only heighten the schisms of consciousness and aid the play to further persist.

III

There are many obstacles in the pursuit of a narrated personhood in Faulkner apart from those presented by the inexorable entity called language. The goal of the major characters of Faulkner is to decipher the past and to compose coherence by bridging it with the present. The roots of their troubled legacy lie buried in the past and often are of social origin. It is the clash between the individual ethos and the coercive machinery of the society/state which triggers the crisis. As Faulkner is given to iterate, there may be "no such thing as *was*" (Meriwether 255), but if it is embedded with the present, that presence itself thwarts the characters' desire to unentangle themselves. To further mystify the liberation struggle, they all have pasts immersed in the racial conflicts of the past. The Southern cultural backdrop that defines Faulkner's oeuvre provides yet another crucial determinant/deterrent in the constitution of their personhoods.

It is not at all surprising that together with Barth and Doctorow, Faulkner has dismissed blankly the idea of his fiction carrying any political affiliation or manifesto as such. Yet, an author who succeeds in problematising the Southern way of life in his novels could hardly keep off the signs of the times and he actually does not. At the very hub of Southern American culture and the fiction which feeds on it, is the racial question.

Among other things, violence, incest and misogyny creep always into his world of fiction as offshoots of the feelings of race and place. In his Faulkner's Apocrypha, Joseph R. Urgo takes an insightful look at the apocalyptic vision of Faulkner and its ideological implications. Faulkner, for him, is a twentieth-century writer of apocrypha writing against place and time, denying the universal/perpetual authority of any single established truth or knowing (Urgo 48). Faulkner admittedly is interested in portraying the scenario of "man in conflict with himself, with his fellow man, and with his time and place, his environment" (Gwynn 19). As Urgo modifies: "man is in conflict with himself, with the perceptions and values he has inherited and carries with him, preconceptions that can blind him to reality and prevent independent or genuine reaction" (59).

In every work of Faulkner--Joe in Light in August, Quentin in The Sound and the Fury--the major sufferers are recipients of a cultural scenario, a past they are compelled to accept, a history they are destined to live through. Their personal quandary is as much an outcome of the philosophic scepticism they possess as it is a derivative of being held captive by the deterministic cultural parameters of a shifting community. The role of community in the construction of a sense of identity is quite significant. There is a delicate dovetailing of give and take involved in it. In the way we feel our separateness and experience this knowledge

subjectively, there are questions of our perceptions and expectations about the world involved. "[A]ll of the choices that we make about how to live our lives are based on perceptions of the world and our felt role in it; even the most diverse behaviours will be variations on a basic identity theme that may be seen as a sort of core metaphor for our existence" (Mortimer 4). In a revealing study, Mortimer highlights the connection:

> The identity themes for Faulkner's narrators and male characters, were we able to discover them entirely, would tend to be troubled ones, for the perceptions revealed in his descriptive passages show us that their world is experienced as unlikely to offer what they need. Instead, the central consciousness that guides us through Faulkner's fictive world assures that precious things in the world will tend to leave it and that the only way to prevent loss is to hold on, to create containers and to emphasise boundaries, to see things in ways that control the dissolution that is the normal state of things (Mortimer 4).

Faulkner's characters dwell in a very inimical environment, stumbling their way through, more often than not, with the implicit awareness of the cul-de-sac they stalk.

This is all the more relevant when it comes from a writer who has expressed serious reservations about the way the blacks were treated in America. As Cleanth Brooks has stated, "withholding from the black people of their full civil rights and socially forcing them in to segregated schools, Faulkner saw a flagrant denial of the opening sentence of the declaration of independence" (139). Faulkner's planned essay, titled "The American Dream; What Happened to It?" was meant to be a critique of the American way of life. "On Fear" and "On Privacy," the only two to be really accomplished, are a scathing attack on the American cultural ethos of the period. The concept of the freedom of the individual is at the heart of both essays. "We seem to be losing all confidence not only in our national character but in man's integrity too," Faulkner states (qtd. in Brooks 141). The release from mere subjecthood, which the American Dream promised through opportunities to become persons in their entirety, has turned out to be a mirage in terms of reality. In "On Privacy," Faulkner describes America as having promised "a sanctuary on earth for individual man," one in which he would be safe from "the old, established, closed-corporation hierarchies of arbitrary power...of church and state" (qtd. in Brooks 144). The individualism that Faulkner advocates here is what Doctorow asserts in his writings, citing Plato's view of Justice: "the liberty to realise ones full being" (Brooks 145), not the corrupted version

permitted by American culture, where existence is transformed into a synonym for corporationalised lust and individual greed.

This anger and frustration of Faulkner against the American grain marks its appearance primarily in the form of the race-infested class divide in the South. In Light in August, Joe Christmas is ignorant of the manner and degree of recognition required for his acceptance in Jefferson's racial society. The presumed black blood in Joe unsettles his life forever. It renders him an exile for life from life. It pushes him out of the confines of both the black and white communities alike. He remains a culturally undefined entity in a society in which the parameters of existence and acceptance are fixed only in terms of the racial scales. He doesn't receive any models to follow or aspirations to realise. It is this secular void that coerces him to denounce the moral codes of both races. In the white-dominated Jefferson society of the time, a mulatto was considered more of an inferior black. The norms of colour-based identification and segregation has made the acceptance of a racially ambiguous one impossible. This leads to the uncertainty regarding the reception of Joe in the society.

In every sense, at every crucial encounter in the life of Joe, the black/white query has haunted him: his childhood as a white boy in an orphanage, aborted sexual initiation by a black girl and so on. Ralph Watkins argues convincingly that the danger that Christmas represents to

society in Jefferson exists because Joe has done two things: first, he has crossed the threshold between white and black and his existence brings together what should, in a racist society, be wholly separate (13). The Jefferson community's fear of Joe seems to stem from the ambiguous status he has in society because of his presumed mixed identity. They feel him capable of upsetting the rhythm of their lives as he can't be definitely labelled.

"Because society has treated him as a white man, although he is not part of it, he must conform to white society's morality codes. Joe's anger comes in part, not only from his uncertainty about his identity, but from society projecting on to him its anger at what it interprets as wilful deception" (Sugarmann 100). During the fifteen years period he is left away from Jefferson, Joe has wandered between his possible dual identities. "He had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them or be beaten; now he fought the Negro who called him white...at night he would lie...with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and white thinking and being" (LIA 212). When he kills his white mistress, the white code catches up, asserting its whiteness and Joe's blackness, castrating and killing him. When Faulkner's depiction of the racist South and the blacks in his fiction are analysed--from Dilsey, through Joe to Lucas Beauchamp, the three landmark blacks

in his fiction-- the significance attached to the mulatto stands out. Being people of mixed blood, they are capable of manifesting the confusion and puzzlement, leading to ambiguities and ambivalences.

In the spectrum of varying contours of the self-society network, The Sound and the Fury claims a different kind of space. In it Faulkner explores the struggle of an individual, Quentin Compson, a Doctorowian Daniel minus the burden of a politically destroyed family legacy, whose hyper-sensitiveness combined with cacophonous family relationships render him extremely susceptible to the concerns of shrinking selfhood. If in Joe's case the external pressure far outweighs or at least equals the turbulence within, in the case of Quentin it is the inner hell that wrecks albeit it could be the consequences of his dealings with the immediate family surrounding and the cultural, sexual equations it embodies.

> Instead of a single maternal figure guiding a child to a sense of separateness and identity, the Southern child was often raised alongside a Negro (and white) siblings by a black, as well as a white mother. In this context, the complicated sorting out of one's self as a being with a coherent and clear identity of one's own might well be made more difficult by the presence of two maternal figures and two races... in a meaningful emotional state. If a white child is nursed and

> raised by a black woman, the white mother may be felt to be absent (Mortimer 13).

This greatly explains the feeling of a sense of inner vacuity in the central figures of The Sound and the Fury as well as Light in August. In the later stages of the Southern male child, this leads to fixing woman as a polarity and to erection of boundaries. This feeling of Joe reappears in another guise in the identity crises of Quentin too:

> Woman are like that they don't acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed clothing in slumber fertilising the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever exited or not (TSTF 119).

This stereotyped conception of the female which is a Southern cultural derivation has exerted its pressure in demolishing the bounds of entity for the emotionally unstable Quentin. If finally Quentin has failed in maintaining the requisite distance and is compelled to submerge in the "waters of Caddy", a union which implies destruction, a togetherness, a to-get-her-ness, which denies the bounds of self he has sought, it is to a great

extent a result of the said fixation. Hence the vacillation of Quentin regarding his attitude to women and Caddy in particular roughly parallels the same of Joe, the black-white duality, the involvement-detachment pattern. It is loss of love that has disestablished the moorings of Quentin's psyche and it is a direct consequence of the colour politics in which the South indulged. The story of Quentin is, there fore, as much about the loss of self through loss of love and the discomfort of Faulkner's heroes with women is closely related to the disease of a culture of the turn of the century South America.

It is the remix of the same Southern ingredients of race, family and cultural moves which wreak havoc with the lives of Rosa and Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!. In any dispassionate analysis of the Sutpen design, the genesis of the grand design is related to his boyish encounter with racist superiority and the concept of ownership of land. Till then, "he didn't even know that there was a country all divided and fixed and neat because of what colour their skins happened to be and what they happened to own" (AA 179). The initiation of Sutpen, born in the mountains of Virginia, into the colour-conscious rites of ownership cements his resolve to conceive a racially pure dynasty. Thomas Sutpen glues himself to the image which has rebuked his nascent psyche. The South and its racial politics are writ sharply into the backdrop of the character as well as of the novel. The saga

of Sutpen is that of the race-ridden South. If Joe in Light in August undergoes the trauma of turbulent inner contradiction as to the colour of his self, in Sutpen it is the external, material trappings of the same prejudices that surface. His passion to fix his identity abidingly with the Southern symbols of land, mansion and male offspring is society induced. He deserts his first wife at Haiti, a rich planter's daughter, finding that she has Negro blood in her and she couldn't be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design. Rosa, too, is wrought by curious influences of the familial and personal nature, but of which, the least significant one is that of the Southern cultural mores. She is left to fend for herself, in her isolation, at Sutpen's hundred. Though at his mercy, she rejects his offer of a conditional marriage. Hence to a very good extent what turns Rosa into a psychic wreck is the existence of Sutpen and her father in a racial patriarchy.

Though the study restricts itself to selected works of William Faulkner, the aspects of his fiction subjected to analysis here runs through his whole oeuvre. Isaac McCaslin and Gavin Stevens exemplify the same in Go Down, Moses as they attempt self-recognition through articulation. Gavin is especially significant as his voice spreads through as many as five of his works. The capacity of language to reveal as well as conceal, to tell truth as well as falsehood, confuses him. The Reivers, a story of the growing up of Luscious Priest, too is involved with the question of self-

discovery at the stage of initiation. Moreover, it too voices the feeling of being overwhelmed in a world of plenty, where choosing and bounding becomes impossible. Hence even works as different from the exterior as Pylon or The Reivers at the heart embody the same urge to ease selves into emotional consolidation through therapeutic narration.

In the matrix of interpenetrating layers that make up the consciousness of Faulkner's characters, a clear-cut delineation of the purely individual and social is always a futile venture. In someone like Thomas Sutpen the pursuance of a socially rooted design is made a religion of and he is on the trail of experiences that cause/coerce him to catalyse the inner compulsion. The same goes true in the case of many characters studied here. As the evils of the South stretch to accommodate the evils of the land, the evils of humanity, the cursed South becomes a microcosm of the doomed mankind. Faulkner lets the blur called consciousness with its shifty bounds of self and society record itself. When expression precedes and equals existence, and existence denies and defies essence, the cycle of ceaseless attempt at expression and thus existence persist. The narrative houses this play in the consciousness as the self is both the object and the source of the consciousness. Each of the components of the narrative consciousness catalyses the other as well as serving itself as catalysts. The urge for self-definition pushes for linguistic path and language attempts to

gather the life around. As a socially determined culture and language exert the pressure back on the individual psyche, the turmoil is total. The catalytic activity of each is thus interrupted by the other component, leading to the ever evolving, ever emerging sense of self in the flux of consciousness--what Urgo calls, "the continuously created meaning" (24). Consequently, it drags along the material, spiritual and social irritants, repeatedly confronting and doing away with the search for absolutes, the signature of John Barth's funhouses of fiction. The being and the knowing dissolve into each other, as does the key and the treasure in John Barth.

Chapter 3

John Barth: A Spooky Simulacrum of Sense

I

John Barth has been at the forefront of a campaign to redirect the exhausting narrative possibilities and to refuel the American novel. In a highly productive creative career spanning about sixty years, worth a dozen of excellent novels, he has encompassed quite a number of literary strategies, inviting varied critical labels: American absurdist, black humorist, fabulator, and finally neo-realist. With the likes of Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut and Donald Barthelme, John Barth led the American fiction of the sixties to break new ground in terms of its form and content. Drawing on the modern as well as the postmodern poetics of fiction, he has set a course which has undermined the conventional taken-for-granted parameters of fiction while building on the same foundations a fiction of possibilities on the possibly exhausting fiction.

The rationale which fits John Barth to the present study, together with Faulkner and Doctorow is, to put it in a general introductory way, his *idée fixes*: the mechanics and politics of narrative which splinters into themes of self, narrative, and social dilemmas. Barth's fictional obsession could be simplified in the words of Max Schulz as "felt life and fictive means" (xi). As is the case with William Faulkner, Barth's characters are

incessantly caught up in the linguistic, social and metaphysical entanglements in their struggle to narratively delineate a sense of being. Whether real or parodic, they are all questors attempting to write/narrate/ record themselves to firm up a feeling of wholeness. Chasing an ever-receding meaning of self, they exhaust their narrative, rendering the ceaseless genesis of the self-narrative circle further elusive. The epistemological and ontological concerns, which inform the contents of Faulkner's novels, make their presence rather emphatically here. The postmodern queries of confronting as well as capturing reality, the problem of knowing and representation, the imaginative and intellectual cul-de-sac into which the contemporary novel has allegedly fallen--these power Barth's fictional mission at replenishment.

Two essays, "Literature of Exhaustion" (1962) and "Literature of Replenishment" (1979) sum up the fictional manifesto of John Barth. Echoing Philip Roth's well-known plaint of reality outstripping fiction and the consequent feeling of exhaustion of fictional possibilities, these essays argue for the contemporary need for confronting the vacuum generated by the death of high modernism and general narrative exhaustion by turning the cul-de-sacs against themselves. Barth advocates employing the narrative dead ends to generate tales. He prescribes a

"synthesis or transcension" (FB 203) of the modernist/postmodernist categories as in the writings of Italo Calvino or Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

> If the modernist, carrying the torch of romanticism taught us that linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naïve illusionism, transparent language, innermost anecdote and middle class moral conventions are not the whole story, then from the perspectives of the closing decades of our century we may appreciate that the contraries of those things are not the whole story either (FB 203),

argues Barth. Working a path of synthesis, Barth has settled down to the claim of being a teller of tales, Janus faced ones, with "one foot in the narrative past and the other in the structuralist or poststructuralist present" (Walkiewics 13).

"...The condition of *disorientation*...is my characteristic subject matter, my fictionary stock in trade. Intellectual and spiritual disorientation is the family disease of all my main characters", Barth states, "a disease usually complicated by ontological disorientation, since knowing where you are is often contingent upon knowing who you are," Barth states (FB 13). Starting with Todd Andrews in The Floating Opera, every major figure in his fiction is aggressively involved in the act of consolidating their lives on meaningful lines. Language fails them

because of their uncertainty regarding the reality that circles him as a result of the consciousness of the unreliability of medium and the absurdity of existence. The result always being that "the medium is the message" (FB 86). Regress in infinitum in the novels of Barth vis-à-vis characters or themes are a direct consequence of this dilemma. As and when the hunt for the self deteriorates in to a play with language, at the ontological level the search for identity settles down into a sedimented articulation of the path, not the destination. If language unsettles the voyage at one level, the social obstacles perform the same at another. A Barthian hero always gets stuck in the dense, to use a word loved by Barth, "labyrinth" of these shifty permutations of self, narrative and society. In the words of Robert.A. Hipkiss:

> The threatening world outside drives the characters into themselves in these novels and in the play of their consciousness we see both their attempts to escape the threat and the abortive attempts to defeat it. The imagination of the author and his characters, art and artist, become an alternative world in which the divided self took refuge to put itself back together (121).

The narrative and epistemological voyage within, in Barthian terminology, scriptotherapy, pushes the protagonist headlong into the

vertiginous quick sands of language, into the mutually constituted and mutually consuming narrative and consciousness.

This unenviable plight of Barth's self-brooding and self-making protagonists is compounded by certain commonalities. They are either loners on the trail of consoling self-discoveries or individuals compulsively following what is felt to be the destined herohood, like Giles in Giles Goat-Boy. They all end up adding one more component to the Barthian scheme, without offering anything valid in terms of the goals which initiated their quest, making Barth comment that "what I've been writing about all these years is not only orientation and education (rather, disorientation and education), but imperfect or unsuccessful or misfired education at that: not *ergiehungsromane* but *herabziehungsromane*; 'down-bringing-novels' " (FB 132). The scribblerian instinct to fix oneself in letters to halt the fluidity of being boomerangs as the slippery signification process proves equally unyielding to the ever evolving self's manoeuvres. The destination of absolutes--absolute values in terms of personhood, narrative, truth, reality etc--fails as the slippery foothold the intellect provides in grasping the essence of reality outwits them.

The narrative consciousness reflects on as well as becomes a reflection of this struggle. Hence, terms like self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness have dual function in John Barth, as is the case with

William Faulkner. The proclivity of John Barth to lean heavily on the Greek and Arabic myths also could be explained away as a consequence of his characters mythotherapy, to play roles to derive belongingness to affirm themselves. This chapter looks into selected works of Barth with the intention of making a prefatory exploration of the stated flux of personhood of its major characters, in terms of the forever constituted narrative consciousness it depicts, including its causes and consequences. As in the case of Faulkner, the chapter goes about its task in a tripartite manner analysing the metaphysical, the narrative and the social aspects of the issue.

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question in philosophy", states Albert Camus (3). Todd Andrews, the hero of Barth's first novel, The Floating Opera, the first of his great role players, is a Maryland lawyer whose sixteen year long enquiry into the baffling suicide of his father drives him to the conclusion that "everything, I'm afraid, is significant, and nothing is finally important" (FO 252). He adopts a series of masks, roles to counter his ailing heart condition--that of a rake, a saint and a cynic--in the search for a character suiting his state.

Todd is extremely self-conscious, sceptical and given to intense bouts of self-doubts and serpentine processes of vacuous self-scrutiny. No amount of thinking assists him as he grapples with his bifurcated sense of selves to create coherence since he "can understand everything at once in about three ways" (FO 31). A case in point is the question he asks as he broods on the word 'love': "are the differences between, say, ones love for his wife, his mistress, his parents, his cat, his nation, his hobby, his species, his books, his natural environment differences in kind or merely degree?" (FO 36), he muses. Like Daniel, the hero of Doctorow's The Book of Daniel, who also sets out to bring out the truth of his executed father, Todd is in chronic inability to keep his mind and narrative attuned to the one strand that will enlighten him. Multiple viable possibilities way lay his attempt at objectivity. As his attempt to blow up the floating opera to kill himself in the process fail, he resigns to the logic that "there is no final reason for living (or for suicide)" (FO 245) and settles on a life which borders on death.

"The ontological vacuum" (FB 133) named Jacob Horner of The End of the Road is, as Noland puts it, "Todd Andrews with a complete paralysis of will" (18), varying in degree from simple inability to decide to total paralysis in which he remains rooted to the bench he is occupying in the Pennsylvania station for eleven hours. Jacob's doubts as to his

sense of identity are confirmed by the well known opening statement of the novel: *"In a sense, I am Jacob Horner"*. "It is the malady called cosmopsis, the cosmic view..." (ER 60), an intense version of Todd's cosmic cynicism. The mythotherapeutic job as a teacher of prescriptive grammar brings him opposite Joseph Morgan, his colleague and his wife. Jacob, the sceptic is pitted against Joseph, the rationalist. If Jacob can't believe that he exists, Joseph's is a case of being too sure of his ground. If in The Floating Opera Todd finds no justification for anything, even for death, Jacob can't see reason even for motion. He denies a fundamental, authentic human identity. On certain days, "Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolistic sense, ceased to exist, for [he] was without personality" (ER 33), echoing Rennie's feeling that Horner cancels himself off. Rennie too tells Jake: "I think you don't exist at all. There's too many of you. It's more than just masks you put on and take off... you cancel yourself out, you're nothing" (ER 62-3). David Kerner's remark sums up the man: "every choice of *action* is a piece of *acting*--the assumption of a role, a mask, an arbitrary pretence of identity: under the mask is no "true self"--nobody. Horner is this nobody" (92). Rennie's pregnancy hots up the relationship among the three and the botched abortion of Rennie leads to her death. Rennie's death strips him off his mask, pushing him again to immobility. The statement the Negro doctor makes to Horner that "Existence not only precedes essence; in the case of

human beings it rather defies essence" sums up the attitude of both the novels (ER 128).

The Sot-Weed Factor, in the form of an eighteenth century historical narrative, portrays the identity concerns of Ebenezer Cooke and a protracted debate on the issue with his foil, Henry Burlingame. It combines the picaresque and the philosophical traditions of the eighteenth century with themes of existentialism and American innocence, against the backdrop of colonial history. It is the story of the education of Ebenezer Cooke in which the major discoveries are dubiety and futility. Unlike Todd or Jake who falls working for absolutes, Ebenezer, "dizzy with the beauty of the possible", decides to create the necessary absolute and latch on to it. "Faith, it is a rare wise man knows who he is... Did I, then, make a choice? Nay, for there was no *I* to make it! 'T was the choice made *me*, ...what am I? What am I? *Virgin*, sir! *Poet* sir! I am a virgin and a poet" (SWF 70-1). As Puetz puts it,

> In the course of the ensuing events, Eben's original fantasy generates other fantasies... since he is the poet per se, ... there must be a land worthy of his labour and praise. Since his love is pure and untainted by what he calls base motives, there must be a woman worthy of it. Thus the myth of Maryland, the perfect and the fantasy of Joan Toast, his

> eternal love, are born. In sum, the hero turns to the panacea of mythopoesis and creates fictional schemes and mythical worlds around himself which in turn support the very self concepts from which all interpretations of self and world have sprung (SWF 325).

So the fragility of one's self is what is left lingering in Ebenezer even after the attempt at narrative self-composition.

Ebenezer's legendary tutor Henry Burlingame raises the counterpoint in this now parodic, now serious debate over personhood. He is the "suitor of totality" (SWF 526), who persuades Eben and his sister Anna to revel in role taking. His faith lies in the argument that since existence basically lacks essence it is imperative that, "one must assert, assert, assert" (SWF 360) by creating and inventing roles. The world is indeed a flux, Burlingame is certain. Notwithstanding the occasional use of him to ridicule the archetypal shape-shifter of the fiction of the sixties, the character aids our understanding and Barth's experimentation in the varying dimensions of plurality of selves. If Eben is on the look out for his parentage, Burlingame has none to explore, as he is "Sprung *de novo* like a maggot out of a meat, or dropped from the sky" (SWF 142). "[H]urtling through a vacuum, racing to the grave", Burlingame is aware of the dark, undecipherable script of existence (SWF 344-5). As a "suitor

of totality," (SWF 526) his world remains a diffuse entity. He variously exists in the roles and disguises of Lord Baltimore, John Cooke, Peter Sayer, Timothy Mitchell, Nicholas Lowe and even Ebenezer Cooke. This is why he finds it hard to accept the discovery that he is the son of Tayac Chicamec of the Ahatchwhoops Indian tribe. It painfully restricts him and cuts him off all the persuasive liberty of the quest. It denies him an opportunity to be what Faulkner calls a "splendid failure" (Meriwether 180). This is the dilemma of the hunt for selfhood too. It is a Hobson's choice between the submission to a suffocating identity and the diffusive freedom with no claim whatsoever to a personhood--"a freedom that is both a blessing and a course" (SWF 178).

The ending of the novel doesn't offer any ultimate solution to the problems of identity. It is true that Eben wins almost everything he strives for--marriage of his choice, estate, recognition and maturity. It is a hollow victory all the way still. His love Joan Toast is a whore carrying syphilitic scars of their past. The legal victory, which helps him regain his estate, is through the benefit of a legal loophole. The so-called recognition is earned at the expense of his real maturity as a consequence of his capacity to tolerate their treacheries. Hence one can concur with Beverly Gross's contention that "there is neither victory nor resolution in any of this. Only

a precarious equilibrium and a defeat which, if one is to remain sane, had better be accepted ac success" (37).

Questions of success and failure are the staple themes of Giles Goat-Boy, his next novel, interrogated against the allegorical background of academic education. George is the goat-boy stuck half way between goathood and boyhood in terms of his consciousness, seeking his true identity through the achievement of Grant Tutordom. The universe is a university in the novel. In the clash of the New Tammany and Nikolay colleges, between WESCAC and EASCAC computers, it is the mission of Giles to ease the tension by finding out if he is the Giles: Grand Tutorial Ideal, Laboratory Eugenical Specimen. He has to defeat the WESCAC, the Western campus Computer, which rules the campus to declare his Grand Tutorhood. He rejects the condition of being "a regular person" (GGB 123) and chooses to prove himself "less than mortal and more" (GGB 138) to prove himself to be, arriving at the "answer" that will liberate all studentdom. After repeated failures in his descent into the belly of the computer he wrecks the computer to gain the authorization he has sought all along. The discovery is that there is nothing to discover, the answer is that there is no answer. This is not far from the valueless value that Todd settles for or Jake Horner's road in The End of the Road which does not end. The cover letter of Giles Goat-Boy relates the Nihilistic-

Existential vein that runs through the whole of Barth. "Nothing works... everything only gets worse...in fact we know only more or less ruinous defeats" (12). What he does find is not meaning, but a way of talking about the impossibility of fixing meaning. At the end he states:

> Passage was failure, and Failure, Passage: yet, Passage was Passage, failure, Failure! Equally true, none was the Answer; the two were not different, neither were they the same: and *true* and *false*, and *same* and *different*– Unspeakable! Unnamable! Unimaginable! (GGB 650).

As Max Spiel man, Giles' tutor puts it: "self knowledge is always bad news" (GGB 131).

"Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," (GGB 117) states the Spielman's law in Giles Goat-Boy. Lost in the Funhouse traces the ontological queries in respect of narrative and human phylogeny as it presents the protagonist Ambrose Mench's birth and growth into the ambiguities of life and art. It is a collection of fourteen stories evolving around telling and listening to stories. The first six stories of the collection thematically center on self-conscious, self-referential forms and conventional realistic narratives while the second half involves itself with the issue of authorial voice. This why Max F. Schulz states that, "intrinsic to the thematic development of Lost in the Funhouse is an ontological

conceit; the unending replication of self as organism, as authorial voice and as fiction (word and form)" (6).

As in Doctorow's Loon Lake and Lives of the Poets, the concerns of literary perception, articulation of human experience and literary technique are so intensely taken up in Lost in the Funhouse in the form of a bildungsroman. From the first story, "Night Sea journey", the genesis of this duo is implied. The swimming sperm is inundated with queries of the irrelevant voyage amid better-equipped swimmers. The sense of the absurd coupled with literary imagination furnish him for the future Ambrose's ontological/ epistemological dilemma. "Ambrose His Mark" relates his birth and naming; "Autobiography", the question of his parentage and identity and "Water-Message", his boyhood days. In "Petition", the conflict makes its full-grown appearance as "the incompatibility of instinct and self-scrutiny" (Hinden 195). Here, "Ambrose as observant adolescent at the threshold of learning about life merges with Ambrose as the author of this own story at the beginning stages of learning how to construct a narrative" (Schulz 8). The medley of multidirectional voices merges in the series-concluding stories, "Menelaid" and "Anonymiad".

The struggle for self-determination is plagued by the nihilistic, existential overtones of their nature. To begin with, the sperms monologue is

one of rejection and repudiation, its fruition to nonexistence. The petitioner half of the Siamese twin pleas for disjunction. "Autobiography" begs to be ended, if there are ones capable of doing it. Ambrose states in Lost In the Funhouse that if there were, "a button you could push to end your life absolutely without pain" (LIF 86), he would go ahead. The whole series is embedded in a frame tale given at the outset, in the form of a Moebius strip: "Once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time...," it runs. Moebius strip is a strip of paper twisted a hundred and eighty degrees and pasted at both ends in the form of a spiral, in which the inside and the outside merge into each other defying efforts at differentiation as well as separating the beginning from the end. It is extremely suggestive of the Barthian message of the fluidity of self/consciousness in life/narrative. The enthusiastic weariness that plagues his earlier fiction persists. Just as the ontologically puzzling funhouse of the text surmises the cosmic elusiveness of reality and the ever-receding bounds of individuation, the Moebius strip of the narrative emphasizes the process of slippery signification.

Chimera, a reworking of Arabian and Greek myths, contains "Dunyazadiad", "Perseid" and "Bellerophoniad". Scheherazade has remained Barth's most beloved of figures from the narratives of the past and has been obsessed with her existential situation all along--the tell or

die dilemma. He puts into her tale a feminist bill of complaints, there by offering a reworking of the myth. "Bellerophoniad" sets out to follow a "pattern of Mythic Heroism" (C 140), like in Giles Goat-Boy and The Sot Weed Factor. Bellerophon and Perseus are troubled by the query that bedevil the lives of the protagonists of Giles Goat-Boy and The Sot-Weed Factor--whether actions define a hero or heroes confer greatness on actions--the essence or the existence query.

Letters, a symbiosis of epistolary and self-reflexive techniques, takes Barth's habit of cross breeding his fiction with his past fiction to greater heights. Barth recalls the protagonists of his earlier fiction and adds Lady Amherst as the only other major figure. Todd Andrews, Jacob Horner, Jerome Bray, Ambrose Mench, A. B. Cooke VI and A. B. Cooke IV--characters recalled from his earlier fiction or the characters' descendants--not only rehearse the past but relate their current lives. They are as much concerned with the purpose and meaning of their lives as with their capacity to effectively communicate. Often they write letters to themselves as part of their urge to know themselves. The novel carries on with his stock concerns of identity, interpretation, communication and the state of the academe with the added one of the relationship between film and literature. As Stan and Gordon put it, "as to the question of identities, Barth's play with and the destabilization of such characters as Harold

Bray and Henry Burlingame, among others, reaches exaggerated proportions in Letters" (160). Andre Castine, for instance, is more protean and ambiguous in conception than Bray or Burlingame. Bea Gorden's protracted name is also suggestive of the shifty contours of identity. Even as the characters of the earlier fiction review their pasts to divine their future, they come to paradoxical conclusions preventing the expected redemption. Todd Andrews can "see patterns everywhere" and is "sceptical of their significance" (L 255). He closes the enquiry asserting "the intrinsic value of everything, even of nothingness" (L 738). This is repeated in the case of the other redreamed characters too. Hence, citing Cynthia Davis, Letters "does not celebrate achievement, it celebrates struggle" (228).

A couple, Fenwick Scott Key Turner and Susan Allan Seckler muse on how to plan their future back from a sailing sabbatical in Barth's Sabbatical. They are caught in the CIA activities as Fenwick's twin brother Manfred is lost and he suspects a CIA hand in this presumed death of his brother. An ex-CIA agent, Turner is hated by many for his expose of certain covert operations of the organization in Chile and Iran. Still, at the end of it all, the denouement is artistic and the confusion is cleared up in a desultory manner. Manfred's ghost appears in a dream mentioning his death of "hypothermia" (S 328). The book once again is

dwelling on the difficulty of arriving at a decision. In other words, the question is which road to take still. The duality of intertwining quest and the duplicity of crises continue.

That double, duality and pairs abound in Sabbatical is a forceful comment on the inexorable nature of self/ narrative demarcations. In the novel, Susan and Mim Seckler. Fenwick and Manfred are twins. The aborted of Susan are also a pair. As always, Barth laughs at the extra emphasis on binaries while making excellent use of it for his narrative purposes. The man and his wife are the combined narrators of the book. It oscillates between Fenwick-first person singular and Susan-first person singular, often turning into Fenwick-Susan first person plural. Susan's specialization as a professor is on twins. Husband is an author and wife, a good reader, forming yet another double. They are confronted with dilemmas and choices. Fen thinks over the problem: "Is Y a fork or a confluence? Does the Chesapeake Channel diverge into York River channel, or do they converge into Chesapeake channel? The one inbound, the other outbound; or, Analysis versus Synthesis; 'male' versus 'female'. Sperm swim up, Ova float down" (S 137). Fenn's key to sailing is that "to go forward, we must go back" (S 244). True to the motto, the sailing trip never progresses on a linear fashion: "the journey of the sail boat is

endlessly deferred with no destination final" (Stan and Gordon 180). The novel ends as such affirming "the image of our plural selves" (S 332).

The story of the sailing couples' Moebius strip of a voyage, spirally moving from within to without to within, resume in The Tidewater Tales, aboard the boat "story". The twin narrators, Peter and Catherine Scheritt Sagamore, are on vacation, waiting for Catherine to come full term. The novel covers a fortnight of sailing on Chesapeake Bay. The duality and binaries explored infinitely in Sabbatical are replicated at another level in Tidewater Tales too. If Peter is 39 years and 8 and a half months old, Kate is 39 years and 8 and a half months pregnant. He is Cartesian and she, Rabelaisian. "Peter's pet poet is Emily Dickinson: *Zero at the bone.* Katherine Sheritt's is Walt Whitman: *I contain multitudes* (TT 29). In the line of dualities like appearance and reality, life and art, self and other, these two meet and part, tell and listen, listen and tell. They too attempt through "a coupled point of view" (TT 29) to realize a union, as they sail through sexual and textual escapades of indeterminacy. Franklin Key Talbott and Leah Allan Silver Talbott, an important pair of guests on their boat, turn out to be Fenn and Susan of Sabbatical. Thus the intertextual elements again bring to light the device of a frame tale, the ever-expanding concentric layers of connected narrative, one more Moebius strip. As in Sabbatical, in Tidewater Tales

too, it is not a voyage with a destination. It is "without itinerary, time table or destination...sailing wither the wind listeth" (TT 76). Like in The Floating Opera, the goal of the trip is the trip as Katherine feels that "destinations are just excuses for sailing" (TT 76). If Sabbatical ends with the couple's resolution to extend their life through fiction, Tidewater Tales decides in favour of delivering twins.

From The Floating Opera to Tidewater Tales, thus the binding threads of John Barth's fiction are the constraints of self-definition in a world of indeterminacy. If on the one hand the major figures are hell bent on seeking the shore of self, the bounds of reality, on the other, they are aware of the elusiveness of the quest. The medium of the quest, language, is an instrument which ever promises to deliver, never quite achieving it. The process becomes the product, the medium, the message. This is the situation of them all. The existential query pushes them into a question of the communicative essence, which in turn thrusts them back into the existential spiral. It is the strange, yet predictable loop that defines Barth's fiction.

II

Douglass. R. Hofstadter's "strange loop" phenomenon occurs "when by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we can find ourselves right back were we started" (10,15). The two components of art and life collide and collude, regressus in infinitum, in the world of Barthian fiction, "turning the terminal into the perpetual, the linear into the cyclical" (Walkiewics 89), making it an ideal site for the phenomenon of narrative and consciousness locked in a strange loop. The Barthian protagonist ceaselessly circulates the self-narrative-society loop in their efforts at construction of identity.

The major figures in Barth's fiction are all beset with problems of perception and understanding. It handicaps their capacity to lead a rational, satisfactory kind of life. In writing, they embark upon a quest to normatively explore or expiate their lives/errors of their lives, often in an attempt to differentiate what has gone wrong, when, why and how. As Barth puts it, for them, "narrative equals language equals life" (FB 236). They are all author surrogates. It is either their chosen herohood or the supposedly destined selfhood, which drives them on to authorial investigations. It is true that what his characters are moving through is a spiral of knowing and being since it is life's complications and an acutely introspective nature tinged with absurdist vision that necessitate the quest

for self-definition. The descent within is always a journey backward, involving a study of the past and as such terminates in an analysis of the genres of history, memoir, autobiography, biography, allegory, letters, diaries, reels etc. This is why Barth's all major novels are multigenric. They are as much a symptom of the permutations of the consciousness as they are a cause of it. Ultimately none of the modes triumph in the diagnosis and delineation of the core of consciousness.

For Barth, the defining preoccupation of fiction has been self-consciousness. As Marilyn Edenstein points out in a study of Chimera:

> Self-consciousness can mean consciousness of a self, of an "I", of a core unity, or it can refer to the consciousness of itself by an entity, (a person, a novel). In the case of a person, both meanings can come together since consciousness can only presume a self by knowing itself.... If a text flaunts its own artificiality.... if it's authors presence *in* and not just *behind* the text is constantly being emphasized, it is commonly called a "self-conscious" text. The cohesive function...inscribed within the text can be considered the "self" of the text. If this textually created self is in some ways analogous to a human self, perhaps the

> human self is only a linguistic configuration rather that an ontological entity (99).

A comment by Barth, explaining the way the self-consciousness of his narration/characters and the killing self-consciousness of the existential angst are connected, reflects this sense of fabricatedness of self. He says: "when the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they are in, we're reminded of the fictitious aspect of our on existence" (FB 73). The sense of irreality, hence to some extent, catalyses the self-consciousness of the narrative process. The question as to the real 'I' is an offshoot/reflection of concerns regarding the real. A combination of the linguistic and narrative dilemma lends itself as the perfect vehicle for the existentially insecure individual. The frame tale which Barth repeatedly employs as a pivotal device foregrounds the tension between the story and the storiness of the story. This too accentuates the self-consciousness of the narrative act.

The prime destabiliser in the world of Barth's fiction is linguistic because "Language, for the knower of the self, serves as a kind of trap, and also a kind of instrument, the only one at his disposal. As soon as self-awareness objectifies itself into words, the words stand with their own syntactic order, their own associations, out and away from the self and its awareness" (Edelstein 100). From Todd to the Sagamores, the

cardinal question is as to the inability and necessity of communication, to one self and to the world. Citing E. P. Walkiewicks, "the quest for the meaning of making translates into the struggle to make meaning, the "horned" dilemma of being made to end into the difficulty of making an end" (104).

Like the ledger of Blue in Doctorow's first work, Welcome to Hard Times, Barth's The Floating Opera is the result of an enquiry conducted by the protagonist Todd Andrews, regarding his failed communication with his father. The suicide of his father intrigues him and he sets out to explore it in the form of an enquiry, which grows into an enquiry into himself. The polygenric nature of enquiry itself is a testimony to Todd's imperfect communication. If at one level The Floating Opera is the story of a self eternally in the making, at another level it constitutes the story of a story ever in the making. A letter to his father, explaining the brittle hold mortality has on him because of his heart condition, runs into fifty pages and remains incomplete and undelivered. A complete study of the life of his father and their relationship, especially of his father's suicide, three baskets and a cardboard box of notes, couldn't take the enquiry anywhere close to completion. For Todd, even "the genre of legal brief consists ...of giving speculative observation and questionable assumptions the ring of truth, to

give legal fiction the shape of reality, to give rhetoric the shape of legal reality" (Stan and Gordon 44). He could neither be subjective nor wholly be objective too. He is acutely self-conscious and his narrative inclines to be subjective. But he fails in expressing through language the felt life of his. Language, with its associative, connotative burden refuses to play along. The evocative and referential values of language assert at the wrong instants and through confusing means. Todd who exhibits nascent traces of the cosmopsis of Burlingame, the cosmophile, spots significance or the lack of it evenly everywhere. He is lost in the funhouse of ceaselessly bifurcating courses of relevance everywhere. "Good heavens", Todd Andrews exclaims, "how does one write a novel! I mean, how can anybody stick to the story, if he's at all sensitive to the significance of things?" (FO 2).

"Assigning names to things is like assigning roles to people; it is a necessary distortion...(ER 114), Jacob Horner seems to reply in the next novel, The End of the Road. In Jacob Horner, as in every such author-protagonist of Barth, the mythotherapy and scriptotherapy work at loggerheads. Horner, under prescription for cosmopsis, takes mythotherapy as a teacher of prescriptive grammar and steps into yet another role of a writer. But this time, after the elapse of everything, he is narratively attempting a re-enacting of the past through another role, fully

conscious of another failure, conscious that he is failing at every stage of the process of scripting. Like his talisman, Laocoon, he is, "bound like two serpents of knowledge and imagination, which grown great in the fullness of time, no longer tempt but annihilate" (ER 157). At every stage he is aware of the fact that a linguistic construction of self is bound to be fictive as he is aware of the pitfalls involved. "To turn experience into speech--that is to classify, to categorise, to conceptualise, to grammarise, to syntactify it--is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it: but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man" (ER 96).

In the process Horner shifts roles between that of a critic and an author. His convoluted logic often reasons that the ambivalences of his attitude and relationships could be traced to the inherent incapacity of language to communicate: "the apparent ambivalence of Rennie's feelings about me, I'm afraid, like the simultaneous contradictory opinions that I often amuse myself by maintaining, was a pseudo-ambivalence whose source was in the language, not in the concepts symbolized by the language" (ER 59). Composing a life is impossible not just because "the same life lends itself to any number of stories--parallel, concentric, mutually inhabitant, or what you will" (ER 4), but also because, "stories also have something to tell us about themselves, they

always involve self-reflexive and metafictional devices" (Venuti 3). The story has a life and a story of its own too and it begins to get told in the process. Hence the narrative self-definition remains mired in crises of articulation and signification.

Both The Sot-Weed Factor and Giles Goat-boy, Barth calls "novels which imitate the form of a Novel, by an author who imitates the role of an Author" (FB 72). The tales-within-tales-within-tales *regressus in infinitum* of the narrator, who fails to complete a narrative that refuses to close itself, is about to take its genesis here. The Sot-Weed Factor is a commentary about an attempted commentary on a fictional biographical poem of Ebenezer Cooke, titled "Sot-Weed Factor". It is Ebenezer Cooke's and the author's attempt to construct a narrative, as Barth wants, from the narrative tradition of the past. It provides Barth/his protagonist sufficient ground for meandering on a narrative that fragments into literary, historical, philosophical quests. But the final result, in the words of Earl Rovit, "reminds one of a pack of hounds with stuffed noses frantically sniffing out a non-existent covey of quail" (120).

The question of identity, reality and the construction of a narrative are streamlined into that of specifically composing history here. Like in the other novels, here also, a character that attempts an autobiography ends up writing a polygenric account that defies classification. But in The

Sot-Weed Factor, it tends to be a lot more historical. The text embraces various figures and events cutting across the bounds of the fictional and the fantastic. Learning, the prime instrument fostering illusionary certainties, is made fun of pungently in the novel. Even after consulting the whole gamut of historians-scholars, he receives little to cure his void: Herodotus, Polyseius, Aristotle, Augustine, Zeno, Rabelais, Aquinas, and Moore--the whole gallery of stars fail to replenish his exhaustion and, "the stuff of history became in his head no more than stuff of metaphors" (SWF 10).

> As he [Ebenezer] loses touch with the realities around him, and as he methodically transcends the boundaries of actual experience, both the reality and experience are converted into mere substrata of art. Ebenezer's mythopoeic view becomes a lens that distorts reality by refracting it as a potential or actual work of art. The realm of facts becomes by analogy the realm of aesthetic experiences; ... It is more important that in the same process Ebenezer's whole life is slowly converted into a unique work of art. By letting go of the world and the self he gains the momentary freedom to recreate both as autonomous objects (Puetz 139).

This exercise in linguistically ordering experience repeatedly relapses into a play with the very idea of signification. But this apparent feeling of "verbal perpetual motion" (Walkiewics 48) is not dissimilar to the problem of multiple selves at the bottom. Both are symptomatic of the incapacity to contain and define.

After The Sot Weed Factor's commentary upon commentary, Barth employs another mild kind of framing of his narrative prior to the likes of Lost in the Funhouse, Chimera, and LETTERS etc. If The Sot Weed Factor ends with the author's apology to the reader, Giles Goat-Boy is framed with more elaborate apologies from everybody-author, publisher and editors. It is presented by Stoker Giles, who reads it to a computer WESCAC, which collates and edits it and mixes it with other verifiable matter. This information of the post tape is further questioned and alleged to be spurious by a postscript to the post tape. Post tape, postscript, foot notes--each squashes the argument of the other.

The claims and counter claims push the concept of author-authority into a vortex of narrative and speculative flux. It is this undercurrent of constructiveness, sense of lack of authenticity to the mission in hand, which characterizes the narrative and the quest of Giles. Even after assuming encyclopaedic vastness, it is capable only of failing to deliver anything authoritative. Even the allegory, instead of drawing

parallels, suggests two equal possibilities. As contradiction terminates into paradox, the exercise becomes what Walkiewics calls "an external guessing game that terminates into exhaustion" (73). A quest for ultimate answer, passage, conducted via a narrative which is semantically elusive, arrives at a realm that collapses distinctions, like passage and failure. As Barth states, "The main thing he seems to have learned is that what he's learned can't be taught: in his attempts to effˆ the ineffable, his truths get garbled in transmission, misconstrued, betrayed by verbalisation, institutionalisation" (FB 135). The self-knowledge, if any, he gains is regarding the createdness of his life, the self-consciousness which under compulsive examination yields the result that self could only be the creation of a fabricated consciousness through a conscious narrative.

Lost In the Funhouse definitely marks a milestone in the circuitous journey of the consciousness that foregrounds language and form. It collapses the reigning enigma of Barth into the primary one of being and knowing, of life and art. The fourteen story series involves the conception, birth and growth of the twin concerns of Ambrose's existence and expression, effecting relentless examination of the question of narrative voice and communicative act. Each story in the series marks a stage simultaneously in the development of the individual, artist and art. "In all of them... the process of narration becomes the content of the

narrative...[most] of them exploit, one way or another, ambiguities of language and narrative view point" (FB 77).

"Echo", "Glossolalia", "Two Meditations", "Autobiography: A self recorded fiction", "Title" and "Life Story"- these are self-conscious fiction in the extreme sense of the term. There are stories like "Water Message" in which the process claims as much significance as the content. "Echo" is the fitting title as well as the symbol for a writer whose works trace infinite regression. Echo is condemned by the queen of heaven to repeat others' voices. The cast of the story features Narcissus and Tiresias, two characters who, with Echo, complete the picture of Barth's Phylum. Narcissus symbolizes the self-obsession while Tiresias the sense of perplexity subsequent to being caught in the evolution of plurality. He has listened to immense number of tales and given plenty, the result being that he is incapable of differentiation. In "Autobiography", a story speaking of itself, a "contentless form" (LIF 33), confesses that it distorts its creator. "Title" is the voice of a narrator tired of his trade, sick of self-consciousness, who has "narrated himself into corner" (LIF 108). "Life Story" targets itself in its critical fury. It suspects that the author's life may be a fictional account. It is a story in which an author takes the world to be a novel and the writer, a character. In "Water Message", the growing boy receives a message in a bottle, a letter that salutes and signs

off, leaving a blank for a body. "Lost In the Funhouse" is the key story which shows Ambrose getting lost during a family outing, in a funhouse "in the endless reflection of his image in the mirrors" (LIF 90). "Glossolalia" has six speakers who share their experience of being misunderstood by the audience. "Meneliad" and "Anonymiad", which explore mid life crises, are equally concerned with self, narration and voice. Meneleaus enquiry into the causes of Helen's love for "his cipher self" (LIF 151) results in self-negation and turns him to a mere voice, a self-courted fiction. Ambrose attempts multiple voices to reify himself into "regular person" (LIF 93). But, "the whole question of identity in Lost in the Funhouse *tentatively* (italics added) resolves itself in the capricious immortality of the work of art. Within the cycling of a world at once solipsistic and self-negating, man is artist is work of art is artist is man" (Beinstock 203). But as Beinstock asks later, "who confirms whose existence?" (208).

Chimera invalidates the urge for such affirmations as the attempts to attain world end up in fluid entities. The three novellas, which constitute the novel, are engrossed by queries of voice, authority and composition of literary text. In his latest return to his favourite Arabian Nights, Barth places Dunyazade, sister to Sheherazade, as a listener and voyeur. The sisters are assisted by a Genie, a Barth look like, who

supplies them with stories from another volume. The whole narrative turns on its head, when, at the end, it is revealed to have been a narration by Dunyazadiad to her husband. In Dunyazadiad, the Genie and Sheherazade speculate on what are the seminal problems of Barth's fiction:

> Whether a story might imaginably be framed from the inside, as it were, so that the usual relationship between the container and contained would be reversed and paradoxically reversible-- and... what human state of affairs such an odd construction might usefully figure. Or whether one might go beyond the usual tale-within-a-tale, beyond even tales-within-tales-within-tales... (C 32).

"Perseid" is Perseus attempt to narrate himself into existence, addressing Medusa, attempting a verbatim duplication of the same story narrated to Calyxa earlier. He couldn't get it right when he said to Calyxa and failing memory compels him to receive prompting from a spiral mural Calyxa had painted at Medusa's direction. The perspective is, hence, a shifting consciousness and frames, many. It ends with the similar affirmation of the tentativeness of everything--life, art, narrative etc. In "Bellerophoniad" as in "Dunyazadiad", the final twist reveals Polyeidus as Bellerophon's story. Here too the ending of the story mid sentence

points to similar tentativeness. Failing to be a hero, he attempts to be a story and ends up neither but rather a hybrid. All the three attempt and fail to effect a narrative resolution. Language drifts and detours ceaselessly betraying the man it is intended to represent. Dunyazadiad's story is unfinished, Perseus can neither hold Medusa nor see his continuing mortal existence and Bellerophone can't achieve apotheosis" (Davis 224) because, "words, language are simultaneously key and treasure" (Stan and Gordon 139).

Letters, Barth claims, is intended to work at three levels. The title is meant to cover messages, alphabets and literature. The Genie, who decides to counter the dilemma of exhausted possibilities in Chimera by going back to the springs of the narrative, performs it in Letters by weaving together the various narrative strands of his major fiction of the past. Six of his major protagonists or their descendants join the most dynamic creation of the author to date, Lady Germaine Pitt. And as often in Barth, the novel endorses the perpetually stillborn resolution of the ever-emergent crises of signification and existence. The pitch of self-consciousness at its peak, the novel's narrative convolutions as explorations operate at various levels. It picks up the resolutions of the previous works and twists them further. In tracing the unstated future of the past protagonists, Barth turns the whole of his literary cannon as well

as the critical cannon that feeds on it up side down, disestablishing once again the presumed distinction between key and treasure. All the fictitious characters recruited from past fiction in Letters are writers. Though their writing often cuts across the bounds of genres, what they attempt is to succeed in a particular kind of writing. Todd Andrews' is socio-legal history, Jake Horner's is supposed to result in a memoir or journal, Jerome Bray aims at Literature, Ambrose Mench, novels and Lady Amherst, Literary history. They all write to explain themselves to themselves primarily, to animate life by feeding [on] art. Their narrative self-reflexivity is often the result of a mythotherapy gone haywire. Even their correspondence is more often than not with themselves or with the dead, the imagined or the absent.

No letter, in each of the three senses meant by Barth earlier, can reflect the contemporary as, every 'now', as it is composed, turns in to 'then' as they are read. The lapse of time between the conception, composition and reception makes the letters exist in different time frames, not to mention the difference between the actual date of composition and letterhead date, problematising the authenticity and autonomy of the realized selfhood of each narrative. This stretches the list of irritants in the struggle for realization, narrative or otherwise. What is read is not what is written and what is written is what is not meant. The complexities of

teller, tale, the told is further compounded by the alteration time effects on them, not to speak of the reiterated protean burden of the tale, termed signification. Reopening of the past texts rocks the already shaky sense of personhood these protagonist-narrator-questors have. As Schulz puts it: "We have here life and art, reality and artifice, locked in an endless, self-referential creative process" (77).

Running parallel to the narrative of reflexivity is the one of history and that of the history of making history too. Here, "a novelist's perception of history unravels into the conflicting ambiguity that human events and literary genres are as prone to overlap as to stop-frame sequence" (Schulz 52). Various characters in the novel are working with theories of/approaches to history: Todd Andrews's "Tragic View of History and human institutions" (L 880), Jake Horner's "Anniversary view of History" (L 98), A. B. Cooke IV and VI's "Action Historiography" (L 75) and Jerome Bray's fantastic, mythological palimpsest. The Cooke-Burlingame saga is not only an attempt to subvert the recorded and accepted mythologies of the past in history, it equally serves as an evidence of showing the constructedness of it.

Literary and critical stock taking and sailing couple in Sabbatical. The sail traces the growth of this intimacy in the past as it feeds (on) a narrative, which in turn sustains the fictive life. The almost exhausting

and entropic narrative cycles and spirals of the earlier narration alternate between Susan and Fen and sometimes to their combined point of view. But the relentless duplication, at times like an accelerated aversion of Doctorow's Loon Lake, often derives the chimerical effect of the plurality of the earlier fiction. Fenn feels, "that all the 'inauthentic... layers of false or unworthy selves' of his past life gain authenticity only to the extent that they contribute to, figure in and are instrumental in fertilizing and birthing 'the story... this story, our story'..." (Schulz 134). For Fenn and Susan fiction represents a way to acknowledge indeterminacy and regression and to perceive and impose pattern upon the world. As Barth stated, "Narrating almost literally equals living" (FB 236). But coherence/reason doesn't emerge as the story they are living is also the story they are writing.

The narrative is heterogeneous and it contains shifty perspectives. It is mixed with Vietnamese poetry, newspaper reports and drama. This is not to mention the many references to literary works, characters and authors. The theme of meaning and inauthenticity of existence form the burden of the song in Sabbatical too. The indeterminacy is not restricted to the matter of narrative only. It informs many other entities in the novel. It affects the definition of relationship and even the geography in it. A case in point is their landing on an island that doesn't appear on the maps.

The romance comes to an end as they stop sailing to start writing. The termination of their narrative marks the end of their journey--a journey they are sailing through the narrative. The narrative to be effected, "this story, our story" (356), will be plagued by the redundancy of signification, beset with ambivalence in articulation. As Fenn states: " we ourselves may never know one another's story" (302). The novel ends up finally as a novel about the manner in which it comes to be written.

On the fictional clock Sabbatical ends on Sunday, June 15, 1980, the day on which Tidewater Tales begins. In the next half of the pair, Tidewater Tales, the Romance gives way to a Novel but the narrative navigation remains. Peter and Katherine, on board the sailboat "story", waits for Katherine to come full term. As the novel composes itself, it relentlessly throws up queries regarding the complexities involved in compressing experience into a literary system. Tidewater Tales presents the problem at many levels--of life defying attempts at integration, of language thwarting attempts at communication, of history and the documents denying the possibility of understanding etc. As is the case of every other text of Barth, the inextricably intertwining spirals of these make up the novel. At times, the whole flotilla, the entire lot of characters, involves themselves, telling and listening to stories. A massive conglomeration of narrative, various wheels working at various speeds,

all contributing to and being part of the machinery of narrative, yet all threatening to go its own way, resisting integration. In the boat "Story" too Katherine, Peter, Frank, Leah, their friends, Carla B Silver, Leah's mother, May Jump, Katherine's former lover, not to count Don Quixote, Scheherazade, Odysseus, Nausica etc, do the same. Supportingly the book contains discussions, suggestions, playful remarks, and ironic comments, including attempts to build up a dialogue with the reader. In what serves as a specimen, Frank discusses at length the way he has changed real life characters into fictional ones through a change of names.

The theme of indeterminacy resides firmly in the narrative of Tidewater Tales. Apart from the intertextual and fantastical elements of it, it is linked to Sabbatical with a curious device of a frame tale. Franklin Key Talbott and Leah Allan Silver Talbott are the complimentary pair to Peter and Katherine Sagamore. These are later revealed to be the real authors of Sabbatical, further diluting the already fluid narrative and contributing to the overall indeterminacy. Like Ambrose declaring his authorship of Lost in the Funhouse in Letters, this is a device Barth time and again adopts in the colossal intertextual weave of his oeuvre in which more loose ends are added to the already fragile construct. The sheer volume of repetition recognizes the extent to which duality and doubling govern our organization of personal and social points of view and

determine as well as dissolve the linguistic comprehension of life. The delicious cacophony is made richer by the criticism they indulge in of the literary texts they have read.

So is the matter of the whole oeuvre. What begins in The Floating Opera is sustained through Tidewater Tales, severally repeated and variously articulated, "at once exhaustion and replenishment" (TT 654). Todd Andrews, Jake Horner, Ebenezer Cooke, George Giles, Ambrose Mench, Peter, Katherine--they all navigate in their narration, pushing themselves to and fro, in the agony of articulation. Words they seek to commemorate experience strongly jolt them to the restricting reality of the way language constructs experience. "Thus this endless repetition of my story. As both protagonist and author, I thought to overtake with understanding my present paragraph as it were by examining my paged past, and, thus pointed proceed to the futures sentence" (FB 138), Perseus speaks in Chimera, representing the whole lot of Barthian self-narrative questors. They move back and forth in the narrative, oscillating between the past and the future, locked in a genuine tension. Life and art constitute the continuum called self, approximating each other, in the approximation called consciousness. Feeding both and hence resisting a resolution, aiding the being-as-becoming-pattern is the social reality they are forced to live in.

III

In the three authors studied vis-à-vis the struggle of their protagonists in the fiction to overcome the frail sense of self in terms of their existential, linguistic, social inclinations, the evolution of their fiction show varying emphasis of these tendencies. In Faulkner the social/racial problems vie for occupation of the fictional space with the stringent push and pull of the linguistic, articulatory issues and existential dilemmas. In Doctorow, the social concerns often approximate supremacy while the other two arms never really concede the edge. In Barth, the social aspect is explored mainly along two lines--as an adjunct to the concerns of the narrative and through the satiric and ironic vein of the narrative. The sedate and often blended backdrop of the narrative, in one way or the other contributes to the hostile environment of the texts. But what is strongly felt in the early novels of Doctorow and Faulkner, the social aspect, makes its appearance rather late explicitly in Barth. But tangentially, the strain has always existed along with the satiric/parodic vein of the writer from the very beginning. He has off and on commented on the pivotal aspects of his fiction like the extreme self-consciousness, the narrator-as-character structure, frame tale etc which reflect the unstated but submerged social consciousness of the author.

The narrator-protagonists of Barth, in course of their diagnosis of the past, subject to analysis their involvement with the society too. Their stand is acutely critical not only of their self-worth to attempt it, of the narrative tools at hand but of the societal responsibility to the individual too. Society's contribution is found to be equally vital in these "down-bringing-novels" (FB 132). This is cardinal in an author who states that "all my readings, my experience, my reflections and intuitions, incline [me] to the tragic view of human institutions, including political systems" (FB 119-120). This is reflected in many ways in Barth's fiction. It might be in the form of being subjected to nihilistic urges of an existentialist environment, like Horner or Todd Andrews; it might take the form of an urge to examine the concept of formal history, as a tool and as a weapon, like Ebenezer Cooke. It can work as an ideological underpinning in the recycling of a supposedly exhausted narrative by using the figure of Scheherazade as a feminist advocate and it might also be fighting the exhaustion generated and perpetuated by the society by prescribing narrative pictures of exhaustion being replenished by further exhaustion.

In The Floating Opera, Todd Andrews exists in the world of an expressed consciousness where the problems of articulation and existence outweigh, but not altogether negate, the problems imposed by the society. Todd is a typical product of the modern era. The experience he has been

through has left a sharp imprint on his nascent psyche. At least two defining episodes of his life--the First World War experience and the suicide of his father--are revealing the societal dimensions of his angst. His exposures to the brutalities of the war and the way he has experienced fear, are strong enough even to engulf the amity he builds up with an enemy soldier he befriends. The pathological distrust bred by war rises to such a pitch that it dries up the springs of love in him. He bayonets the man. A hypersensitive man like Todd might be exacerbated by anything, even the most obvious. What causes the suicide of his father is the financial crash of the market in 1929. The loss of the family fortune leaves the man with no other choice. Though Todd's enquiry does not look into this in detail, they do chart a course for his nascent thought. A persistent weave of Barth's fictional texture, the composed fictive nature of the supposed factual documents, whether of historical nature or of bureaucratic, has its mild beginning in The Floating Opera. His failure at one stage in the Mack estate lawsuit Todd attributes to the opposing lawyer's capacity for figurative language. "I believe it was this final metaphor that won Froebel the judgement...even the judge smiled benignly at the trope" (FO 92-3). This reflects not only on the frail capacity of language to contain experience and reality, but also the fragile content of the documents which are constituted by words and figures and held to be supreme reality by the social powers to be.

The End of the Road shifts the historical scenario of the novel from the America of 1937 to that of 1951. Horner resides in the post-war America, struggling for revival in political, moral and economic fronts. Like Todd, he too is an occupant of world bereft of moral and rational institutions to live by, a consequence of corruption and brutality of the state. This in turn contributes to the disintegration of a core consciousness in Barthian figures.

> The final affirmation of human existence is Des Carte's "Cogito ergo sum". In the present time however the "I" that thinks does so in many roles, many states of being which in turn define the "I" conditionally: the pressures of war, social change, and the integration of most of society into the corporate society require of the citizen an almost chameleon like adaptation the changing social institutional demands upon him. The result is the insecurity of a self that tries for a time to "go along"; then under the pressure of conflicting loyalties, fears, it splinters, escaping into various roles, which Barth calls mythotherapy (Hipkiss 119-120).

Jake Horner is a classic instance of this. Social orientation of more specific kind replaces this general socio-political situation in the later works.

Beginning The Sot Weed Factor, Barth imparts a greater role for the society as he narrows down to particular aspects of it, rather than projecting the general restrictive scenario. The cannon he adopts is broad in comparison with the novels which came before, but it lays more importance on the social scenario. The plots and symbols of the novel are tied tightly to the history of colonial Maryland. Baltimore and Cooke are the central figures in the saga of Maryland and they are shifty and shadowy ones. Maryland of The Sot Weed Factor is not a place "of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (SWF 22), but is teeming with slavery and exploitation of the Indians. It has a judiciary in which "nobody gets a verdict he hath not paid for" (SWF 417).

> The New World, he discovers, is a place where all the evils of the old world persist; commercial intrigue, dishonest and intriguing governors, hatred and violence between the separate colonies, mob violence, conspiracy and counter conspiracy by the French, Indians and the Dutch to seize various colonies (Noland 24).

But as the making of colonial Maryland unfolds through them, Ebenezer's vision of New World recede. The "civilization *versus* the abyss of savagery" (SWF 716) theme of colonialism tumbles as the

English men and women act in ways which make the aforesaid distinction invalid, provoking the question: "Does essential savagery lurk beneath the skins of civilization, or does essential civilization lurk beneath the skin of savagery?" (SWF 638). The various fabrics of the society, its history, its language and its scholarship are satirized, often hinting at the truth that in such a society it is not impossible for one Eirkopf to split tick and tock of the clock or for that matter for Burlingame to be a "suitor of totality" (SWF 526) or for Ebenezer to seek herohood in virginity and poethood. At the narrative level, this is an instance where the *regressus in infinitum* works. What Ebenezer seeks is the herohood rampant in the Eighteenth century fiction which the literary society of the period espoused. Hence it is the existence of a pseudo-social faith in the unrealisable, which is made a model of and in the process made fun of in the The Sot Weed Factor. The confounded Ebenezer explains: "what glory, to be singer of such sewer!" (SWF 483). The fitting epic for the land is not a "Marylandiad", but The Sot-Weed factor, a satire. Rather than letting the narrative sediment into an identifiable fixed attack on the founding of America or a colony, Barth twists and turns the tale into a protean relation that simultaneously wrecks and means it all, unmasking the submerged pulls of self and society in the narrative consciousness.

Though the vagrant, playful narrative voice ultimately takes control in denying fixity of perspective or purpose, Giles Goat-Boy's submerged moral interest is reflected in the allegorical framework it accepts and satirises. The numerous parallels it builds between the universe and university, in terms of its events and characters, are reflective of what Sartre has called the moral imperative at the heart of the aesthetic imperative (Tatham 43). Studentdom for humanity, campus riots for world war; east and west campuses for eastern and western world, Enos Enoch for Jesus Christ and so on. Giles hasn't the capacity to distinguish between the literal and the metaphoric, art and reality. It is important that "graduation", despite its ambivalent status in the novel, is defined as, "learning not to kill students in the name of studentdom. And the only examination that matters is not any final; it is a plan that you got to answer every minute: am I subtracting from the total misery, or adding to it?" (GGB 92). The ethical tangent of his fiction comes to the fore here. What Barth intends to do in Giles Goat-Boy is "to try to abstract the pattern and then write a novel which would consciously, even self-consciously, follow the patterns, parody the patterns, satirise the patterns, but with good luck transcend the satire a little bit in order to say some of the *serious things* (italics added) I had in mind to say" (Bellamy 13). The serious things presumably should include not just exposing the irreal paradigms of the literature of the past and the hollowness of the claims of

the narrative exhaustion, but also the difficulty of sustaining faith of any kind in the chaotic world depicted in the novel, "faith in the self or the roles that constitute self" (Hipkiss 96).

In both Lost in the Funhouse and Chimera, on the socio-literary and mythico-literary canvasses, the ultimate emphasis falls on the problems of articulation and narrative voice. The world of Ambrose Mench is loaded with the figurative and the ironic to such an extent that even when the rare pause on the family/society occurs, it hardly focuses itself on the essentials of the environment, choosing to be eager to slither on the gliding non-referentiality of signifiers. Chimera shows the traces of the turn for the contentness, which Barth declares he has affected since Lost in the Funhouse. Scheherazade and Dunyazade are made to plot a feminist revenge against centuries of patriarchal "violations at the hands of fathers, husbands, lovers" (Schulz 31). But at the end that frame is broken and it becomes a tale-within-a tale-within-a-tale.

Letters displays further marked advance as the massive work attempts a panoramic baroque. Much of the surrounding social scenario gets in with less ironic tone than that of say, The Sot Weed Factor or with less satirical-allegorical force than Giles Goat-Boy. The novel presents a socio-economic recreation of the sixties, the America of the Vietnam War years, a period that presents itself for a study of the nation's unenviable

core, the ugly reality at the heart of America. "Letters synthesizes many of the diverse realities at once socio-politically present and historically past known as America and assimilates our multiform national self-image, redefining it as manifest destiny of rebellion and counter rebellion" (Schulz 46). In which, to put it in Doctorow's terms, "the power of regime" and "power of language" ("False Documents" 17) clash, coalesce and come apart. The novel almost sweeps through the major chapters of the making of America, even though the broadness of the canvass denies the social emphasis of a single line of development in Sabbatical and Tidewater Tales. Apart from the metafictional/frame tale devices, this is the other element which makes the social criticism lose its teeth. Vietnam war, Civil rights movement, diplomatic and military history, federal government dealings and foreign policy matters--all parade through the pages of the text. The petty academic politics is marked off as a chief target of the expose in LETTERS, primarily through Lady Amherst. But working at loggerheads always is the multiple-ironic frame of the text. "As such the text of the LETTERS not only subverts in multiple ways the myth by which they have conducted their lives, but also demythologises the idea of an official, or received, history by showing it in the process of being mythologised" (Schulz 123). This is the prime channel through which Barth effects his stinging attacks on the contemporary powers that be and society. The hesitancy on the part of

critics in legitimising the political content of Barth is reflected in the statement of Stan and Gordon: "Barth is, in one sense, the least political of postmodern writers because he takes up no cause virulently or whole heartedly, but also he is very political in his criticism of those elements that threaten the rights of both individuals and communities" (163).

> While I have very little faith in the political institutions and I am not finally deeply interested in the ideological quarrels in the former century neither am I finally cynical about them and I admire most people who are so utterly disillusioned about these things and, yet find reason to attempt to do something in the cause of social justice. So, I still remain in my heart an anarchist, in my head a socialist but finally I have as great faith in the potentiality of any kind of system,

states Barth (Schulz 120-121). In a manner of speaking, Barth has enough reason to admire himself for many of his protagonists subscribe to the dictum of "perfect scepticism in opinions, incorrigible optimism in actions" (Lemon 157). The sailing saga of Fennwick and Susan Sagamore is an attempt by John Barth to engage the theme of social justice in a prominent way. The fake patriotism, which maligns the life of its citizens and the nefarious deals of its federal organizations, is stringently attacked

in the text. With almost Doctorowian energy, Barth pulls up the dearth of justice in the power play of the authorities. A major thread of the plot involves the sinister machinations of the CIA among the issues of feminism and pollution. Fennwick is an ex-CIA agent, who has done an expose of the agency's covert, questionable dealings in particularly Chile and Iran. His twin brother Manfred has been missing and Fenn suspects him to be a victim of CIA skulduggery. Another presumably dead one due to the nefarious dealings of the Agency is Gus, Manfred's son. He has left for Chile with anti-Pinochet exiles and has been missing ever since.

The sterility in question in Sabbatical is not only natural but to a great extent social too. The protected self-made world of Fenn and Susan which is also the fictional world they have composed for us, their life story, is besieged by the destructive forces of contemporary society and weakened at its center by self-doubt and indecision. Fenn's involvement with CIA constantly troubles his mind. Being familiar with the retaliatory tactics of the Agency, his life is beset with fear and uncertainty. The crime-laden path he has traversed as part of the organization in the past makes him feel guilty which radiates through his narrative and unsettles his self.

The novel has a generous cast of those tortured, traumatized or supposedly killed by the state machinery's clandestine operations. Gus's mother Carmen is a victim of the Nazi concentration camps in her girlhood. Susan's twin sister Miriam is the target of torture by the Shah of Iran's secret police. To accommodate the startling acts of gross violations of personhood, the narrative often turns to reportage, once incorporating twenty pages excerpted from the *Baltimore sun*. The Journalistic excerpts, after all, only offer contradictory material, as to whether it is suicide, murder, apparent cover up or squelching of an operation. Still the pitch of such stories and the impact of it on him make him feel, "the pinch of one's personal destiny as it spins itself out upon the wheel" (Walkiewics 143). Fenn and Susan going through this kind of life are unable to sort out their personal issues. To be *and* not to be a writer or a teacher confuses them.

In Sabbatical Barth intensifies his attack on formal documents through which the state wields its oppressive power on individuals. This time the target is not history, but the information dished out by the federal governmental agencies likes CIA and their reliability. Apart from landing on an island the existence of which the CIA has kept under wraps, it also seems to emphasise the fraud played on people by the society. A man whose oeuvre is preoccupied with authority of any kind in any domain of life, Sabbatical trains its narrative guns on the falsification of the

verifiable by the politically crooked. The deliberate dis/misinformation always wrecks the living individuals. The interrogation of the social injustice perpetrated by the supposed guardians of public morality finally lands the investigator in to the fictive-factual phenomenon called life, as it is with Joe in Doctorow's Loon Lake. Every one holds back information, including Fenn and Susan. If at all they all sense success in putting it straight and perfect, the language denies, defies and sabotages the act. They decide to remain, "right at the fork; right at the hub" (S 359).

Peter and Catherine take over not only the voyage of Fenn and Susan in Tidewater Tales. The pressures of contemporary existence also continue to exert its hold on the lives and narrative. The operations of the federal agency and the travails of the global pollution possess a significant space in it. Tidewater Tales has John Arthur Paisley as the disappeared CIA agent. His body, which first floats in on the final page of Letters, floats through Sabbatical and Tidewater Tales, gradually rising to strength in the final appearance. Most of the characters embroiled in the socio-political events in the novel return in Tidewater Tales under new names like Frederick Mansfield Talbott, son Jonathan, Doug Townshend etc. The lethal interference of the government in the lives of these and the rest as well as the distortion and manipulation of communication is unveiled in the novel. The deaths of these people are consequence of the violations mentioned. As Peter states:

> What we're against, sentimental stock liberals that we are, is our governments collusion in--not to say its systematic well funded direction of assassination, torture, clandestine warfare, the clandestine undermining of other peoples elected governments, the clandestine harassment of and illegal general scooping upon our own citizens--things like that--you know, by anybody from our intelligence community down to our local cops (TT 238).

Peter and Katherine are politically interested as they are in their narrative and Katherine's anger at the unwarranted imperial intervention of USA in the intellectual affairs of other countries make her form HOSCA: "Hands Off South And Central America" (TT 66). In a similar vein, the novel confronts the matter of pollution. Making it a dumping ground for waste pollutes the Chesapeake Bay and the surrounding area. Susan's brother and ex-husband are both involved in illegal disposal of waste. The CIA agent Doug Townshend attempts to recruit Peter as "some genuine writer needs to know what's going on" (TT 252). But the more Peter knows about the CIA operations, the less he writes, lapsing into a final silence. Doug Townshend's tragic view of central Intelligence Agency is symptomatic of the social investigation of all the three authors under the study. "Covert government security operations, like organized criminal operations, are cancers in the body democratic. They have in

common that they corrupt and falsify individuals and institutions. They widen the gap between what things represent them to be and what they are. They debase the very language" (TT 261). What is interesting is that the charges against this institutional corruption are precisely the one that is levelled against language and the occupational hazard of working with language.

The social consciousness in John Barth, it is argued, has been slow in awakening to respond assertively to the heinous acts of treachery and denial nakedly espoused by powers that be. But the common critical charge of conspicuous absence of social concern in the works of Barth is greatly because of the inability to fathom the social impulse "disguised by layers of parody", right from The Floating Opera itself (Bradbury 69). It is the result of the critical tendency to write off the serious import of the satiric/parodic intent that makes commentators thinks of Jane Austin when dealing with Barth. Barth himself has stated the need of acknowledging the significance of the satiric mode of writing, when he states that "the imitation...is something new and may be quite serious and passionate despite its parodic aspect" (FB 72).

"Confluence of potentialities", Arthur Saltzman's term for encapsulating the characteristics of Robert Coover's fiction, can sum up the fictional exercise of John Barth (12). He writes novels which

ceaselessly exfoliate into sub-narratives and supra narratives, the semblance of convergence, confluence, bursting forth into the potentialities, with the generative tension of convergence and divergence always approximating each other. Hence the quest is of/for self, to relate the quest and then to explore the destined failure of it too. Self-language-society-language-self-narrative continuum exists. The endeavour, which begins as the individual is caught in the circular rut of the mind/thoughts, gradually gets embroiled in the traps of language and the life around him. The labyrinth of the self-society-language symbolizes life--the journey as destination. The already existing feelings of being overwhelmed by the failure to take stock of one are intensified by the social betrayal and the failure of communication. But articulation is self-revolt. Barth's characters' incomprehension delivers them into the decision to 'live', extending and supplementing life with art. The initial self-exploratory fervour fades in to narrative saturation, bowing to the infinite spiral of life, infinite deferral of sense. What is sedimented, in Barth's words, is "a spooky simulacrum of sense" (qtd. in Bellamy 19). Geoffrey Harpham considers Doctorow "as a creator of texts whose ambivalences define his central continuing concern, narrative itself, and its relation to power, imagination and belief"(82). The statement effectively encapsulates the fiction of John Barth.

Chapter 4

E. L. Doctorow: Eternally Arriving

The fiction of Doctorow insistently dwells on characters caught in the agonising necessity of reading themselves and their past to come to grips with their lives. They are speculative, introspective loners who are coerced into the act of therapeutic narration. Placed against the backdrop of some of the major socio-political epochs/events in American history, his protagonists are always in a state of rapid slide into, if not already in, a vapid existence. As Harter and Thompson put it, they are "existing in the process of becoming" (81). The act of narration is important as progressively each of these texts transforms into creative explorations from realistic investigations. Though loosely labelled as either *bildungsroman* or *kunstlerromane*, these novels' endings are always ambivalent. On the whole, the dominant in the works of Doctorow is the sense of self-betrayal subsequent to identity crisis and the resultant futile attempt at narrative retrieval. If Blue in Welcome To Hard Times is puzzled by the circularity of events, Daniel in The Book of Daniel admits the futility of attempting connections which can illuminate the truth of their parents' alleged crime. Joe of Paterson's is a voyage of dubious self-

discovery in Loon Lake and Ragtime is a veritable symphony on the theme of the elusive self. The problematics of identity can exist as a consequence of human existence as well as of peculiar socio-cultural problems. In Doctorow it is caused by both as an offshoot of the consciousness which is struggling to contain its warring and wedding components.

"False Documents," the seminal essay by Doctorow, aims at a definition of the form and purposes of fiction in his artistic vision. The essay opens by distinguishing between two kinds of power embodied in language: "the power of regime" and "the power of freedom" (17). "The power of the regime" lies in its "manifest reference to a verifiable world" and that of freedom in "a private or ideal world that can not be easily corroborated or verified" (17). This division, roughly equivalent to the one between fact and fiction, is followed by the emotional ramifications of the statement. "There is a regime language that derives its strength from what we are supposed to be and a language of freedom whose power consists in what we threaten to become", the essay adds ("False Documents" 17). Doctorow goes on to recall a time when "the designative and evocative functions of the language were one and the same...there was intravention, a mixing-up of the historic and the aesthetic, the real and the possibly real" ("False Documents" 18). It is this tension between

the evocative and referential uses of language or rather the heavy consciousness of it, leading to the factual and the fictional pursuing each other, that lies at the root of the polarities of narrative and consciousness attempting to approximate each other in his fiction. Hence Doctorow's abiding interest in the exploration of repetition, symmetry, synchronicity and circularity in life and art. This is where the roots of what Harter and Thompson call "the fundamental paradox" of Doctorow's fiction--the collision between "the intensely held social convictions of the man" and "the imaginative realisations of the artist"--lie (9).

The Doctorowian criticism has moved along certain lines, more often than not taking into account a handful of repetitive strains in his oeuvre like the treatment of history, the innovative narrative techniques, the critique of American values and less often the postmodern elements of his fiction, particularly the scepticism of writing. Paul Levine's introductory book on Doctorow, in the Contemporary Writers series basically focuses on the stated concerns of the fiction of the author. In Models of Misrepresentations, Christopher. D. Morris studies the fiction of Doctorow in the light of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return, Paul De Man's theory of blindness and insight and Heideggerian thinking on death. Carol. C. Harter and James. R. Thompson's study offers a more balanced analysis of the works of Doctorow. They often deviate from the

stock foci, like the treatment of history and critique of the west, to make critical room for discussion of the struggle of the artist in the writer. The authors also point to the themes vaguely spelt out by various critics like the dilemma of knowing and being faced by the author and his major characters.

In the moral-aesthetic continuum of Doctorow's fiction, the issues are intertwined to such an extent that it would be worthwhile to attribute to him Beverly Beinstock's summation of the fiction of John Barth: "man is artist is work of art is artist is man" (203). This is permissible in a man who holds on to the dictum that moral values are inescapably aesthetic. Doctorow in his fiction approaches characters whose troubled legacy--whether of social making or individual failure--render them susceptible to onslaughts of violent perceptions of an ungovernable kind. As these characters attempt to weave a tale that might liberate them into coherence, the narrative begins to reveal their complicity too. The denotative as well as connotative, the private as well as public, vie for acceptance as the narrative act gets problematised. The already fragile search for moorings for self thus gets further foregrounded and foreclosed. This is what happens in Doctorow's "assessment of the condition of the American self in its varied and complex historical contexts" (Parks 15).

All the leading characters of his fiction are self-seekers. Dissatisfaction, the all-consuming passion that drives Doctorow, is crucial in the struggles of all his protagonists. They exhibit a tendency to hop from the physical to the philosophical with confusing ease, especially when caught between the need to act positively and the impossibility of finding anything positive. Taken together, the mentioned components of his fiction very acutely reflect, repeatedly, the writer consistently grappling with himself and his views. The current chapter shows how the whole of his fiction is investigating the struggle of/for the self from various angles, in differing contexts. The quasi-existential struggles of his primary characters, his themes, the narrative voice or the struggle for it--these will be the parameters to test the aforestated interests of the writer. It examines, by extension, how these demonstrate the extent to which the characters struggle to develop a sense of belonging in what could be termed the "cosmic politics" of knowing and being (Harter and Thompson 9).

Welcome to Hard Times, Doctorow's first fictional work, is a deceptively simple novel. It tells the story of a western frontier town. When the novel opens the Bad Man, who rides into a prospering western frontier town, rapes, plunders, and sets fire to it. Blue, the self-appointed mayor of the town rebuilds it only to be destroyed a second time, with the

Bad Man getting killed in the process. Jimmy Fee, son of the carpenter who is killed in the Bad Man's first rampage, rides away as the new avatar of the Bad Man. Blue, who records the history of the rise and fall of the town, bleeds to death. The novel, a western, could be read at many levels: as a parable illustrating the evil within, as an anti-western which deromanticises the American western myth and as also the story of a writer's futile effort to find truth through his narrative.

When we consider the novel as a parable of good/evil we have to talk about the cosmic irony which the characters of Doctorow often mention. The Bad Man from Bodie is a character with easily identifiable traits of the kind. Simply called the Bad Man he rides into the town and wrecks it with impunity. The town carries living scars of the attack in the orphaned Fee and burnt Molly. But more powerful than these is the lurking fear in the mind of Blue and Molly as to the fated nature of their lives. As the town progresses, the fear grows. Bad Man changes into The Bad Man and then into The Bad Man From the Bodie. The Doctorowian habit of throwing an idea or question wide open with a sudden shift from the keenly particular to the overtly universal is evident in the way the writer has depicted the character. Bad Man is not just evil, but the Evil. After his first rampage Molly, the one who is scarred for life by him, is always certain, even strangely desirous, of the Bad Man's return.

Covertly, Blue too feels the same way. "Bad Men from Bodie were not ordinary scoundrels, they come with the land and you could no more cope with them than you could with dust or hail stones" (WH 7). The fatalistic sense of the evil within will bounce back with renewed vigour in the texts to follow to be very much a part of Doctorow's spiritual autobiography.

Battling to push the evil down is Blue, the builder of the town. The ledger-keeper narrator is hoping against hopes that he will win the battle against the Bad Man. Though he is endowed with the faith that "all the solutions are to be found right here on earth" (Harter and Thompson 9), a sense of human possibility and responsibility, he also knows that he is fighting a losing battle. Blue has been hoping to keep the Bad Man away with material success. Yet, the fact that he is never fully confident of himself comes out through his narration on his deathbed. As all protagonists of the writer, Blue also is a fusion of the writerly sensibilities and an activist's responsibilities. But the writerly susceptibility comes out all the stronger when the protagonist indulges in the process of recording. As in Molly, the tension is there in Blue too. The forces of fatalism and nihilism ultimately win the battle and it projects a kind of bleak vision so symptomatic of Doctorow. The Bad Man does come and wreck the town again: "Nothing is ever buried, the earth rolls in its tracks, it never goes anywhere, it never changes, only the hope changes...the first time I ran,

the second time I stood up to him but I failed both times. No matter what I have done, it has failed." Blue concludes (WH 214-15).

Failure and flight are near allied in Doctorow. Their case is one of mutual induction. All the major characters of Doctorow are in flight--either always on the move physically to take root somewhere so that they can develop a sense of belonging, or always in a fervent emotional hunt for a train of thought they can hold to, an idea which wouldn't contradict itself and will help them deliver. This doomed escape from freedom often is worsened by the sense of failure they nurse. What drives Blue to adopt Jimmy Fee, to take care of Molly, is his guilt of having failed to protect the town when the Bad Man wrecked havoc with it. As Frank. W. Shelton puts it:

> Like most of the residents of the town, he is unable to face the physical threat of the Bad Man and the memory of his cowardice fuels his commitment to help rebuild the town... In fact all his activities are aimed at compensating for past weaknesses and obliterating his memory of past failures (10).

Thus the arrival of the Bad Man poses problems and questions the integrity of the already introspective and thoughtful Blue. The whole text is, hence, a discourse necessitated by that.

Blue is found lacking ever since the arrival of the Bad Man. His efforts afterwards are to make sense of himself in the surrounding context of his failures. In Dilemmas of the American Self, John P. Hewitt remarks that "failure is one of the forces that makes the identity problematic--which is to say not only that failure makes for self consciousness but also that this self-consciousness sometimes calls identity into question" (159). Blue is "tired out with looking, looking, moving always and wanting I don't know what..." (WH 100) and the sense of having failed renders him extremely circumspect to himself. Subsequently the narrative of Blue supplies a steady current of the inner dilemma of the man, the questions of whatness of existence. The urge to civilize and the pessimism at "the terrible arrangement of our lives" (WH 203) clash in the man. Blue is the first in a series of protagonists of Doctorow in whom elements of Jewish humanism and European existentialism collide ceaselessly.

A starkly transparent feeling that recurs in the fiction of Doctorow, which reflects the flux of identity, is the meditation on perfection. The feeling is seen as a logical corollary of the search for perfect realisation of one's self. It appears in varied guises and contexts. At the bottom it is inextricably linked with a failed sense of identity or absence of self-realisation. Doctorow states in an interview that he does not think that "self satisfaction is very useful or constructive for an author... If you did

something perfectly, what would be the need to go on?" (Tokarzyck, "The City" 37). There are two occasions in the novel when Blue speculates on the inaccessibility/elusiveness of perfection. Once when he ponders over his relationship with Molly, he says: "there must have been a moment when we reached what perfection was left to our lives... When was the moment, I don't know when" (WH 138). Later, Blue repeats his fatalistic comments on the elusiveness of everything: "it made me shudder to think whatever perfection was, like the perfection I had with Molly, it was, may be past, silently come and gone, a moment long, just an instant in the shadow of one day" (WH 175).

Molly's and Blue's certainty as to the return of the Bad Man and Blue's pondering on the elusiveness of perfection, hence, bear marks of the unrealisable identity. What this points to in the immediate context is the question, how the self could be brought to its perfection, full realization. Blue knows that he has it in himself to lead a group of people into a sense of a community but the evil which embodies itself in the Bad Man--is it inner or is it outer? Since Blue is struggling with his narrative, the potential source of the truth of the matter, doubting his capacity to reveal the truth, it ultimately leads one to the Doctorowian conclusion which fosters ambiguity.

All along the novel the concern of the writer to extricate himself from the conundrum of being and knowing continues. As the reader moves towards the end of the narrative, the narrator's queries and asides multiply. Caught in the endless circle of epistemological and ontological concerns, at one stage Blue asks himself regarding Molly's warnings of the return of the Bad Man: "Molly, could you really know what was coming? Or did it come because you knew it? Were you smarter than life or did the life depend on you?" (WH 147). It is a question as to the existence versus essence dilemma, earlier found in Barth. Towards the end of his narration, close to his death, he asks again, "Why does there have to be promise before destruction? (WH 211). The novel has an ironic kind of closure when Blue "with great shame" *hopes* that someone will come by who can use the wood.

Thus the novel clearly spells out the thesis the writer is to explore repetitively in the works to come. Blue can rest eternally assured only if he could be satisfied with his efforts in terms of constructing a city or a narrative. He feels the innate evil--that of the land or that of the failure to be oneself. The novel closes on an ambiguous note--optimistically hoping against the equally pessimistic hope that another one may come for whom the wood will be of use to raise another town. But what keeps ringing in

the mind of the reader is Blue's question. "Why has there to be a promise before a destruction?" (WH 211)

The Book of Daniel involves the lives of Daniel and Susan, children of Paul and Rochelle Isaacsons, the fictionalised Rossenbergs who were tried in 1951 and executed in 1953 by the American government for allegedly delivering nuclear secrets to Russia. Their childhood, their adopted early teenage, their parents arrest, trial and execution, Susan's insanity and death and Daniel's experiments with radicalism, with himself--these constitute the narrative of the text. The novel, divided into four sections, "Memorial day," "Halloween," "Star Fish" and "Christmas," is a tortured narrative by Daniel. The disjointed and chronologically fragmented narrative oscillates between the period of his parents and the world he lives in, the world between the 40s and the 60s. But the genuine world of the text is the realm of the mind of Daniel with its weird connections and abrupt ruptures. It is his "attempts to make sense of his family past so that he can somehow understand the present and thus discover his own identity" (Harter and Thompson 26). Through "these relentless attempts to uncover, analyse and understand the dynamics of his own past" (Harter and Thompson 27), analysis of the Left movement, the state and culture all seep in. Still, it very much is the "Book of Daniel" as it searches for

moorings for the unhinged psyche of its protagonist as a consequence of his inherited legacy of evil.

Evil is pervasive in Doctorow's fiction. With varied affiliations and under elusive guises, it prowls unconquered in his novels. To the author, the admitted perplexity as to the elusiveness of villainy testifies to it (Tokarczyk, "The City"). The Book of Daniel is an in depth analysis of the legacy of evil. In Welcome to Hard Times, Doctorow unveils the evil lurking behind the facades of civilisations and humanity. The Bad Man significantly is from the "bodie". The pun on the word is pungent as the text proceeds to its end. There is a stage in the novel when the protagonist states that the Bad Man came because they wanted him to. At the same time it also states that the bad man is always there to be found. This renders the ultimate source of evil indeterminate and ambiguous. The source of the evil is less ambiguous in The Book of Daniel and the impact is deeper and more life denying. Here the sufferer is not the direct recipient of the evil, like Blue. But the cardinal difference is that if Blue dies in the process of searching for the truth of his past, the truth of his existence, the springs of evil that led to his failure, in the case of Daniel, he lives with it. If Blue to an extent is responsible for the happenings of his life, Daniel could in no way be answerable for the dilemma he has inherited. His suffering is having to find the truth of the crime of his

parents. The subject of the novel is this legacy and that is why it is Daniel who is on trial in the novel, not the Isaacsons.

Daniel Isaacson is a transitional figure in the novel. Rebellious and enraged, he is writing or trying to write the account of his life, his parents and his past in the Colombia University library while he is supposed to be writing his Ph. D dissertation. Like Blue before, he is to narrate his past into comprehension and join life on his own terms. But his past is inextricably bound with his parents' alleged crime of atomic espionage and the subsequent execution. A release from the legacy of the supposed failure is equivalent to walking out of the suffocating shadow of them and their act. This quest of epistemological as well as narrative truth informs his text. But he "lacks practical knowledge of the past, knack of analysis necessary to develop a workable thesis or a political position. He is paralysed, unable to chose a subject for his dissertation and unable to discover himself as a political subject or agent" (Carmichael 138).

The characteristics of Daniel are by and large the stock attributes of other central figures in Doctorow's fiction. He is stoically isolated, indeterminate, often irrational and at times even violent. Restless by nature, Daniel's narrative quest powers the narrative while his etymological quest powers his narrative quest. This is the circle Blue is earlier caught in--whether we make history or are made by it. This is the

coil of thought Daniel is struggling to release himself from. As he puts it, "there had to be a dialectic of breaking free" (BD 75). But "they were like figures in a myth who suffer the same fate no matter what version is told" (BD 75). The streak of doom that punctuates the fiction of Doctorow, like that of Faulkner and Barth, asserts itself.

What binds Blue and Daniel at the outset is that both feel alienated from the society around on account of their sense of failure, a sense of unworthy survival without giving what they are capable of for the cause. Quite early in Daniel's narration, he expresses the cosmic incomprehensibility of life which Blue experiences as he progresses in his narration. The guilt-stricken life of Daniel repeatedly echoes the inscrutability of life and alienation that is hard to decipher. "People looked at you in a fancy way and spoke to you down corridors. You didn't know what to do...a forgetting of what you could expect from being alive...you were in dread of your self" (BD 18). Daniel's comments on life echo the persistent angst of Doctorow's protagonists: "It has occurred to him, perhaps, that the pattern of our lives is deterioration, that the movement of lives is towards death" (BD 23).

Failure and a sense of guilt reside incurably in Daniel. The existence of it is incurable as it shifts incessantly among the plains of personal, social and metaphysical. Living a life with thousands of

intruders, he feels being partially responsible for "some of the force that propelled the razor" of his sister's attempted suicide (BD 40). This feeling of complicity in a crime even of the undefined kind mystifies him. It is Daniel following the pathetic demons inside. Corollary to this is the feeling that he stands to gain nothing fruitful from these defining ventures of his. "Nothing I do will result in anything but an additional entry in my file... If I were to assassinate the President, the criminality of my family, the genetic criminality, would be established," Daniel feels (BD 85).

If the radicality of the radical becomes so much of an expected event, it amounts to a denial of his or her right to deny. It virtually nullifies his identity. It is a kind of forced silence in a society. Because, for the radical to deny the establishment is to define himself. This is refused in the case of Daniel. After participating in the Pentagon march he states that all day he "looked for satisfaction" (BD 272), but the nagging sense of self-unworthiness makes him feel that his presence has "robbed the day of genius" (BD 272). The same is the reason why Daniel's emotion falls into a pattern of "discontent and crisis, discontent and crisis...simultaneous fear and hope, defeat and victory" (BD 89).

Daniel's thesis on the radical thinking is the stock argument of Doctorow on the eternal evolutionary nature of identity and of existence. Implying the repetition and reiteration which is to come as the operating

theme of Ragtime. Daniel comments after the entry of Artie Sternlicht, the radical's radical, on the dynamics of radicalism:

> With each cycle of creative thought, there is a stage of genuine creative excitement during which connections are made. The radical discovers connections between available data and the root responsibility. Finally he connects everything... .At this point society becomes bored with the radical. Fully connected in his characterisation, it has achieved the counterinsurgent rationale that allows it to destroy him. The radical is given the occasion for one last discovery--the connection between the society and his death (BD 156).

The moment of connectedness Artie theorises on is similar to the moment of perfection on which Blue dwells in the first novel. This is applicable to his arguments on individuation, where equal impulses and achievements regularly impoverish the person, leading to a feeling of vacuum in him.

Daniel's criminal perceptions never emphasize the findings of his quest. The yield of his mission is as non-specific as that of the rest of the questors in Doctorow. The thesis which earlier begins with a desire to bring out the innocence of his parents, later turns out to be less certain

about the issue. Though all along the running feeling generated by the novel is of the victimization of his parents, Daniel's deft narrative later throws the question open hinting at the dark sides of their personalities: "their pompous little egos and their discussions and resolutions and breast-beating", "their arrogance as they delivered to us the gospel according to the 11th street" (BD 219). Once as he speaks on the influences of his parents on him he remarks about his father: "that was our relationship--his teaching me how to be a psychic alien" (BD 45).

There is a passage in the novel as it discusses Daniel's meeting with Susan in the mental asylum after her suicide attempt and Daniel recalls a dream of his the other night:

> With some one looking on I lifted the hairy, scalloped gourd of a face with its eyes closed and affixed it to my head. It was not a funny dream. The eyes were closed. The thing weighed a ton but it wasn't the whole head, just the facial edifice. I felt the flesh with my fingers down my temple and cheek and it felt like dead flesh. I noticed its imperfections (BD 225).

In Ragtime the little boy watches himself in the mirror and feels he is infinitely separating from himself. Similarly in Loon Lake, Warren Penfield experiences the weird sense of being self-objectified. For

someone like Daniel, inclined incurably towards the unsolvable imperfections of oneself, and of life, no analysis could be therapeutic. The pathological vacancy of his mind often troubles him. "It is a feeling with no bottom, no root, no locus... It pulses out of him like a radio wave out of all parts of him at once" (BD 234).

If Blue found mystical evidence of repetition in life, the same is the case with Daniel.

> What is monstrous is sequence. When we are here, why do we withdraw only in order to return? Is there nothing good enough to transfix us? If she is truly worth fucking, why do I have to fuck her again? When we come why do we not come forever? (BD 262).

he asks. Daniel's fragmentation within, the criminality of his perception, denies him a fixed perspective to perform a reasonable analysis. Moreover, his faith in the cyclical nature of history, the thinking that neither the individual nor the system could fully be held responsible for the evil which permeates life, enriches the said fluidity.

An ambiguity of perception can legitimately render a sense of elusiveness of existence. Repetition, sequence and a general unaccountability of evil further contribute to this. Daniel, like Blue, is a victim of the feeling of elusiveness. For him "everything is elusive. God is elusive.

Revolutionary morality is elusive. Justice is elusive" (BD 54). This is what makes him conclude that discrimination of right and wrong is impossible and postulate the theory that "whatever occurs is right", "any action is correct because it happens" (BD 83) and that, "everything is significant, every small act changes the world" (BD 168).

Daniel's final stop in his doomed mission for truth is his meeting with Selig Mindish, the communist colleague who is said to have betrayed his parents. It is at first a meeting between Linda, Mindish's daughter and Daniel, "children of Trials" (BD 291). This encounter doesn't prove to be any deeper descent into the heart of darkness as compared to the earlier efforts. Daniel "experienced the truth of the situation as an *equitability* (italics added) of evil" (BD 291). He finds "no clues either to their guilt or innocence, perhaps they are neither guilty nor innocent" (BD 145). The void which takes possession of Daniel after every significant attempt at self-analysis grips him during his meeting with Linda too. "If you change your life, you lose connection. If you take a stand, you lose touch" (BD 300), he states, driving at the heart of the matter, the impermanence of the bounds of self.

Daniel and Susan can claim another stock feature of Docotorw's prominent characters--their orphanhood. Orphanhood, which Doctorow calls his metaphor for injustice (Morris, "System of knowledge" 441)

exerts a telling impact on the lives of the children of trials. As they lose their parents quite early in their lives, they are propelled for the rest of their initiatory years by surrogate parents. It spurs their desire to belong and thus to justify their existence. This is reinforced by Paul Levine's comment that "at the heart of The Book of Daniel is a deep, radical trauma, the pain of dispossession, denial, abandonment--by parents, by friends, by country" (28). Daniel's understanding of his life is that nothing can obliterate his past, his parental legacy of sin. Their having grown up, his having matured, nothing can. He asserts that "it was their thing, this orphan state, and that it obliterated everything else and separated them from everyone else, and always would, no matter what he did to deny it" (BD 19). This has made his life vulnerable to outsiders, "thousands of guides, commentators, counsellors, sympathisers and holders of opinion" (BD 37). Jake Ascher is the first surrogate and the Lewins, the last. Once the desperate narration of Daniel screams at himself: "[Are] you looking for another father? How many fathers does one boy need?" (BD 26).

Daniel Isaacson is in flight. Paradoxically he is the orphan who is, primarily, in flight from his parents, the legacy of evil he has inherited from his parents. As he himself has conceded, there could be no ultimate getting away from the past, his parents. "All my life I have been trying to

escape from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another, they are what you come up on around the corner" (BD 41). Echoing the flight of Joe in Loon Lake from money and that of Blue in Welcome to Hard Times from the Bad Man, Daniel's too is a failure foresworn. The flight induced by the elusiveness of identity only serves to remind one of the futility of it.

Daniel, haunted by past, resorts to feverish effort to record it and thus to get it out of his way. His sister Susan does not go for that option. She is the radical for whom the connections are to be made, whatever be the cost of it. The pair personifies the radical-moderate conflict in Doctorow like Joe and Warren in Loon Lake and Coalhouse and Houdini in Ragtime. One would go down fighting while the other would accept an artistic resolution of his crisis. There has always been a commingling of passions, a fusion of identities in these pairs. The experiences of Daniel and Susan clearly fall into this pattern. They "were like the compensating halves of a clock sculpture that would exchange positions when the chimes struck" (BD 18), according to Daniel. But if the problem of Daniel is his inherent inability to come to a conclusion, in Susan resides the definite family gift of having precise feelings. "Always taking stands... With her aggressive moral openness" (BD 19), she reminds one of Coalhouse Walker of Ragtime.

Susan is a tortured soul in the novel like Daniel. It is the perspective which is Daniel's that clouds the genuine nature of her struggle. Susan chooses the radical path, ignoring her politically underdeveloped brother. She feels that his cynicism is a phoney excuse which saves him from doing anything. She establishes the Isaacson Foundation for Revolution despite Daniel's objections. She is a minor presence in the novel. Her death after an unsuccessful suicide effort is attributed to "a failure of analysis" (BD 317), a failure to make connections between desires and reality.

Daniel calls himself "a criminal of perceptions" (BD 44). As Harter and Thompson point out, it is a term "that also implies Doctorow's own ambivalence where questions of didacticism versus exploration are concerned" (30). As an adult he wants to establish himself in life finding out for certain the nature of his parenthood, the truth according to Daniel. Yet, it could be concluded from the theory Daniel puts forward in connection with radicalism that just as a state of fully connectedness is illusionary, so is a state of autonomy too. As the narrative of Blue fails in resolving the truth of the past, the truth of his life, Daniel is urged to "seal the book" (BD 319). What Doctorow says of Jonathan in Lives of the Poets is true of Daniel too: "what he learns at the end is what he knew through his writing, without knowing that he knew it" (qtd. in Morris,

"System of Knowledge" 448). What he has known is that the state of knowledge which can define the identity of an individual unambiguously is inherently inaccessible as man is ever in the process of being and knowing.

The most popular novel ever from Doctorow, Ragtime is simultaneously an exploration of the American ethnic question, a critique of the American character and yet another meditation on justice, self and the travails of artists. As Budick puts it, "the concern with a procreative, regenerative relationship between the self and the world is the subject of E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime" (186). There are three major strands of self-crises and subsequent explorations closely intertwined in the novel: sexual, economic and artistic, evident in the portrayal of Father, Tateh, and Houdini respectively, not to mention the general inability to fathom oneself experienced by many as a result of the immensity of life. But towering above them all and hijacking the narrative is Coalhouse Walker. He is the yardstick of individuation against whom the rest of the characters are to be measured.

The novel revolves round the story of Coalhouse Walker and his quest for justice. He is a self-made Negro pianist, dignified in carriage and honest in dealings. He has a son in his yet to be solemnized relationship with Sarah. During one of his visits to her in his Model T car,

the firemen of the Emerald Isle Fire Company stops him and vandalizes his car. His wife-to-be dies as a consequence of trying to plead his case with the presidential candidate. Coalhouse takes up arms and attacks fire stations, beginning with the Emerald Isle Fire Company. With a group of like-minded men, he occupies the Morgan Library demanding justice. Having made the authorities produce Wilkie Conklin, the fire station chief, and repair and restore the car to its original condition, he is killed on his way out of the library.

Coalhouse Walker is a strange as well as rare entity among the characters of Doctorow. Nowhere in the works of Doctorow does one come across a character remotely sharing the inner features of the man. What etches the character's presence sharply is his sense of mission, the certainty, the persistence and the devotion with which he proceeds with his life. Father aptly puts it: "Once Coalhouse had set a course for himself, he was nothing if not persevering" (RT 161). Sarah was not ready to reconcile herself to Coalhouse after their baby out of wedlock. Coalhouse traces her out and visits her week after week. It is this dogged pursuit of his goal which makes her relent and agree for the marriage. It is the same determination that marks his quest for justice when the firemen destroy his car Coalhouse comes as a refreshing change after Doctorow's fictional assembly line of sceptical heroes, chronically unsure of

themselves. But still, he too raises troubling questions related to the theme of personhood.

The reason why the writer doesn't provide the interior of the psyche of Coalhouse is that he is one who is not given to convoluted speculations. As Morris has pointed out he does not get lost even though he is an artist (Models of Misrepresentation 106). This assumes more importance as Doctorow traditionally paints his artist heroes indulging in social missions getting carried away by their endlessly and circularly extended thoughts. They ultimately accept the inability to act determinedly as they are caught in either equally plausible alternatives or a mystical absence of viable choices.

Coalhouse Walker knows himself and hence his destinations. Unlike Blue or Daniel, he is not in flight, but in pursuit. He believes in sequence and not in circularity. Coalhouse knows how to realize himself. For Doctorow the social activist, he is the most powerful message of justice. At the same time Coalhouse Walker is a statement from Doctorow as a part of his enlarging debate on self. He is the reply to the potential query as to what happens if perfection is achieved, if the goals of the self could be realized. In the self-narrative-society continuum with which Doctorow is obsessed, one can always thwart the other and does always thwart the other. The perfectionist Walker pursues the society and

demands his pound of flesh only to die at the end. As Shelton states, "It is the individuality that is no longer possible in Doctorow's novels...Coalhouse Walker of Ragtime, a man who created himself by sheer act of will,...though heroic, must be destroyed by society because of the very fact that he demands his individuality" (8).

How uncommon Coalhouse Walker is can be made out from the way every other character is caught in the disputations of the self. Houdini, the escape artist, is hell bent on discovering the real act, in opposition to his magical fiction, that will legitimise himself. The Young Brother is said to have "difficulty finding himself" (RT 18) and the anarchist Emma Goldman is unaware of "who are the instrumentalities and who are the people, which of us causes and lives in others to cause and which of us is meant there by to live" (RT 50). Theodore Dreiser "turned his chair in circles seeking the proper alignment" all through the night (RT 28). Father "wanted to avoid what the great Dr James called the habit of inferiority to the full self" (RT 161). Peary, on his mission to find the North Pole, moves miles indecisively not able, "to find the exact place to say this spot, here is the North Pole" (RT 67). The Young Boy is caught in evidence of self-duplication and endless transformation. Morgan, the capitalist, wants "to satisfy ourselves of the truth who we

are" (RT 115). Coalhouse Walker inhabits among these speculative self-seekers who are irresolute yet unrepentant of self.

Of the crowd, the Little Boy deserves special attention. He is the central intelligence of the novel, a term that admits the inability to pinpoint the narrator. He and characters like Morgan help to bring out the singularity of Coalhouse Walker. The Little Boy echoes the elusiveness of which Daniel was a prisoner. Grandfather's stories "proposed to him that the forms of life were volatile and that everything in the world could as easily be anything else" (RT 90). "It was evident to him that the world composed and recomposed itself constantly in an endless process of dissatisfaction" (RT 92). The Boy found the duplicable event everywhere. As Morris points out, "The duplicable event is here associated with a seemingly inexorable loss of individuation (109). As it happens to Blue in the former novel, here too duplication threatens the individuation since no true identification of oneself is possible in a world of endless sameness or similarity. Differentiation, which Hewitt has pointed out as a central constituent of identity, is rendered impossible in the midst of duplication. The Boy's fondness for discarded things is an extension of this duplication. Even in baseball what strikes the Boy is that the same thing happens again and again.

The composition and the recomposition, the repetition and the instability of both people and things are the issues confronted by the Magnate Morgan too in the book. Doctorow is given to use circularity and repetition as structural patterns in his novels, one of the best instances being Ragtime itself. Not only that, he often mixes up the voices of the characters, repeats their utterances to effect the fluidity which defines his fiction. This principle he puts to brilliant use in Loon Lake. Here the utterances of the child find fruition in the eccentricities of Pierpont Morgan. In the novel, he is the exponent of the theory of reincarnation. He is a man who "knew as no one else the cold barren reaches of unlimited success" (RT 106), a man who "has no peers" (RT 108), a man who has "catapulted himself beyond the world's value system" (RT 108). Yet, he has to confirm himself that he is the divinely chosen one to inherit the mantle of a sage. Even at the physical level the defect of his nose he sees as "the touch of God, the assurance of mortality" (RT 107), the assurance that perfection is not achievable. He feels that "individuation may be compared to a pyramid in that it is only achieved by the placement of the top stone" (RT 112). The top stone as far as he is concerned is the confirmation that he is the one who will receive divine benefaction. He doesn't. Still the genuine revelation comes when he asks, "Why should we not satisfy ourselves of the truth of who we are and the eternal beneficent force, which we incarnate?" (RT 115). The portrayal of

Ford, the explorer of self is of importance as it depicts a disturbing sense of self-incompletion, the sickly loneliness of an otherwise worldly successful character.

The Young Brother adds to the repertoire of the lost young men in Doctorow. He is a brooding, lonely sort of person who has made no friends, "a strange young man" (RT 5). Solitary and impassive, he hitches himself to Evelyn Nesbit, the sex goddess, as Joe does to Clara in Loon Lake, at the beginning and exhibits all the customary traces of the lovesick. But it is he who finally develops a political conscience, something which the keenly self-made Houdini is incapable of. He is the first to perceive the travesty of justice in the case of Coalhouse Walker. As Evelyn gets tired of him and goes away he pushes himself headlong to fight for the radical cause--whether it be for Coalhouse or the Spanish rebels. Even though the novelist doesn't lay bare the thoughts of the young brother, he is not of the intellectual type. His position in the hierarchy of the questors in the novel is between Coalhouse and Tatch. Young Brother is an expert in explosives. He shares some of the features of the heroes of Doctorow in that he is lonely. But the way he steers his life later puts him in a different class. His desperation with himself and with the system drives him to a mad urge to destroy. It is true that he does it for a political cause more often. But he comes out as a character who is

on the look out for such opportunities. His rebellion is not always an exploration of himself. Rather, it is the undecidability of the thinker, of the writer translated to the level of violence. He gets killed during his days with the Spanish rebels.

Father is experiencing the failure of himself, of being "bye passed by life" (RT 161). He is a man who is a variation on the theme of the self-made American in the company of Coalhouse and Houdini in the novel. Still, there is an ironic undercurrent in the depiction of Houdini which is missing in the portrait of the Father. If what makes Coalhouse dissent is the sense of justice denied and Houdini, the unreality of his art, when it comes to the Father, it is his sexual relationship which topples his sense of identity. His firm makes flags and fire works, two defining objects for the country. It is through this business that he has made himself after his father went bankrupt. Father possesses the snobbery and hypocrisy of the middle class. He resents the self-confidence of Mathew Henson who accompanies Peary on the final leg of the mission to discover the North Pole. Similar is his feeling when he confronts the determination of Coalhouse Walker in courtship. Rightly, the Younger Brother calls him a "complacent man with no sense of history" (RT 219), a self-deluded man "who has travelled every where and learnt nothing" (RT 220).

But the real problems of the Father are of the sexual kind. "With his incessant outward explorations" Father is seeking an "escape from his internal conflicts and contradictions" (Parks 66). The novel opens with the interrupted sexual act of the Father and the Mother, with the unexpected arrival of Houdini. The next day he leaves for the North Pole mission.

> Father's escape from the world of Mother's well bred sexual delicacy and restraint delivers him into a world of sexual fantasy...[and] expresses powerful and unanswered sexual needs and equally potent sexual fears. It represents an escape that breaks the bonds of community and makes human experience painfully indeterminate and morally ambiguous (Budick 188).

Theirs is a marriage which "seemed to flourish on Father's extended absences" (RT 17), the narrator ironically reminds the reader. Hence, Father is only a mild variation of the Doctorowian character in flight to know himself, with a disestablished sense of sexual identity. His trip to North Pole has been a failure on many counts. His presence in the team is a result of the fat purse his club had made to the expedition fund, not a natural consequence of his skills of exploration. At the Pole he watches the sexual act of the Eskimos in which the female is grunting and

pushing back. "He thought of Mother's fastidiousness" (RT 84), reminding one of the resentment he feels towards the likes of Coalhuse and Houdini. Even though he has moved away from Mother, from the community that girds his loins, that has repressed his sexuality, he is not to learn from his fantasy. The psychosexual center of his being continues to be unrealised. As Budick puts it: "Father cannot survive the confrontation at the pole of his own being" (188). The expedition fails as far as Father is concerned. It fails because of the "tendency of his extremes to freeze easily" (RT 89). His expedition to the pole of his being fails and it makes him "arrive eternally on the shores of the self" (RT 368). Father returns a lean, weak, emaciated individual, "finding everywhere signs of his own exclusion" (RT 123). Experiences that do not educate him are of no value to him. True to the pattern, Father continues to struggle to be unsure of himself, of his identity, because of his sexual uncertainties.

Admitting the persistence of orphans in his fiction, Doctorow has stated that "the state of orphanage is just a useful metaphor for all sorts of injustice" (qtd. in Morris, "System of Knowledge" 444). Though every work of the writer is child oriented, Ragtime is of peculiar importance as, though it contains three children literally or metaphorically orphaned, it doesn't portray the injustice in terms of their points of view. Coalhouse's son finds his mother late and his father later

only to miss both in a short time. The Little Boy grows up metaphorically as a partial orphan since his father never takes an active interest in him. Sha, Tateh's daughter, too loses her mother quite early as Tateh drives her away because of sexual misconduct. Of the three, the one who receives emphasis is the Little Boy. From Jimmy Fee in the first novel, the writer has repeatedly painted the agonies of isolation evident in the orphan. The necessary insight to be added to the comment quoted at the beginning is the emphasis on loneliness that the author achieves through his orphans. Also significant is the fact that basically the leading characters of his fiction are men without much of a history. Nothing is known for sure about the antecedents of Blue or Coalhouse, for instance. This tendency peaks in Ragtime. To a great extent, the problem of isolation that characters like Houdini or Coalhouse feels is, the writer seems to suggest, a part of the emotional luggage they carry with them on account of their orphanhood. Sarah's or Coalhouse's past is void. Yet the ideological finger is pointed at society for this historical vanishing act as the ironical voice of the narrator reminds the readers of the presence and absence of immigrants in America. When the novelist distances himself from the immediate context of the novel, he seems to be bemused by the fluidity of the situation. The ever-enlarging sense of elusiveness grips him, as it does Daniel. Orphanhood is isolation so terrible that it simultaneously leads to a feeling of elusiveness of

everything. The ceaseless composition and recomposition, felt by the little boy, is part of that elusiveness too. So is the need of Houdini, orphaned metaphorically by class segregation, to perform out of elusive life, into proper existence.

Ragtime further carries on the dialogue Doctorow has initiated earlier as to the elusiveness of existence. It is filled with characters who are in quest of themselves and a narrative, mirroring the way the writer is grappling with himself. The narrators as witnesses, the leading characters like Blue and Daniel, are meditating for an anchoring experience, finally coming to naught. Notwithstanding the ethnic weaving at the end, the picture of Harry. K. Thaw, the released murderer, marching in the armistice parade is what the novel ends with. It makes one think of the return of the Bad Man in Welcome to Hard Times. To sum up, as Harter and Thompson comment, "*Despite or in contradiction to* (italics added), the book's political perspective, the novel's deeper more radical vision, is of a world seemingly devoid of meaningful connection, though constantly connected, a world of unending change and simultaneously of continual repetition" (69).

With Billy Bathgate and World's Fair, Loon Lake forms Doctorow's trilogy on the experiences of growing up and being brought up in the suburbs of New York. Published in 1980, the book draws up the

socio-political scenario of the depression years of the 1930s in America while telling the story of the crucial nine months in the life of a very young man. Narrated in a complex blend of shifting voices, places, persons and time, sprinkled with free verse and computer printouts, Loon Lake is "a classical American version of the Bildungsroman" (Harter and Thompson 73). But the issue runs deeper and the novel investigates the question whether "the human life is inexorably an act of impersonation?" (Parks 82).

Loon Lake tells the interesting stories of a boy, later called Joe, Joe of Paterson and Warren Penfield, the failed poet. Joe, Doctorow's boy in flight, is in pursuit of himself. Seeking liberation from the constraints of his limiting childhood and the uncaring parents, he sets out on a trip to nowhere. The trip takes him through conventional attractions of the American Dream--pretty woman, money, power and his ultimate and essential destination, fame. It simultaneously is a journey of spiritual discovery too as he experiences "the opportunity to find or create a self" (Harter and Thompson 73). In Loon Lake, on a slightly modified scale, Doctorow carries on his preoccupation with the themes of the corruption of human identity and the emptiness of (American) life.

In Welcome to Hard Times, Doctorow begins with the sense of cosmic loneliness of the hero clashing with the need of belongingness to

the society. The duality is evident in the struggle of Blue himself, without dividing and distributing the impulses among various characters. But in The Book of Daniel and Ragtime, the novelist spreads his canvass wider and distributes the drama of identity among various characters. The fictional landscape is again restricted in Loon Lake, as compared to Ragtime. Loon Lake, which "suggests the act of self-composition on the part of Joe" (Parks 73), puts the fictional technique of juxtaposition to brilliant effect in the characterisation of Joe and Warren. Joe of Paterson is a boy who would like to race to autonomy, the writer's word for fully-realised self. Warren Penfield is on a stage of equally rapid decline. Warren is experiencing his failure not only as a creative writer, but as an individual too while Joe is exhilarating in his progressive discovery of money, power and himself. Joe ends up being rich and the owner of Loon Lake, the abode of the millionaire Bennett, as Warren is lost on a flight above the Pacific Ocean in the company of Lucinda, the aviatrix wife of Bennett. On the way Joe realises the artist in him just as Warren realises the writer in him is no more.

This surprising correspondence leads to the query regarding the essential identity of the two, as to whether the author has split the life of a single character into two chronological halves and depicted them as sharing a core while differing at the margins. This is established by the

counterpointing experiences of Warren and Joe--their synchronous but unsimultaneous lives. As Levine points out, "as in Ragtime and The Book of Daniel Doctorow creates twinned protagonists who function as alter egos" (76). There are many parallels between them. They are born on the same day (2 August) nineteen years apart. Each has witnessed the urinating girl when they were children, each flees the working class background, both suffer economic exploitation, each of them arrives with the intention of killing F. W. Bennett and gets attacked by wild dogs, each loves Clara and leaves Loon Lake with Bennett's woman. At the end, Joe describes a mystical sexual experience, one that recalls many details from Penfield's life in Japan, a country Joe has never visited. Then the narrator adds: "you are thinking it is a dream. It is no dream. It is the account in helpless linear translation of the unending love of our simultaneous but disynchronous lives" (LL 291). The similarities are so striking that one might be tempted to make claims for the joint identity of the characters.

It is necessary to take up the lives of Joe of Paterson and Warren Penfield in detail to investigate this duality. Falling in line with the characters of Doctorow, Joe is an adolescent chronically unhappy with himself. His is a frustration which is all consuming. He feels lonely and unwanted. Consequently, he hates and envies people who are "known, where what they were did not have to be proved" (LL 19). Later he joins

the freak show of Sim Hearn. The detachment practiced by the show owner makes him crave recognition as he, "wouldn't be a nameless creature below his line of vision" (LL 124). Anger is dominant in the character of Joe even if it is not the raving rage of Daniel. Magda, the owner's wife runs away with him and with the season's collections. He throws her money to the wind, expressing his anger at the way it is made. Joe follows Bennet's train feeling more derelict and lonely. "Who did I think I was? Where did I think I was going? What made me think it was worth anything to stay alive?" (LL 34), he broods in the vein of Blue and Daniel. The suicidal kind of isolation takes possession of him as he speculates in the existential mode. "I came to make the distinction between the great busy glorious civilisation on the one hand, and the meagreness and the pretence of any one individual on the other" (LL 12). The alternation of hope and despair, enthusiasm and tragic inertia, witnessed in Blue, is thus alive in the nature of Joe too. Every conquest leaves him more and more dissatisfied. If Blue hopes and then speculatively rejects the validity of such hopes Joe realises his hopes and then finds the triumph void in retrospect. If warren has "the relentless faculty of composition" (LL 39), Joe has the relentless faculty of observation that only serves to emphasise his desolation.

Joe finds the train which ignited his fancy and is angry at the arrogance of the people who own the loon lake, "wilderness as luxury" (LL 48). When Joe recovers from the attack of the foraging wild dogs, he feels that "some of the serious intention of the world has leaked in" (LL 74). It perhaps gives the earliest hint that Joe is incrementally moving closer to the inevitability of compromise, the inherent failure of autonomy. Is it the hint of his espousal of Capitalism under the guise of the real destiny, like Tateh in Ragtime earlier? But it still puzzles him. "Would I purchase isolation, as this man had? Was that what money was for, to put a distance of fifty thousand acres of mountain terrain between you and the boon docks of the world?" (LL 75). He resists the lure of money as Bennett offers him a place on a permanent basis. "I wasn't one of them, I was a paying guest" (LL 76), Joe asserts. He runs away with Clara, the woman of Thomas Crapo, a goon of Bennett, with the help of Warren. After a brief stint of roaming he leads a short domestic life with her, working in one of the factories of Bennett. The murder of his neighbour, colleague and fellow unionist lands him in trouble again with the authorities. At the police station, on interrogated about the murder, Joe discovers that "the voice he improvises authenticates the identity he claims" (Levine 74). He claims to have been specially appointed by Bennett to study the performance of the industry-espionage of Thomas Crapo as he is Bennett's son. Leaving Lyle's widow in the train he returns

to Loon Lake, the resort of the Millionaire F. W. Bennett. He embraces money which he has earlier discarded with contempt.

As Paul Levine argues, "Joe's defiance is tinged with ambivalence...every act of rebellion on Joe's part is absorbed in a pattern of entanglement and acquiescence (75). Yet for Doctorow the essence of identity seems to reside in this series of entanglement and acquiescence. If These characters "destroy the past only to preserve the worst of it in themselves" (Levine 75), it is suggestive of the return of the Bad Man. Joe displays all the stock features of a Doctorowian youngster seeking awareness of himself--lonely, desperate, impatient, dissatisfied and indecisive. In the process the text brings to the fore the schism in the novelist owing to the artist-activist conflict inside. A case in point is Joe's attitude to money. Apparently an act of surrender, Doctorow's art is skilled enough to ambiguate Joe's final choice of Loon Lake.

What Joe is after is recognition, not the recognition which comes after a commitment, but recognition on his own terms, on it's own. This is the crux of the autonomy that he is after. "The ultimate quest of autonomy is for one's home alone to be a sufficient identifier, so that wherever one goes in society, the mention of one's name is sufficient to establish an identity" (Hewitt 203). The argument of Hewitt is peculiarly relevant in the case of Joe as he is keen on being known as "the one and only Joe of

Paterson" (LL 148). Joe's frantic hunt for fame hence is emblematic of his need of autonomy for self. This explains why he feels the sudden sense of belonging when he meets Warren Penfield.

The final acceptance of money by Joe raises curious issues, at the same time demonstrating the way Doctorow's fiction heads in general. Joe has contemptuously dismissed the isolationist capacity of wealth. Yet the autonomy he seeks too is isolation of a kind. At the end when he embraces Loon Lake as its inheritor he concludes his quest in dubious terms. When Joe stumbles on the uses of assumed voices for assumed identities, he leaves just enough room for the speculation as to the motive of the shift in allegiance--his shift from flight to residence and from hatred of wealth to the acceptance of it. Is this isolation an act of reneging oneself or an act of creative choice? Is it just another transition in life, which is constituted of many such? If Life is flux and consciousness, identity, as he seems to suggest, Loon Lake bears testimony to it.

An analysis of the portrait of Warren Penfield does not call for such queries but it may shed useful light on the elusiveness of Joe's final about turn. Warren Penfield is a failed poet. If Joe's story engulfs the bulk of the novel, the rest is claimed by Warren Penfield's endless mutinies with himself. He can't experience himself as the center of initiative and suffers from disintegration anxiety. Though he is a failed poet, the

character we encounter in the novel is more a failed man. As is pointed out, in a revealing contrast of characters, the novel presents the pre-creative phase in Joe and the post-creative struggle with life in Warren Penfield. Still there are strong similarities between them. He too undertakes a romantic quest that takes him all the way to Japan before ending up in Loon Lake. If Joe wants to apprehend reality, warren wants to transform it imaginatively. Warren flees his parents as they want him to grow up into a trade union leader in the coalmines. He who comes to Loon lake to murder Bennett stays and becomes its poet in residence, thanks to Lucinda's sympathy. His speech is an insistent mixture of injustices suffered and inabilities confessed, of a man who "has lost his perspective" (LL 94). "His great accomplishment was his own private being, the grandness and depth of his failed affections" (LL 96).

Apart from serving as a commentary on the ethnic dimensions, Warren's life and experiences in Japan serve as an ironic revelation on the quest for self. The people he encounters in the Zen monastery, the lessons he learns in terms of the commerce of self in Japan amplify the novelist's investigations into the concept of self. If anything, the happenings in the monastery emphasise Doctorow's conviction as to the incomprehensibility of self. Initially he is astonished by the Zen master's ability to imitate others to perfection as "the master fully realised whatever he chose to do" (LL 135).

But the admiration soon wanes as the mind imprisoned and the body entirely personal, Warren struggles to accomplish even the half lotus. The fragile temper of the Zen master accelerates his sense of irony. Warren rejects the Zen casuistry that "everything is now" (LL 137). "I am my memory and the images of my past are me" (LL 137), he concludes. The sense of identity which should come from the feeling of continuity is the casualty in the Zen way to self nirvana. The monologue attributed to Warren, questioning the validity of the Zen approach shows the real nature of the struggle in Warren:

> Why don't the storms of self taste fire and thunder across their brainbrow, why aren't they as sick and unsure of themselves as I am of mine?...If we are to press ourselves on the world sticking to it like a decal, if I am one with the trees the rocks the stars why is my memory invalid and why there are the images of Clara on our beds of slag in the cool mountain desert of Colorado forbidden me...why must I exclude exclude? (LL 137).

This fervent narrative shows the way Warren Penfield stresses the need for a sense of continuity in life. The elements of his past, the agonies of his mine-life can not be purged out of him with meditation. A total break from the past and living only in the moment can't be achieved.

Daniel felt that the ways of the working of education in the soul are truly mysterious. There are only possibilities for random connections, at bizarre instances and in rare moments. This secret soul of education that arrives unannounced is possible in the uninterrupted flow of evolving self. It is a continuum, formed as much with the dreams of the past, as of the truths of the life to come. "Is not everything valid?" (LL 137), he asks. Warren Penfield is guilty of failure of perception. Though he rejects the Zen way to salvation citing the relevance of the unexcludable past, he is never able to differentiate logically between the relevant and the irrelevant. He is like Daniel in trying to accommodate every thing. Overwhelmed by a sense of all-inclusive significance, he struggles to define himself.

Warren Penfield demonstrates powerfully the feelings congenital to the questors in Doctorow--the ideas of repetition and void transformation. "We must remember how we are vulnerable to the repetition of our insights so that they tend to come to us not as confirmations of some thing we already knew, but as genuine discoveries every time" (LL 131), he states. This amounts to the fatalism of Blue and the deterministic attitude of Morgan. The statement drives at the futility of searching for novel knowledge. Nothing could be invented, as every thing is repeatedly discovered. Budha interests him in his "propensity for self division, the endless fractioning of himself into every perceivable

aspect" (LL 131). He feels, in the vein of the existential, that "the convictions of friendship, love, the assumptions of culture, the certainty of calendars, were fragile constructs of the imagination and there was no place to live that was truly home" (LL 132). The portrait of Warren thus becomes an extension of those like Blue and Daniel, often emotionally bare and ironic.

His spiritual excursion in Japan is employed by the author for two significant purposes: to expose the meaningless nature of his quest and to expose the hollowness of the spiritual claims of the Japanese Zen masters. In the playful, ironic voice of the narrator, Doctorow makes his narration sound ambiguous--making it sufficiently unclear as to the identity of the one who mocks and the one who is mocked. Is it Warren mocking the Zen enthusiasts, the Budha devotees or is it Joe mocking Warren? Is it both? Warren, the perpetually failing man, wonders why Gautama had to leave the palace to realise that life was suffering. "If death exists, life has to be suffering" (LL134), he reasons with un-Budha like ease. He is unable to concede superiority to the Zen master who occasionally breaks into mad run, jumps on the Budha statue and breaks it. The master at the end of the meditative training gives him his Koan, a puzzle to torment oneself until enlightenment bursts on oneself: "if this is a religion for warriors, what are you doing here? (LL 138). When Warren sits pondering, he sees

through the slits the beautiful girl who sweeps the streets, his Clara on the train.

Warren is finally taken to a puppet theatre. After some time he feels that it is ridiculous to watch such a show on a stage as it is an innate feeling in him. "When I speak, I hear some one else saying the words", he muses (LL 179). It only emphasises the alienness of his own self, the self objectification familiar in the characters of the author. At the bottom, so, the problems of Warren are that of a man agonisingly alienated from the reality of life. Through the character of Warren, the writer further investigates the feelings of alienation within, the confusion of self.

Bennett, the lonely rich like Morgan in Ragtime, thinks that life is progressive discovery of death. He says, "I've never understood it... how a man can give up his life, give it up, moment by moment, even as he lives it" (LL 109). He too is aware of the paradox of living--life as a flight into death as his wealth is a flight in to loneliness. But for Lucinda, flight is life, literally. Levine is right in arguing that "Lucinda's desire for transcendence involves a fundamental self denial" (69). She dies "flying towards some great personal ideal" (LL 235). Like in Ragtime earlier, in this text too there is a description of a self attempting to take root eternally. The experiences of Joe and Warren, the duplicities/duplications

of selves, the ironic experiences as a Budhist novitiate--every major character contributes to this mosaic of self.

"Narrators with two names or false names occur frequently in Doctorow's fiction" (Morris 27). Tateh becomes Baron Ashkovsky in Ragtime, the reference to Bad Man changes a couple of times in Welcome to Hard Times and Billy becomes Billy Bathgate half way through Billy Bathgate, for instance. In Loon Lake Doctorow puts the technique to a very effective use as far as the name of Joe is concerned. Joe of the opening of the novel later turns Joe of Paterson and then to Joe Paterson. His name is revealed at the end as Joseph Korzeniowski. Ultimately as the master of the Loon Lake his name undergoes one more change of name into Joseph Patterson Bennett. Names are referents and they refer to an entity, a self. But by common perception names refer to an individual not in his flux but as a completed self. Since the ceaseless play of perceptions in an individual mystifies as well as enlightens the author, he resorts to the habit of changing the mode of reference. It can cause a continuous re-situating of the self, shifts in the elements of individuation. Each change points to a stress on a particular dimension of the evolving entity. Paterson carries the industrial/capitalist connections at a time in the life of Joe when he is involved with the labour unions and the rage against money. Joe's change of name and the resultant intertextual connection

with Conrad could very well be explained as expressing thematic similarity as self-discovery is the defining fictional core of Conrad. Like Marlowe of Conrad, the protagonists of Doctorow are in a mission to discover the truth of their lives through the stories they try to narrate. But in general the switching of names is highly emblematic of the ever-emergent quality of the self.

Contrary to Doctorow's established practice of analysing the problematic of the ethnic in the American context, he presents Warren, an American as an immigrant in Japan, caught in the identity warp. This transposition of the national-ethnic identities assumes importance as the consequence is similar to the feelings of otherness which Warren experiences in the puppet theatre. The quest for self-knowledge that takes Warren to the land of the Budha, The Enlightened, actually breeds an additional self of the cultural other. Warren makes a very revealing remark as he watches a musician playing on a street in Japan:

> [He] looked at the jazz pianist and the jazz pianist looked at him and smiled and shook his head and here they were together in service the smile said the frank and the some what contemptuous self awareness mirrored in the other doing the same thing what are we doing here man...that look of economically dependant expatriate we really down

> the ladder man to be stuck on this island making nigger faces at this little yellow man (LL 176).

The WASP as the black, the white as having to "make nigger faces for this little yellow man" (LL 176) drives home the transposition. It is to be noted that in the end Warren is reported to have been expelled by Japan as an "undesirable alien" (LL 26). The effect that Doctorow achieves with this counterpoising of cultures and identities is vital to the explorations of self he conducts. An American as an alien in Japan, Niggering for the Japanese emphasises the fluidity of identity the novelist muses on. Hence even the social analysis which springs from the activist impulses of Doctorow is reflective of the concerns of selfhood. Loon Lake is an excellent example of Doctorow's success in placing the apparent artist/activist division closer to the core of self--the existential core which moulds ones identity and expression. Though ultimately it stresses the fictionality of self, the path of exploration it has established is the logical continuation of the texts which have come before.

Thus Doctorow's interest is, in all the cases analysed before, in the synthesis of the visions of these individuals: not in the known, but in the knowing. Essentially there is little distance separating Blue, the first protagonist from Joe, the final one of this study. The sought reality regarding the rightness or the wrongness of an action never materialises

and when they fake liberation at the end, this apparent realisation of the self only serves to underline schisms infinite. Blue bleeds to death unaware of the dictates of existence--whether he makes life or life makes him. Representation fails as he feels that nothing could be fixed. Daniel rages: "IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER?" (BD 27). Coalhouse Walker is a man who connects every thing and finally realises that the only connection now possible is the one with death, as Daniel puts it. Joe, who only wants to be "free", finally merges with the wealth he has fought all along in his quest. Each of these texts is informed by this dynamics of individuation. Caught between the conflicting pulls of plural impulses, they, like Father in Ragtime, "arrive eternally" (RT 368) on the shores of self. They attempt to narrate in order to quantify themselves, but their perception tends to turn criminal, rendering their struggle for self-definition tortuous.

Chapter 5

Criminals of Perception

For Doctorow aesthetics and ethics mother each other and the abiding passion of his fiction is the indeterminate intercourse between the two. The narrator--witnesses of his fiction are all seen indulging in a course of ethical enquiry in which their examination of the past leads to the genesis of a fictional text. More often than not what begins as an act of moral investigation concludes as an exercise in imaginative reconstruction. Because, for Doctorow, "presumptions of form tend to control presumptions of thought" ("Language of Theatre" 637), and "moral values are inescapably aesthetic" (Trenner 25). The enlightenment that bursts up on his leading characters is of a dubious kind as it only illuminates the dreary slippage of narrative and existence. The imposition of the supposedly ethical on the presumably aesthetic and vice versa manifests itself as not a constructive principle, but an abiding problematic. This discovery attests the intense subjectivity of experience and innate contradictions that ensue between the aesthetic and the ethic. Subsequently it results "in a way of thought recognising that art and literature cannot escape the contingencies of the world" (Vieira 356), just as the world cannot escape the impingement of the fictional. Hence,

Doctorow's fiction depicts the contradiction and fissures of existence which attempt to approximate art.

In his cardinal essay on the mechanics of fiction, "False Documents," Doctorow mentions a reference by Walter Benjamin to a period before "fact and fiction became ontologically differentiated" (21).

> The fictional writer is recognised to have discovered the secret the politician is born knowing: that good and evil are constructed, that there is no outrage, no monstrosities that cannot be made reasonable and logical and virtuous, and no shining act that can not be turned to disgrace--with language ("False Documents" 21).

The artistic heroes of Doctorow substitute the politicians and their system in deciphering the alternative yet possible truth. As they mine into the roots of their legacy, it also turns out to be a venture to unearth their cultural genes too. Caught in their own narrative they seek refuge in the hinterland co-occupied by life and art. The narrative quest energises itself into not merely an affidavit of art, as it simultaneously brings into being a critique of the politics too. The "Language of Freedom" digs in to the "Language of Regime" ("False Documents" 17) only to concede the constructedness of the truth it has started out hunting for, the truth which will authenticate personhood of these protagonists.

> There are always contingent circumstances but I would say the constant underlying everything is desperation...We are often filled with doubts as to the values of what we've done--but beyond that to the form it self, to the trade...is the larger consciousness, if there is such a thing, advanced a quarter of a tenth of a thousandth of a millimetre? (qtd. in Morris, "System of Knowledge" 455).

The statement manifests the stated dilemma of the author. On the one side the author is worried whether his "trade" can constructively contribute to the expansion of the "larger consciousness," while doubting whether there is anything as such, beyond the subjective realm. Interaction of impulses of this nature evolves into and results in the narrative consciousness, which is nothing but the play of consciousness, consequent to the antagonistic symbiosis of the self and the wor[l]d. The narrative is informed by this paralysing play of contrary pulls of a consciousness that rocks and wrecks any convincing reification. All the more so since Doctorow preaches the linking of the political and the individual, the social and the artistic. Doctorow seems to conclude that the territory one possesses is ultimately one prescribed by language and so the limits of individuation are those prescribed linguistically. Because language is one of the means with which we (try to) make sense of

ourselves, they all explore "to what degree the instrument changes or creates the phenomena it reports" (Trenner 23). In the terms of Barth, the process and the product always threaten to trade places and the medium becomes the message.

Doctorow has stated that to a great extent his novels are "about writers of one sort or another, all of them are kunstlerromane" (qtd. in Friedl and Schulz 191). Recalling the protagonists of Faulkner and Barth, his artist heroes are lonely, indolent, and often inefficient in practical matters. They are speculative and hold on to their faith in narrating their past into legitimate lucidity. They undertake a quest for self-knowledge, more often than not akin to romantic flight. These artist/writer characters are urged to composition/creation as a part of the said quest for identity. They are desperate, dissatisfied and deluded since the rationale for writing is often personal/social, not artistic and so their tryst with art is always coincidental. They all narrate either to write away the personal crisis resultant of a social failure or to rid themselves of the legacy of failure they have inherited. Even when the act leads to an epiphanous encounter with creativity, it manifests in such a way that it also presents the limitations of the art(ifice).

An area where Doctorow has taken the ingenuity of fictional technique to rare heights is that of the narrative voice. From his second

novel The Book of Daniel onwards, Doctorow has been markedly keen on multiplying, mystifying and masking the narrative voice of the text. The author has consistently spoken about the importance of getting the voice of his text right and of the kind of desperation he feels otherwise. The shifting voice and the many experiments with it, at the same time, exposes the scepticism of the controlling intelligence of the text and the author. The experiments which begin in The Book of Daniel finally lead him to the radical text of Lives of the Poets, a marvellous medley of voices which highlight the remarkable artistry he has achieved in terms of narrative voice. It frequently happens in his works that in places of narrative intensity when the story is at a very socially active phase, the sceptic, experimentative vein slackens, often altogether disappears. The hunt for the voice generated by the artist often clashes with the socially conscious core of the writer. The narrative inertia after the death of Coalhouse Walker in Ragtime and the cluttered narration after the return of Joe to Loon Lake in Loon Lake point to the same. The fragmentariness of the voice is indicative of the crucial dislocations in the narrator. This is why an analysis of the narrative voice is a necessary component of this study .It could finally reveal the travails of the creating consciousness.

It is significant that the author's experiments in narration and in the evolution of the creative self make him present many of his characters as

writing--maintaining diaries, journals, simply keeping notes and recording themselves. For instance in Welcome to Hard Times, Blue is the ledger-keeper cum Mayor and in Ragtime we have the Young Brother, Houdini, Father and the little Boy all recording themselves at one stage or another in the text. In The Book of Daniel, apart from Daniel, there are Rochelle, Paul and many other minor ones recording themselves. Similar is the case of Loon Lake too, where even the inanimate intelligence of the computer features among the contributors. This catalyses the dialogue of language not only between the evocative and referential dimensions, but amidst the polyphony of voices stemming from these tentative writers as well.

Tightly interwoven with the theme of art/writing in the novels is that of history too. As is mentioned, all these narrators are chronicling their past. They want not only to straighten their lives with the effort, but also to get to the bottom of the history of the society which they inhabit. In the intended construction of identity through the integration of the past, present and future, the narrator turns into a historian. So, as in Faulkner and Barth, individual and social history twine, blurring the commonly held distinctions between the public and the private. For Doctorow, "there is no history except as it is composed" (qtd. in Trenner 34). He opines that there is neither fact nor fiction as we see it, but only narrative. All the

protagonists of Doctorow under scrutiny here, from Blue to Joe, are caught in the intersections of the personal and the social, in the coupling of the factual and fictional. "History shares with fiction a mode of mediating the world for the purposes of introducing the meaning, and it is the cultural authority from which they both derive that illuminates these facts" (qtd. in Trenner 24). Mediations of language between the person and his past proceeds to creative levels of interactions, leading to a fusion of "the figures of historian and artist in a single consciousness engaging in a struggle with itself" (Harter and Thompson 24). The explanations which they undertake to redeem their problematised past are one in which the bounds are hazy and shifting just as the voice and the context are often chimerical. History collapses into fiction as an effort is made to authenticate it. Doctorow's very first novel prepares the ground and hints at the possibilities his fiction might assume later.

Blue, the central character in Welcome to Hard Times, is the self-styled mayor who uses the ledger of transactions to record the rise and fall of the frontier town, Hard Times. The novel is in the form of three ledgers. Blue's first set of ledger books are destroyed in the first attack by the Bad Man. As he builds up the town again, he resumes the habit of maintaining the ledger. But the town is destroyed a second time by the

Bad Man who gets killed and Blue is mortally wounded. Bleeding to death, Blue completes his ledger/novel/history.

Since the novel is the ledger kept by Blue as a kind of memoir, he is the writer as witness, recalling the past as he slips to death. The arresting opening of the novel keeps the reader too engrossed in the story to realise the significance of the teller's decisive complicity in it. But as we progress, suspicion is aroused and corresponding to the declining interest in the plot, there is a growing enthusiasm to find out more about the teller of the tale. Towards the middle of the narration, Blue the writer comes to the fore. With inconsistent pieces of information, the earliest traces of his effort in representation surface. Blue cites different motivations for his decision to restart his ledger keeping. Once he states that when he experienced a rare moment of reconciliation with Molly with the arrival of the spring, "it was enough to start me keeping the book again" (WH 132). But immediately Blue corrects himself: "No, may be I am not telling it right. When I dipped my pen in the ink, it was not just for celebration, it was something that had to done" (WH 132). This constitutes the opening stutter in the narration, the moment when the reader begins to think in a dual way as to the manner the plot will unfold and as to the authenticity of the unfolding plot. Later as the narration picks up momentum, after the deceleration of the writer, Blue attributes a

third motive for writing, the sight of Zar lying dead, shot in the stomach. It makes him "sit down and try to write what happened" (WII 211). When the novel comes to an end, the point to be pondered in detail concerns the man who narrates it and the veracity of the tale, rather than the nature of the events which are narrated. This is partially because of the fact that "Blue's narration conceals to the point of undecidability his own complicity in the events" (Morris 30).

In his first protagonist Doctorow has fused the duality he is to distribute among the leading players of his later fiction. The narration of Blue reveals distinct strains of hope and despair in him. This roughly corresponds to the highly magnified activist/artist schism which emerges in the later writings of the novelist. There is an optimistic Blue who builds up the town after it is burnt to ground by the Bad Man. The Blue who persuades Zar to set up business, who cajoles Ezra to have faith in the commercial potential of the town, who distributes his money to the jobless in the town to generate as much employment to remove the social disharmony as he can--this is the faithful side of the man, thinking positively to launch creative ventures. But the other Blue is the one who is always aware of the futility of his ventures, the man for whom the Bad Man is a certainty to be accommodated. He is the one who will lend credence to the circularity of history, the sceptic in the power of

representation. This humanist-existentialist polarity is the spine of Blue and of his narrative too. Not unlike the "terrible responsibility" (Meriwether 70-71) of which Faulkner spoke or the Barthian policy of "perfect scepticism in views and incorrigible optimism in actions" (Lemon 157).

Like the protagonists of The Book of Daniel or Loon Lake, Blue is a character who always vacillates in his views and moods. He is alternatively bright and gloomy, hopeful and despondent: "Was this not a way of hoping or was I just being typical of myself, unable to do something in the morning without regretting it at night?" (WH 178), he asks himself once. This waxing/waning narratorial voice is central to his fiction. It corresponds with the divisions which reside in his consciousness. As Blue bleeds to death, the vacillation begins to threaten the very fabric of his act. Is it the frailty of the draining mortality or the philosophical sense of elusiveness? Death catching up and stifling him or the futile effort at communication speeding his end? The ambiguity Doctorow thought to be essential for good fiction here contributes to the circularity of the components of narrative consciousness.

This uncertainty spreads and assumes sceptic dimensions of subversive proportions for the narrator. As the novel proceeds, rather than the fated destruction of the town, the debility of writing takes center stage.

> I am trying to put what happened but the closer I have come in time, the less clear I am in my mind. I am losing my blood to this rag. But more, I have the cold feeling everything I have written down doesn't tell how it was. No matter how careful I have been to get it down, it still escapes me: like what happened is far below my understanding, beyond my sight (WH 199).

Blue, as his narration progresses, turns out to be a man who creates fiction while attempting history. This dilemma turns out to be a persistent feature of all the novels of Doctorow.

"Writing is only a temporary delay of disillusionment", states Morris, while commenting in the light of Blue's struggles to represent the past (Models of Misrepresentation 37). For the narrator the elusiveness in representing the truth is a typical offshoot of the overall elusiveness of life. The attempt to give life to a narrative concludes with the draining of life from the narrator. The uncertainty as to whether the vagaries of memory are to be attributed to the weakness in the dying man or whether the man's strained hope of salvation through narration is aggravating his life and speeding his end, remain. Similarly whether the elusiveness of the message to yield to the medium is a consequence of cosmic

elusiveness or whether it is a feature of the medium that engenders a feeling of elusiveness is left unanswered.

Paul Levine is partly accurate in pointing out that, "the question of the expense of life in the creation of art," is the staple theme of Doctorow's fiction (30). Doctorow admittedly follows the romance tradition of Hawthorne and he attempts in his fiction "the idea of curing up life into meaning" (Morris, "System of Knowledge" 444). Blue, bleeding his life to the rag, is ironically expending his life for art while believing that his art can save his life or the sense of it. This is how circularity, a persistent trait of his later fiction, materialises in the place of the self or the narrative he had hoped for. Fiction, which is intended to cure life to elicit meaning out of it, paradoxically comes to existence by using up life. When fiction or narrative finally comes of age, the life to be cured is used up and the meaning delivered is the sense of futility the process liberates. This is why Doctorow acknowledges that art and life make each other. For Blue, as Arthur Schlesinger puts " truth, the truth of his self, comes to be defined as the system of his limitations" (205).

Molly's words to Mr. Hayden Gillis on the selfless devotion of Blue as he charges nothing for the plot he distributes to the unemployed in the town is a clear reflection of the paradox called Blue: "you can trust his records for they show against him" (WH 139). In the case of all the

protagonists studied here, this is true. Their narrative, instead of proving them, invalidates their very existence. But the awareness comes too late. Blue wants to "account for the way things went" (WH 108), thinking "notations in ledger can fix life, as if some mark in a book can control things" (WH 185). In the words of Christopher. D. Morris, "At the point when he discovers that language cannot replicate experience, and memory and externally observed reality can never be as one, Blue the artist transcends Blue the historian" (Harter and Thompson 24). The text hence closes making the tension apparent between the images of the art and the life mutually counterpoised. The act of composition would continue, spreading life on life, composition feeding on creation--the eternal skirmish of the evocative and referential values of language in the "false documents" of the fiction. When the scene shifts from the parable-like atmosphere of the novel to the passionately conceived The Book of Daniel, the tension almost assumes proportions of a battle.

In the critical debates triggered by the publication of this politically significant novel, the chief question concerns the ending of it. The question is whether the novel subscribes to the artist vision of Daniel or the political one it begins with. The sharp division among critics (see Morris 80) Doctorow is bound to treat as the triumph of his novel since he wanted fiction to acknowledge what he felt to be the inherent ambiguity.

Doctorow's fiction has consistently been Doctorow writing through his protagonist writing to discover themselves. The interests of the protagonist--the individual, the aesthetic and the social--progress in an inversely proportional way in the novels. The texts begin by laying significance on the ethical but as it progresses the ethical either gives way to the aesthetic or they fuse in such a way that it becomes hard to comprehend the borders. In one way or another, all the conclusions of Doctorow's fictional writing have been resolutions of the artistic kind. This has been the fictional device employed by the writer to enlarge the scope of his enquiry from the personal to the social and further to the questions of knowing. The Book of Daniel dwells on the problem against the background of the trial of Rossenbergs in America on charges of spying. Unlike Welcome to Hard Times, The Book of Daniel is involved with the specifically historical episode of the Rosenberg trial and Daniel is caught in the complex labyrinth of self and society, narrative and ideology.

"False Documents," Doctorow's fictional manifesto, refers to the abiding interest criminal trials possess in the historical consciousness:

> Criminal trials in the courts of law where society arranges with all its investigative apparatus to apprehend factual reality, using tested rules of evidence and accrued wisdom

> of our system of laws, declare the guilt or innocence of defendants and come to judgement. Yet the most important trials in our history, those which reverberate in our lives and have most meaning for our future are those in which the judgement is called into question: Scopes, Sacco and Vinzetti, the Rosenbergs. Facts are buried, exhumed, deposed, contradicted, recalled. There is a decision by the jury and, when the historical and prejudicial context of the decision is examined, a subsequent judgement by history. And the trial shimmers forever with just that perplexing ambiguity of a true novel (23).

Till now there is no definitive version of the story which succeeds in bringing out "the truth" of the event and hence, " [a] close and contextualised reading of the Rosenberg story necessarily confronts the politics of writing and reading" (Carmichael xiii). In other words, such criminal trials of standing reputations are those in which there is room for differing perceptions. As Harpham adds, "the undecidability of such trials doesn't merely resemble a novel; it opens up a space that virtually produces the novel, a space in which narrativity takes precedence over referentiality" (82-3).

The hub of Daniel's pursuit of reality is knowing, not the known. From the self-appointed mayor who uses his ledger to record or trying to record the past and to comprehend the present, we here move to a Ph. D scholar writing or attempting to write of/off the trauma of his dead parents when he is supposed to be doing his thesis. In both cases, apart from the parallelism discussed earlier, their deviation from the formal activity results in the narrative. While Blue enquires into the root of evil in general, Daniel's investigation is made apparently easier as he is looking into a specific criminal charge, evil of a specified kind. At the bottom Daniel realises and Doctorow illustrates that whatever be the target of the exploration, through the medium of investigation called narrative which tools language, truth can only be approximated. This is because, as the exploration of an art gets spilled into its relatives and subsidiaries, the search for the motive gets stuck in the medium, there by mystifying an already elusive quest.

Central to the understanding of the artistic nature of the thesis of Daniel is the label he uses to depict himself, "criminal of perception" (BD 44). It is a term in which the warring tendencies and impulses of the writer can logically reside, as is pointed out by Harter and Thompson. In addition to that, if the term is to be analysed in terms of the information the novel delivers, it signifies the highly impressionable psyche of Daniel. The

agony of Daniel consists of his inability to compose a logical resolution out of the impressions he stores up in him. He is denied the ability to sift the right from the wrong. The desperation that Doctorow feels to be an ally of literary creativity is evident in the struggle of Daniel.

The principal agony of Daniel in The Book of Daniel is in articulating himself. "IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER?" (BD 27), Daniel enquires himself. As he states in connection with his analysis of post-war American situation, the agitation cannot be extinguished immediately, "the mind and the heart can not be demobilized as quickly as a platoon" (BD 33). This state of alertness in which he continues incapacitates a resolution though it enables a recording, however fragmented it may be. There are many moments in the novel when he dithers, thinking of his decisions to get the matter out of his heart. But he does not want to keep it in his heart as "the only thing worse than telling what happened is to leave it to the imagination" (BD 72). At the end neither suppression nor expression delivers Daniel since the psychic agitation handicaps his ability to differentiate and deliver.

True to his artistic status, Daniel feels imprisoned/governed by images.

> I worry about images. Images are what things mean. Take the word image. It connotes soft, sheer flesh shimmering on the air, like the rainbowed slick of a bubble. Image connotes images, multiplicity being an image. Images break with a small ping, their destruction is as wonderful as their being, they are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful, undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose (BD 83-4).

Complex, incongruous and bizarre, the quote drives home the dilemma congenital to the artistically inclined activists of Doctorow. Being the bearer of a highly sensitive psyche in which multiple images of heterogeneous kind rain on, he can not help communicating the torturous potential of images. Images operate in the space opened up between a word and its meanings by virtue of languages' innate polyphony. An image can herald the entry of rhetorical functions of language, sometimes at the expense of the logical ones. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has stated in another context, "there is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity. If we emphasise the logical at the expense of its rhetoricity, we remain safe" (359). Daniel can't and he decries the infinity that the images attempt to impose on his

mind. Multiplicity besieges him upsetting his quest for definitive knowledge.

The locus of Daniel's narration is not on the known, but on the knowing. Yet, it would be more precise to state that the thrust is on the difficulty of knowing. Apart from the inability to feel differentiated emotions, the other root of his suffering is the element of repetition evident in writing as in life. "To write, for Daniel, is to be condemned to return and to repeat; repetition permeates his narrative" (Morris 88). In the sequential nature of language, there is the necessity of return, which Daniel can endure as his is already a return to the American past, digging for the truth he can rely on. Repetition, as in Ragtime and Loon Lake, assumes many forms in the novel--from those which are indicative of the enraged psyche of Daniel, almost bordering on the insane, to those that operate, paradoxically, as a structural principle, with methodical jumbled writing in between. For instance Daniel writes as he muses on the definition of "crime and treason":

> *IF THIS BE TREASON MAKE THE MOST OF IT !*
> If this bee is tristante make the most of it
> If this be the reason make a mulch of it
> If this brie is in season, drink some milk with it
> If this bitch is teasing, make her post on it
> If this boy is breathing make a ghost of him (BD 184).

It is the discussion of the constitutional definition of crime and treason for which his parents were executed that prompts this statement from him. The progressive disintegration through repetition of a logical utterance reflects not only the agitated psyche of the writer. It also implies the collapse of language under burden of thought. Still repetition can't be helped as Daniel seeks justification of either his parents or the state through any which vent possible. But words either lapse into gibberish or become traps of textuality. Rather than authenticate one's personhood, it only aids the feeling of eternal duplication of the self-sought. It attests the disability of writing. There are instances of repetition which fortify the structural pattern of the novel too. Many of the sudden transitions of the thematic kind, though repetitive, belong to this group.

> Om om om omm omm om om ommmmm
>
> Ohm ohmm ohm ohm ohmm ohmmmmm
>
> What is it that you can't see but you can feel
>
> What is it that you can't taste and can't smell and can't touch but can feel
>
> Ohm ohm ohm ohm ohm...(BD 242).

This poem follows Daniel's discussion of the apparent motivations of Selig Mindish in betraying Paul and Rochelle. A passage which debates the guilt and innocence gives way to a passage oscillating

between ohm and om--a world of spiritual power and that of electricity. This incantatory, seemingly obscure limerick refers to the power of the unseen and reflects the incapacity of Daniel to render transparent the schism and unify himself through his narrative.

The multiple endings of the novel are an apt summation of the elusive quest for truth it has been involved in and it once again evidences the principle of repetition. In addition to the admission of the truth of the situation as "equitability of evil" (BD 291), Doctorow makes the structure too a vehicle of the same plurality. A narrative which intends to confront and conquer "the tyranny of meaning" (Carmichael 7), admits the inconclusive nature of the meaning-making language. For Daniel, like for Saul Bellow's Moses Herzog, "If the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable too" (Herzog 392). He agonisingly perceives that "the speaking subject is a fragmented entity produced by the act of speaking" (Zweig 146). As Harpham puts it,

> The search for a narrative mode that will secure the truth has led Daniel to investigate the problematics of meaning in narrative and has brought him to the brink of a disabling conclusion: that the poles of narrative are respectively, monstrous and boring, meaningless and all too meaningful

> and the narrative is only the crossing of two types of misrepresentations (85).

The fiction-chronicle hybrid he presents in Ragtime is very much informed by the quandary of the artists/writers eternally "existing in the process of becoming" (Harter 81). In line with the sweeping narrative, the novel contains a number of artists/writers who would like to connect themselves out of the baffling void of their selves by performing/writing. Effecting a technical leap from the sceptical narrator Blue and puzzled radical Daniel, Doctorow produces a classical narrative voice whose identity is fluid. Doing away with conventional tools of narrative complexity like abrupt breaks, pronoun shifts, and mixing of genres, the writer composes a smooth text in which the impossibility of representation is borne out by suave fluctuation of the pseudo-historical voice. Apart from the little Boy, the controlling intelligence of the text, there are artist figures like Harry Houdini, the magician, Coalhouse Walker, the pianist and Tateh, the silluette artist. To stress the author's presumption that the flux of indeterminacy and the fluidity of identities is not simply a writer-oriented dilemma, he brings to his fiction the escape artist Houdini and silhouette artist Tateh, Coalhouse, the musician and the little boy, the writer.

Doctorow has attempted a broad investigation into the art-life mutuality and inherent dilemmas in Ragtime through an array of characters poised delicately at varying borders of the twine. All of the artist characters face identity crises as an offshoot of the social prejudices. Yet they go different ways seeking integrity of existence. Houdini is placed at the fringes of society, with most of himself consumed by his passion for his art of escape. Tateh is the socialist who turns his back on ideology and rises to wealth through his art. Coalhouse the perfectly balanced violinist's life is basically consumed by his passion for justice. The little boy is poised in his narration as the master orchestrator of this congenitally unsolvable jigsaw puzzle. The entertainment, the economics and the legal machinery of society are juxtaposed with art to mine deeper into the symbiotic quest. The argument implied in the pervasiveness of the problem and the operative tension, again, further confirm the depth of exploration that Doctorow seeks. What disestablishes their attempt at a sense of integrity is manifest at different levels, though at the bottom the malady boils down to the same. Hence, Ragtime is a continuation of the probing of dynamics of personhood and the impositions of the imagination through which resolutions are effected. All the artist figures of the text are politically involved or they have politics involved in their lives. The figurative and referential functions of language merge in their portrayals and in the way they fight to be themselves.

Interestingly the leading artist figure in Ragtime is Harry Houdini, the renowned escape artist. The coitus interruptus which triggers the narrative is caused by the arrival of Houdini. If the novel commences with a casual dissipation of the creative act, life, all through the fiction afterwards it is life and creativity that puzzle him. Falling clearly into the art-life dichotomy of Doctorow's fiction, "Houdini's problem is that he could never make the connection between life and art" (Levine 58). He is a tormented man perpetually contemplating on himself, his art, and its success. He craves reception of the perfect kind as "people who did not respond to his art profoundly distressed him" (RT 31). Often the struggle of an individual to find himself in the fiction of Doctorow is deftly related to his own moorings in the lower and under-recognised strata of society. Houdini "had come to realise that the people who did not respond to his art were invariably of the upper classes" (RT 31). It is through this angle that the novelist introduces the social dimension of Houdini's struggle. It is this social inequality that powers the artistic spurt of the man.

What Houdini is after is recognition. Since he is an escapologist, the recognition he feels to be legitimately his is that of an artist. He is mortally scared of a future from which he will be left out. If Daniel is left facing a future from which Daniel the individual will be excluded as he is branded an Isaacson. Houdini is in fear of a similar exclusion, as a legacy

of his race. "What was the sense of his life if people walked out of the theatre and forgot him?" (RT 79), he muses. He seeks an artistic solution for a racial, class-induced problem. This fear of the possible obliviousness puts him in the class of Daniel as he too is tormented by the fact that his parents' alleged crime has classified him, nullifying his potential for a free existence. Houdini's dissatisfaction pushes him to flying, literally. Even his successful European tour fails to enthuse him. "He wondered why he had devoted his life to endless entertainment" (RT 81). This fear eggs him on to stretch the limits of the possible and attempt daring acts of escape. His frantic gesture of attempting to quiz the blast victim regarding the essentials of his miraculous escape is not without its comic side. Yet it deserves to be emphasised as the act reveals the sense of desperation Houdini experiences as a result of his art being infinitely removed from reality.

In Ragtime Houdini's craving for recognition by performing convincingly reveals Doctorow's return to his theme of representation and the art's ability or inability of performing it. The "endless process of dissatisfaction" (RT 52) that Father felt is similar to the acute dissatisfaction experienced by Houdini. But it is closer to a sense of failure manifest in Blue as he attempts to narrate the past in to existence. The significance of Houdini hinges on the fact that through the character

of Houdini Doctorow raises to the center of the text the struggle of art and life: the struggle of artist with life. He is "unable to distinguish his life from his tricks" (RT 171). "It is as if the attempt to represent must necessarily delude with the false promise of escape in the face of necessity" (Morris 109). He doesn't want to be treated as an "illusionist." He is "the most poignant example of the incapacity to regard the self as subject to invention and reinvention" (Harpham 89). He is as much in search of this elusive reality which can confer truth on his art as Blue does with his writing. "There was a kind of art that used the real world for its stage. He couldn't touch it" (RT 79). Hence his mission is to perform in such a way that the magic can be a reflection of life, a true representation of it. For this his art will have to soar to the pinnacle of perfection, to mirror the trick of life as life itself is a kind of trick. The dissatisfaction which catalyses Houdini is "the despair with what one has done, that dissatisfaction, that need to push on" (Morris, "System of Knowledge" 455), which propels Doctorow as well as his protagonists in to fiction writing.

Erich Weiss aka Harry Houdini is mother-obsessed and the death of his mother pushes him further into crisis as he throws himself into a search for a medium to communicate with the dead. This quest for the supernatural and the subsequent disenchantment with it soon deviates in

to a thirst for exposing the fraud of seances: "the unmasking of the spirit fraud wherever he found it" (RT 232). Houdini's search for the ultimate escape act which will transform itself to life leads him at the end to be one known for exposing the unreality of the others who deal in fiction. His final consolation is in revealing the spurious claims of reality of others fiction, wilfully oblivious of the void he experiences regarding his claims. It is quite revelatory that the novelist opts to have him frozen in the process of another escape art--in the process of searching for a place in the reality's scheme of things.

Reality could be schemed the way it justifiably has to be, the way justice wills, as far as Coalhouse Walker is concerned. "what is worse, you are a trained musician." Booker. T. Washington, during his admonition of Coalhouse Walker inside the Morgan Library, states with surprise, "one who comes to this infamous enterprise from the Lyceum of music, where harmony is reverenced and the strains of the harps and trumpets of heaven are the models for song" (RT 209). Coalhouse Walker who charges the narrative with his lust for social justice is a black pianist. In the novel, the harmony he seeks is social one not artistic. This is not unlike Morgan in Loon Lake speaking spirituality or Father in Ragtime. the one who deals in flags and festoons and fire power for the country lacking a political consciousness. Coalhouse sets himself apart from the

artist figures of Doctorow as he is not in flight and feels that a musician needs a permanent place. Coalhouse evokes surprise with his determination, a quality singularly lacking in the fictional domain of Doctorow and this surprise increases as he is an artist.

He is the self made American artist, the foil of Warren Penfield, the failed artist in Loon Lake. He is a capable musician, but one who believes in dignity of man. That makes him look so unartist like in the self-sufficient carriage of the man. He hasn't lost his perspective studying others emotion as it has happened to Warren. Coalhouse Walker, the artist possesses the integrity not dissimilar to the moral quality of Walker, the man. His art too is a measure of the man who seeks self-sufficiency of the highest kind. When he plays music, strains hung like small bouquets in the air and only those seemed to be the possible interpretations of the world. The common feeling of the tension between transformation and completion, desire and its satisfaction, is nonexistent in Coalhouse Walker.

If Coalhouse Walker is the artist as reformer, then the Little Boy performs the role of the artist as reporter--the narrator as witness. Despite the accepted ontological indeterminacy of the text, the roaming voice which holds the text together is attributed to him. The text is taken to be narrated by the Little Boy who has grown into his 60s. He, neglected

quite early by his parents like other young characters of Doctorow, shows the blooming creativity of him in the novel. The various threads of artistic impulses in the different artist figures of the novel find fusion in the image of the boy. The repetition inherent in Tateh's silhouette, the dissatisfaction characteristic of Houdini, and the despair of Father.

The Boy has precocious intelligence in him. "In his mind the meaning of something was perceived through it's neglect" (RT 89-90). "He was alert not only to discarded materials but to unexpected events and coincidences" (RT 90). A "strange child," he has no friends. The Boy witnesses ceaseless testimonials to the transformations before him. "Grandfather's stories proposed to him that the forms of life were volatile and that everything in the world could as easily be something else"(RT 90). He accepts stories as images of truth and there fore as propositions that could be tested" (RT 91).

> He discovered mirror as a means of duplication. He would gaze at himself until there were two selves facing one another, neither of which could claim to be the real one. The sensation was of being disembodied...It was evident to him that the world composed and recomposed itself constantly in an endless process of dissatisfaction (RT 91).

The Boy narrator sees duplication everywhere. He plays the victrola again and again as if to test the endurance of the duplicable event. As Morris points out, "the duplicable event is here associated with a seemingly inexorable loss of individuation" (109). The Boy draws the submerged similarity between life and art. Just as a similarly cut series of silhouette can be made to work into mobility of life, it is the repetition of arts which can attribute momentary reality/meaning to life. Hence art can not compose life's essential identity. But art can approximate it through composition and recomposition. This, any way, will lead to only endless dissatisfaction--the constant under every creative act.

Even when the little boy argues that "moving pictures depended on the capacity of humans, animals, or objects to forfeit potions of themselves..." (RT 91), the essential reference is to metamorphosis as progress. The theme is the usual one of the periodic extinction/evolution of self as the discovery of self. As he says of the baseball match, "the same thing happens again and again" (RT 172). It is circular but of varying radii. Repeated efforts at composition evidence creation. Thus the boy reporter espouses repeated transformation as life's basic principle but some how feels that though they transform, they form also. Transformation being the formation too.

The boy is the unsceptic narrator, unlike Blue in Welcome to Hard Times, as he no longer perceives that the elusiveness of the ultimate reality is something to be concretely experienced/expressed. Instead, the narrative, the voice of the text itself proves the point. The change in changelessness of the self is evident. The evil is to persist whether it is called the Bad Man or Jimmy Fee. Father's journal of the arctic exploration, Tateh's silhouette and later movies--all these different modes of artistic representation pass through the hands of the little boy. He takes to watching himself in the mirror to watch the self-duplication. "the dizzying feeling of separating from himself endlessly" (RT 91), every separation being an act of composition, recomposition, "in an endless process of dissatisfaction"(RT 91).

Tateh, the Jewish immigrant is another significant artist character in Ragtime. Many critics have dwelt at length on the character as they analysed his rejection of socialism for the capitalistic dreams. The political affiliations of the character and the author eclipse the significance of this artist. Originally a silhouette artist, Tateh leaves his first dwelling as he listens to the anarchist Emma GoldMan revealing the identity of Evelin Nesbit who has taken a fancy to his daughter Sha. In the context of the insistent presence of the principles of circularity and sequence in his novels, Tateh's artistry in silhouette and later in movies is

of relevance. In a masterly analysis Budick comments on the silhouette art. Like Rii's photographs meant to clean the shelter of the immigrants, the silhouette too fails to bring to light the agony and anxiety of the living. It reflects "the indeterminacy and concern with the self" (Budick 194). Tateh's is "the hand of the artist literally culling out an image of the world in bold and unrelieved opposition to everything the artist does not wish to consider" (Budick 194). The static outline of reality that the silhouette composes denies not only room for realism, but interpretive space too. "Emptied of detail, the silhouette conveys repeating and repeatable out lines that cancel the urgencies of social reality. It is an empty fantasy of the world, flat shapes and figures that are often representations of the outlines of self" (Budick 195). The effort is to fill the void between the outlines, the borders of existence, of each artist who precedes Tateh in the fiction of Doctorow. If Houdini's quest for the ultimate escape art to escape from the insufferable lightness of being leads to saving the gullible from the guiles of spiritual frauds, Tateh fights the, "varying degrees of unrealised hope" (RT 95) by turning himself into a maker of Silhouettes, realised in varied degrees of frozen positions. Like in the case of Coalhouse Walker, Tateh doesn't articulate his inner attachment to his art. He seems to consider himself a working artist carrying all the socialistic connotations of the term. The silhouette of Tateh is highly suggestive of the repetitive strain of composition as well as the sense of incompleteness.

A silhouette is a moment frozen and a posture eternised. That it is the clubbing of a multitude of such postures that leads to an illusion of life is of telling significance in the context of the existential, elusive propositions which constitute the fiction of Doctorow. If Houdini's magic is in a way fiction compressed and magnified, Tatch's silhouette is fiction miniaturised, particularised and frozen. It certainly is a central addition to Docotorow's meditation on the mechanics of life and representation.

The crucial move Tatch makes when he attempts to make these flat representations move is an effort to make them come alive. He draws the silhouette at varying degrees of action and flips them first to create an impression of motion. From these movie books he later turns to movies. Hence the semblance of mobility, change, progress comes from repetition of static and similar motions. Tatch who is worried that he may have to go on, "in varying degrees of unrealised hope" (RT 95), ultimately coalesces postures in varying degrees of unrealised hope into action, life. Even the movies which make him rich and popular rely on the multiplication and repetition of the similar. It is an illustration of the illusion of reality that comes from technical manipulation of the circularity of existence. If technology often functions to deny the legitimacy of existence in Doctorow, here ironically, Tatch moves to

technology to make his life come alive. This constitutes the second irony of his life and every such irony in Doctorow confirms the impossibility of individuation of the settled kind.

The many who seek to extricate themselves out of the suffocating repetition and the subsequent feeling of circularity attempt it through recording their experiences/crisis in writing. Father, mother's Younger Brother, Houdini--all three have tried it at one stage or another of their life. Significantly they resort to it when in the grip of desperation or life denying isolation. Father's literal isolation during his trip to North Pole brings to the fore the submerged feeling of desolation. In the killing winter of the pole father needs to withdraw,

> to the theoretical consideration of his system...Father kept himself under control by writing in his journal. This was a system too, the system of language and conceptualisation. It proposed that human beings, by the act of making witnesses, warranted times and places for their existence, other than the time and place they were living through (RT 62).

The illusion of escape that writing guarantees--the illusion of the construction of an alternate reality to cement one's sense of being--is what Father attempts.

> Doctorow's subject...is the freedom of the world from the impositions of the imagination- that is, he is concerned with the conditions of a philosophical scepticism in which undecidability must be entertained as a part of commitment to historical reality (Budick 206).

The fictional machinery of this undecidability in the text is supported by these artist figures of the text. The characters of the novel may be split in to two categories: those who seek/suffer circularity and those who seek/suffer linearity. Paradox is that whichever option one subscribes to, little difference it amounts to at the end. All the artist figures aim to link art and life in a decipherable manner and in the process they feel they can't decipher themselves. The repeated escapes of Houdini, the ceaseless compositions of the Little Boy, the cut and dried slices of reality that Tateh works through--these all testify to the struggle of Daniel to connect the official representation, the popular representation and the leftist representation with the hoped for and never achieved "real" representation. Those who seem to seek the sequential nature of life like Coalhouse or Father and the later Tateh eventually approximate an extended and enlarged circle. The quest for justice on the part of Coalhouse breeds more injustice and Tateh's fight for equality leads him to the opposite results. As is stated at the out set, all these artist figures

who confront the elusiveness of their identity are partially led to it by their social impulses. Houdini's sense of being neglected by the upper classes, Coalhouse's fight for the constitutionally guaranteed social equality, Father's need to be the upwardly mobile American self, Tateh's convoluted sense of socialism--all these exert pressures on them to define themselves. As the art endorses and almost enables them to do so, their sense of being alive, a state which is confined linguistically and the pressures of the inherited culture and indigenous scepticism nullify the reification of the selfhood.

> Doctorow has said that his primary consideration while composing [Ragtime] was "relentless pace" and to maintain the pace he has not only eliminated most description, setting and background and also effaced the differences between the various elements of his narrative--between large and small, speech and thought, speech and description, historically real and fictional characters. (Harpham 89).

The unengaged narrative voice, in another way, shows the engagement of the self of the author indulging in the process of composing the elusive, narrative self. If individuation is a kind of identity of satisfiable nature, such an identity is inaccessible for the narrative voice too. So the novel is itself in a process in which we have the flux of

narrative voices--the generation of successive self-representations. It still can claim to have the fixity which is the product of fluidity; the seeming certainty of the cyclic. The de-emphasis of the particulars is a hint at the way individuation is bound to be thwarted

The ambivalence and irony manifest in the thematic and structural patterns of Ragtime evidence in the principles of synchronicity and simultaneity in Loon Lake. The novel takes the fictional art of Docotorow a step higher and his philosophical thinking on art and representation a few strides deeper. If in Ragtime the political and the artistic are placed on an equal footing, vying for supremacy, it is the artistic/creative aspects which receive a marginal edge in Loon Lake. Not withstanding the deft weaving of the artist/activist duality of perception, dominance is conceded to the artistic before the final imaginative triumph of Joe, the artistic self-discovery. The flight for autonomy of Joe and the need of belongingness of warren, after multiple overlapping and varied collisions, concede the superiority of the imaginations at the end.

After the Lives of the Poets, Loon Lake is the most pivotal study of literary representation from Doctorow as it plays the lives of the budding artist and a fading poet against each other. In addition the novel introduces the idea of machine intelligence, with quickly transferable, easily erasable memory partially composing the narrative. This certainly

is a reflection of the extent to which his thinking on the elusiveness of the narrative voice has reached, the "perfect mobility of the text" (Harpham 90). In Loon lake the effort is to make a text compose a self, as Harpham puts it. A medley of voices, it trains its focus on the imaginative realisations of the frontline characters, pushing to the periphery the questions of its validity in the context of the thematic preoccupations.

"The idea of imposition of people on each other--whether in their personal relationships or in larger historical terms--seems to intrigue me" ("Creators" 44). Doctorow's statement is especially relevant to Loon Lake in the way the characterisation is effected. Even though Joe hates imposition of the physical kind, as it happens always in Doctorow's fiction, the formative years of Joe and Warren are experiences in the impersonations/impositions of the very kind. This is to culminate at the end of the novel in the conviction that only made up impositions of the imaginative nature can enliven his self and effect illusionary liberations. This is what Joe learns at the end after "waiting for everything to add up to a judgement (LL 9).

Joe of Paterson's mission in life is freedom and fame--freedom from the impositions of the parents, from the dictates of the rich like Bennett, and the fame of autonomy. The boy Warren is stated to have, "relentless faculty of composition" (LL 34). In the text it is more

genuinely evident in the case of Joe. While watching movies as a boy Joe, "instantly knew who the situation called for and became him" (LL 12). He knew that, "it was a matter of distance you took" (LL 12). As he indulges in the imaginative vicariousness of this kind, "that silent secret presence grew out to the edges of [Joe] and [Joe] was the same as he, imposed up on [himself] in full completion, the same with all men, the one man in all events" (LL 13).

Joe, the narrators imaginative coming of age is achieved through and after his picaresque of impersonations. The relentless faculty of composition that is attributed to the Boy Warren in the novel is genuinely evident in the childhood experiences of Joe. While watching cinema, he impersonates the required presence or opposition. He has the capacity to enlarge the silent presences within him until he becomes the other. This is indeed ironic as Joe's flight has been for autonomy from impositions. Here, as in every successive novel of Doctorow, the protagonist who seeks release from and aims to put an end to impositions ultimately seeks refuge in imaginative impositions.

There is no respite for Joe, the artist-to-be from also the onslaught of the ceaseless fragmentation of oneself. When he flees the constraints of his parents, he seeks autonomy of the truest kind and the freedom it generates. But in his flight from repetition, Joe does replicate his parents,

his circus chief and his boss, Bennett. This lands him in synchronicity. Interestingly, the synchronicity of the type Joe experiences is a product of compressed repetitions, similar to a bringing together of the western towns which suffer the Bad Man to one plane of existence. This is where the significance of Joe's narration of simultaneous lives lie. In Joe the early dominant impulse is to belong--a kind of existence that is wilfully justified, not just taken for granted. It means existing in the physical sense, being noticed and taken care of. This happens when Warren recognises him--an artist-to-be by an artist, too much in "residence".

But deep inside Joe is moving towards the acceptance of the imaginative reality as is evident in the final acceptance of the wealth he has initially rejected. The acute loneliness he has felt all along, the synchronicity he has experienced, all in the end prove to be the ground work for the imaginative realisation--the throwing of voice. This is where Loon lake, more than any other text, is exemplifying the effort of an artist to compose himself through his text. The political goes down and the artistic comes up. Tha saga of a young man in depression period finally is recorded to be an endless, triumphant anguish.

It is when interrogated on the death of Red James by the police that Joe unknowingly stumbles on to his ability to throw voice. This

accidental discovery makes his fate. He acknowledges the significance of Red and Warren at this point:

> It was an amazing discovery. The uses of my ignorance, a kind of industrial manufacture of my own. And the more it went on, the more I believed it, taking this fact and that possibility, and assembling them, then sending the results down the line, a bit and another fact and dropping an idea on the whole thing and sending it on a bit for another operation, another bolt to the construction, my own factory of lies, driven by rage...this was survival at it's secret source (LL 222).

Joe has acknowledged the importance of both Lyle James and author Warren in his new discovery of throwing voice. He has learnt the basics from Lyle James but the art of it from Penfield. "the hero of his own narration with life and sun and stars and universe concentrically disposed on the locus of his tongue" (LL 219). The statement of Joe is curious as he lists Lyle James as one of those who inspired him. His self in collaboration with the two creates Joe, the artifact. Harter and Thompson's comment that this moment is to be cherished as one which marks the "the transubstantiation of potential self into political self into a very specific and a very privileged self" (87), could be accommodated

only at the risk of ignoring the price the character pays by way of ambiguity here. Joe does not simply accomplish any privileged selfhood as such as much as he acknowledges the flux of persona where art melts into life and vice versa. The creating persona and the created persona modify each other in ceaseless traffic of intentions and intuitions as Joe the narrator, who recalls his past, is acted upon by the narrated Joe. This is why Richard Trenner argues that "the imagination obviously imposes itself on the world, composes a world which, in turn, affects what is imagined" (42), hinting at the circularity as well as the fictionality of experiences.

Lyle James is a union leader of the Bennett Autobody Company. He is accused of being an agent of the management, spying on the union activities and leaking the vital information about the impending strike. At the same time, after Lyle is killed, the union leaders convincingly claim not to have anything to do with the murder. Though he is the only friend of Joe, Joe is ignorant as to the ways of Lyle. He is almost confirmed that the murderers are management appointees. But the moment he begins to throw his voice, he emulates the trick of Lyle, with his "factory of lies" (I.I. 222). He does a Lyle on the police. Accelerated by the novel possibilities of the assumed voice, he imaginatively reconstructs a possible story justifying the reasons that have prompted the company to

murder it's own operative. According to Joe, Lyle is a double operative. In the self-made discovery of Joe, Lyle is both but neither. For Joe, to begin with, Lyle is a member of the Crapo Industrial services, the Industrial espionage service of F. W. Bennett, to keep tabs on the movement of the union based activities in his factories. Then he claims that actually Lyle is a double operative and then adds that he is working for the union and all the talk about an impending strike is a hogwash to decoy the owners. These additions and alterations thrive on the amazing current he discovers in the course of his "narration" at the police station. This play of meanings he has generated in the process of a criminal investigation, like that of Daniel, serves as a kind of an epiphany for him. Certainly an epiphany pregnant with irony.

Lyle James is an effective bridge in bringing together the art/life currents in Loon Lake. This is proved by the acknowledgement of Joe and Warren regarding the way Lyle inspired him to throw his voice. If Warren is a so called poet, Lyle is a so called union leader. It is rather revealing that Joe finds similar contribution from both in the discovery of his artistic self. Lyle is a man who throws his voice in real life, not in an artistic act. He claims an identity he never possessed. That the master impersonator Joe is impressed by Lyle's capacity to do the same in real life is ample testimony to his abilities, not to mention the way it

emphasises Doctorow's feeling that "Art and life make each other" (qtd. in Trenner 38), or, as Barth puts it, "narrative equals language equals life" (FB 236). What Joe did as a boy in the theatre, Lyle does to Joe and the union. "Different pieces of Lyle Red James had been lifted--his espionage self by the union avengers, his union self by the industrial service hoods..." (LL 195), says Joe after the incident. The fragmented Warren, who has lost his perspective resembles the self fragmented Lyle. Lyle has been imposing selves on him all his life, as does every one. He has been authoring his lives to the dictates of the situations but is finally caught in the conflict of the selves. Warren Penfield too has been keen on imposing his imaginative selves on the world. The "basics" that Joe got from Lyle amount to imposition of selves and the "art" of Warren confines to the emotional presentation of it, narration. Together they constitute the impostors of life and imagination--self deceptive-realistic acts and self-declarative imaginative acts.

Lyle James centrality in the novel lies here. Though not a major presence in the novel, he assumes larger significance ever since Joe's declaration of his commitment to Lyle. Subsequent to his declaration in the police station, Joe subjects the identity of the impersonator Lyle to alterations within the "factory of lies" (LL 222). Every change Joe affects in his story contributes a novel self to Lyle: from union leader, to a

management spy, to a double agent, and finally back to union man leaking information about a non-existent strike. The man whose life when he lived it was a fiction of contrived selves is transformed in his death to a pure fictional entity. After Joe's imaginative discovery of himself, his discovery of fiction in life exposes his life in fiction. The result being that the act renders the identity of Lyle irretrievably fluid. The life turns into a text as Joe stumbles on to the need of authoring one's life, as Warren claims to have done.

"I spent my life understanding feelings, yes, my own and others, that's what I do, that's what poets do, that's they are supposed to do" (L.L. 71) Warren Penfield, the poet in residence at Loon Lake declares to Joe, the poet-to-be. Though the novel traces the imaginative coming of age of Joe of Paterson in detail, it shows the early signs of the boy Warren's artistic inclinations too. Warren Penfield is the failed poet, a man who has lost his perspective, but makes it a point to speak about moral responsibilities.

Warren Penfield is the alter ego of Joe in the way their experiences and expressions merge in the book. Though called a poet, he never had much of a success as one. For his position as the poet in residence of the Loon Lake, he is indebted to Lucinda's sympathy. The age in which Joe is indulging in endless impersonations in theatre and on the road, Warren is similarly lost in imposing his imagination on the external reality. If Joe

is an angry young boy turning his back on boyish triumph after triumph, Warren always desires the maintenance of the status quo. This is why the man who comes to kill Bennett stays on to be the poet in residence of the same man. The only instance in the novel when he positively acts is when he helps Joe and Clara to escape from the Loon Lake. This too is possible only through the covert help of Lucinda.

It is a remarkably laudable achievement on the part of Doctorow that he has successfully brought together two lives which twist and twine in and out of each other illustrating not only his feelings of repetition in existence. It also demonstrates the way life and art, aesthetics and ethics, can imperceptibly coalesce. Warren the poet's spiritual quest and Joe, the adolescent's assertive hunt for finding authenticity almost fuse. The selves to which they ultimately settle down are visions of the incomprehensibility watered down to imaginative triumphs. Interestingly, once again it is the detective enquiry of the police as well as Joe that lead to this apparently triumphant conclusion. At another level this play of selves, the frolic of memories and the fluidity of voices are foregrounded in the script of the computer which acts as the Data linkage.

Loon Lake, which is a deep meditation on the conundrum of creativity, adds another creative mode in the nature of computer. With it's atemporal, universal and multiple memories, the computer print out that

runs through the novel clearly brings forth a linear narrative not dissimilar to the elusive lucidity of a fiction. The Data linkage operates as the mediator between the self and the world. It attempts the connections which Daniel aspired to in a different manner. But a mechanical connectedness that only enfeebles the sought boundedness of self. The text contains a plethora of images of coming, composing, combusting, computing and creating. Doctorow's fictional games, like the array of artists belonging to fields as different as escapology and silhouette in Ragtime, in Loon Lake illuminatingly juxtaposes creativity of multiple kinds. The doggerel poem, "Come with me/compute with me/computerised she prints me out/ coming she is/ coming is she" (LL 6), establishes this early in the novel. It also comments on the way the sensory perception is intensely barraged by such aptitudes of every kind. As Geoffrey Harpham comments, "the computer liberates the writer from textual sequentiality, augments the writers powers of repetition, and encourages a view of textual units and the things they represent as interchangeable" (90), like the interchangeability which pervades Ragtime, posing formidable challenge to individuation. The forms and effects of computer bricolage effects the complete mobility of the text.

In narrative experimentation Loon Lake carries on from where Ragtime has left off. The novel's narration is cast in a mix, with shifts in

person, extreme chronological dysfunction, abrupt, abstract life sketches, bios, and a computer print out made to falsely sound like an authorial voice together with what sounds like the dialogues of warren and Lucinda on the fated flight over Pacific. This mixing of voices, narrators and documents open up the critical debate initiated by Ragtime and The Book of Daniel. More over the duplicities of experience, repetition of images, the art of non-linear thinking in linear language, "the apperceptions of oneness in dualistic terminology" (LL 138), make "the question of [narrators] final identification impossible" (Morris 116).

There are two phrases in the novel which throw sufficient light on the links between these narratives. While commenting on the Zen master's unique sense of self realisation, his contradictory views on poetry, the narrative voice ends: "Your register apologises for rendering non linear thinking in linear language, the apperceptions of oneness in dualistic terminology" (LL 135). Nearing the end of the novel, the voice again states: "it is the account in helpless linear translation of the unending love of our simultaneous but disynchronous lives" (LL 247). Both attest the multiplicity of layers of consciousness that simultaneously operate in the ever-emerging sense of selfhood.

The attempt in this context is rather to fix the rationale for the narrative complexity and its source than to trace the narrator. The quoted

remarks from the text, hence, expose the continuing preoccupation of Doctorow with the eternally constituting self and it's representations. "The apperceptions of oneness in dualistic terminology" (LL 135) and " the simultaneous but disynchronous lives" (LL 247), both oxymoronous, implicate the sense of repetition, the feelings of schism within the authorial consciousness that the author always records in his characters. It is an admission of similarity in differences. It calls forth the sense of sameness that belies life's essence. Doctorow uses his narrative equipment to reflect the repetitiveness as his fiction records the sameness of feelings and events in the life of his central characters. This is well exemplified in the way events, images, experiences overlap in the novel. It depicts Doctorow's "central continuing concern, narrative itself, and its relation to power, imagination and belief" (Harpham 83).

Just as repetition and transformation holds the core of text in Ragtime, the principle elementary to the deciphering of Loon Lake is "synchronicity". Tracing the trajectory of the narrative voice in Doctorow's novel yields revealing information as to the way the crisis of consciousness of his characters symmetrically spills in to the voice. In Welcome to Hard Times Blue is a narrator who mistrusts his voice, in fact, anyone's ability to narrate. In The Book of Daniel the singular voice of the prime narrator gives way to multiple voices, various sources, all

fathered through the consciousness of Daniel. Ragtime performs the task of The Book of Daniel in a very covert fashion. It records the disjunction of the voice without abrupt jumps or transitions. The play of the voice is artistically concealed in a traditional presentation. The fast moving, absorbing narration masks the complexity of the voice. But still the elusiveness of the narrative voice echoes the elusiveness of the individuation that Coalhouse knowingly and Houdini unknowingly experiences.

From individuation as autonomy Doctorow attempts to give autonomy to narrative. The crisis of identity is there in of Doctorow going into mechanical ways to attempt to give a narrative that produces itself. Loon Lake is a novel in which characters separated by time and space are bound by the similarity of their experience and utterances. Adding to the experimentative vein in terms of the voice, the novelist employs the computer print out with which the text exhausts it self. With transferable memories and swiftly erasable structures, he once again hints at the fluid nature of experiences in a text. Blue in Welcome to Hard Times is racked by his insistent inability to mine into the truth of his narrative, to bring to light the causes of the Bad Man. Daniel comes across pains of the same kind, only to submit his criminal investigation to the triumph of the imagination with the multiplicity of his conclusions. Houdini, Tatch and

Coalhouse varyingly explore their artistic destinies in a bid to reach their legitimate selves, where as they end up in ambiguous reconciliation with their imagination. Warren's questless flight finally leaves him lost in a literal flight in the company of Lucinda, a condition he has always been in when he lived. Joe gives himself to Loon Lake, accepting the limits to his self and explorations of self set by art and language.

"Our perceptions are sharpest when we are estranged," states Jonathan in Lives of the Poets (88). The socially-estranged protagonists of Doctorow turn to narration as they share with Moses Herzog the feeling that, "explanation is a condition of survival" (Herzog 392). But for each of these extraperceptive heroes of Doctorow, "the problem of composition is inextricably connected to, if not identical with, the subject of composition" (Parks 124). This proximity, instead of aiding comprehension, only promotes an antagonistic symbiosis between the language and the writer, the medium and the message. Further more, as Vieira argues,

> In the process of writing, given their memorialist perspectives, these narrators directly or indirectly problematise larger questions about supposed impartiality, objective certainty, state authority and cultural stability by

> relating these to such issues as history, behaviour, language and literature (365).

Hence the narrative quest of the writer-heroes only tentatively redirects these "criminals of perception" (BD 44) to a promised "kingship of consciousness" (LL 18), while it actually, apparently peters out into a quest for curative analysis of the state's/society's hegemonic denials.

Chapter 6

Hegemonic Denials

> The condition of my working life as a novelist, as I experience it, is one of immense dissatisfaction with the form, with fiction itself, an impatience with what it has done, a terrible impatience with what I have done with it... At the same time, of course, I imperially project from the character of my own feelings the character of our culture as a whole, and the state of it, and by necessary implication, the state of us all in this time in our lives. The insufficiency of fiction and the need to reform it, I take as a metaphor for our need to reform our selves... it is not a matter of thinking big, but of remaining alive ("House of Fiction" 459),

states Doctorow. The quote is pivotal to this study as it hinges on the ethical and aesthetic concerns of Doctorow and connects the unceasing commerce between the two in his writing. The way culture constructs narratives, narratives compose culture and the dissolute boundaries in the interplay of the twain get problematised in his fiction. It renders transparent the running cleft in the consciousness of the narrative stemming from the stated inner division of his fiction. But it also leads to

convoluted questions of the intricate relationship between ethics and aesthetics, culture and creativity, individual and society.

This is why Geoffrey Galt Harpham considers Doctorow's fiction as a search for "an approach that can describe how issues of narrative technique interpenetrate and constitute the political, social or historical subjects of the narrative" (81). Doctorow's efforts have consistently been to analyse the concept of self as it is moulded and brought into being by the social, linguistic and technological systems. His attempt is to articulate and document the changes wrought in human identity by the linguistic, social and the technological systems in which self participates and tries to manipulate. Self is both cause and effect of the processes and elements generally thought of as external to it. Hence each text of the novelist unravels the role played by the state/society in the denials of personhood. Doctorow's fiction investigates narratively the truth of culture responsible for the restricted realisation of self which has caused the self to compose a narrative investigation of its relationship with the society.

Culture is a kind of collective conscience. It encompasses every activity of one's life, each realm of society, all aspects existence. The major and most visible perpetrator as well as producer of culture is the political make up of a land. The kind of administrative set up we have in

every kind of governing dispensation, assume alarming significance in the nurturing as well as the negating of culture. But Doctorow's configuration of culture is as complex as his idea of fiction. At the foundational level he envisages culture to be the way it is commonly understood. It signifies for him what John. P. Hewitt terms "the webs of significance" (vi) that define our life in the society. Clifford Geertz seems to have spoken for Doctorow when he asserts that there simply "is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture...We are incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture--and not through culture in general, but through highly particular forms of it" (17).

The complexity in Doctorow's conception of culture is a derivative of his existentialist leanings and faith in the cosmic nature of evil. This is why even when he conceives culture as discourse-sensitive and sets out to determine the extent to which the privileged discourses of the past, the metanarratives, have erected deceptive, exclusivist cultures, room for tension is left alive by the way individual and cosmic patterns of evil seem to defy his own cultural logic. The way his fiction has evolved there has been a persistently shifting emphasis drawing and redrawing the spectrum that spans the constricted space between individual and society, a space where culture dwells and which is in turn generated by it too.

The loss of consequence of the individual in the socio-political landscape is what Doctorow aims to fictionalise in the form of the struggle of the individual for self-realization. The major factor that coerces Doctorow to revive the seminal epochs of American history is the desire he possesses to unravel the consistent betrayal of people by society or the state. He does not merely expose it but more significantly proves how the establishments have consistently brought to public consumption a distorted reality of this betrayal through its literature. Hence it is neither insignificant nor incidental that the novels of Doctorow attempt to diagnose the evils in its various manifestation and its moral and cultural orientations. From Welcome to Hard Times to Loon Lake form a mosaic of the American society from the closing of the frontier to the end of the Vietnam War and the thrust in them is on tracing the roots of evil in its cultural moorings and to analyse its repercussions for the individual/society. Since Doctorow concedes the fluidity of narrative consciousness subsequent to the shifting polarisations of self and society, there is not any overt attempt to vilify only the communitarian aspect of culture, dwarfing the part the individual has to play in a responsible society. According to Doctorow, it is difficult to say where the self ends and the society begins. The complexity of the issue hence produces logical fluidity. Still, it in no way diminishes the demoralizing of existence engendered by cultural impositions.

The banner Doctorow has hoisted with the title of his first novel, Welcome to Hard Times is eloquently suggestive of the whole of his fiction. It is as much about the hard times the world is for the characters of the novel as it is about their attempts to make themselves welcome it, or of the struggle of making it welcome them. Doctorow has elaborated on the condition in which he came to write his first novel. Reading a fair amount of westerns as an editor in a film company, he concludes how the western world of the frontier really might have been. His contrapuntal idea of the west as a treeless plain triggers the text. Hence the factors which power his contrapuntal idea of the west needs to be analysed. The hoard of writing which has grown out of the myth of the frontier land, whether in the form of formally certified history or of fictional text which bases itself on such histories, lean heavily on the imagined. It need not be asserted that this fiction and myth are not far removed from the popularised version of history propagated by the formally christened culture. Hence Welcome to Hard Times is an invitation of the kind the deromanticised frontier extends to a settler just as it is a call to investigate the hard reality eclipsed by the frontier myth.

Falling in line with the myth constructed by the latter America, the myth of the frontier has punctuated the early cultural artifacts of the nascent USA. The western is a popular genre that lets itself be used as a prominent vehicle of the myth of the frontier land. For a writer like

Doctorow, the western proves to be the ideal starting point in his running saga of revisioning of the American history. The theme of the frontier has exercised defining influence in the formation of the American cultural ethos. Those like Frederick Jackson Turner goes to the extent of attributing the distinctly American traits of individualism and democratic traits to the influence of the frontier. "As reality and idea the west both shaped and was shaped by the American imagination" (Levine 25). The country's fascination with the frontier has given it a myth of inviolable properties as the country expanded and industrialized. Doctorow's initiatory trip to the bowels of American politico-myth turns the romantic myth inside out, in the process raking up a highly demythicized actuality. As Shelton puts it. "He employs the genre of the western in order both to draw upon the preoccupations which readers have of the genre and to play against these preoccupations in a radical way" (7).

The time honoured formula of the western has always been the clash of the old and the new, wilderness and civilization. In Welcome to Hard Times, though it is apparently between the Bad Man and the settlers, it is never really as straight as that. Hard Times, unlike the glorified west of the stock Westerns, is at the mercy of many things--of the Bad Man, the goldmine, railway company etc. It is not a land which can yield plenty before the entrepreneurial determination of the America-inspired individual. Rather, it is one in which the individual is at the receiving end.

As the novel unfolds, one after the other the cardinal myths of the west are exposed and rejected. Individualism, democracy, nationalism--one by one these hollow ideals which are the corner stones of the fabled American exceptionalism are rendered extremely suspect, impossible to withstand a critical analysis.

Take, for instance, entrepreneurship. The commerce which establishes itself and flourishes, to begin with, is whoring. In the first and second incarnation of the Hard Times those who frequent it are invariably the ones who come for digging the golden ore, who come down, drink and whore during the weekends. A two in one, bar in brothel entertains them. Zar, the Russian who runs the brothel in the rebirth of the town is an out and out businessman, hardly evidencing any nationalist or democratic pretensions. As the town grows feeding on the fading gold dreams and the rising hopes of being granted formal statehood, restlessness generated by unemployment catches on. Violence and theft become sporadic. Consequently/confirmingly the Bad Man reappears. Whoever sets shop in Hard Town does so in mere pecuniary interest and the emergence of the Bad Man can reasonably be attributed to this self-centered money-orientedness, highly unlike the democratic mythic west.

In Doctorow's frontier town commerce seems to have taken root quite thoroughly that humane sentiments and casual acquaintances have

become impossible. Commercial transactions tend to define relationships of the town. It is not a simple cooperative of give and take, but of give to take. With the singular exception of Blue, the whole lot of the occupants of the town hardly evidence the manifest destiny of the American individual.

The polarisation of the individual and the self, which will greatly receive the accent in the later Doctorow, has begun to germinate here in the context of the myth of the frontier and the individualism of the ideal kind it fosters. Of the founding fathers of the town, of those who were around during the first attack of the Bad Man, only blue remains to build a future from the spoils of the past. Unlike the heroes of his fiction to come, Blue almost achieves it in the material sense of the effort. Contrary to the given legend, in Hard Times the individual does not thrive on his chosen isolation in the western frontier, rather he experiences the eagerness and insufficiency of solitariness. The hostility of the landscape on the one hand and that of man emanating from his self-centeredness on the other expose the mediocrity of the officially circulated myth and it amounts to a formal critique of the dominant essentialist history.

Mocking the predominant historical narrative of the frontier, the women of Welcome to Hard Times are no longer the fountain of the familial bond. All women in the book are harlots, the only exception

being Molly who has quit the profession after getting disfigured in the fire caused by the Bad Man. In his sense of guilt, Blue takes her and she is ironically the one admired for a time by Zar's whores for being a "wife". The only "family" of the novel is that of Blue, which is made up of himself, Molly, and Jimmy fee, the son of Fee who is killed by the Bad Man in his first carnage. Jimmy Fee too gets into the family of the man for the reasons which brought Molly to him. This make shift blend of substitutes serves for the family in the reworked version of Doctorow, replacing the traditional family as the source of well being: A self styled Mayor, a one time prostitute and an orphan. That the unit couldn't even rise to the status of the metaphorical family serves to indicate the way the text is intentionally composed. The timid mayor, the vengeful wife substitute, and the strange boy never melt in to one. The timidity of the mayor is not entirely on account of the ever-present possibility of the second coming of the Bad Man; it equally springs from the way he has failed her when the Bad Man came first. Molly's vengeance is as much towards the Bad Man as it is towards Blue. When the Bad Man comes next to be overcome, it should strip the mayor of his vanities, she feels. Jimmy, the strange boy is nourished further by Molly to be ready as a sure shot when the Bad Man appears next. She weans the boy away from the Mayor successfully. This completes the family portrait in Doctorow's Western. These characters never truly belong to each other and all perish

with the sole exception of Jimmy who inherits the legacy of the Bad Man. Like the transactional contingencies which temporarily reify in to relationships of the apparently emotional kind, in the novel, the familial bond too is built on necessities and apologies of the ideological nature.

An attack on the myth is an attack on the preservers and perpetrators of the myth as well. If the formal stamp of recognition for the myth is issued by the state then it gains currency and the gullible public becomes all the more susceptible to its consumption. This is where Doctorow customarily trains his fictional guns on--the manner in which the state takes its citizens for a ride and denies them the realization of the aspirations which the state itself has caused them to aspire to. Still, the ultimate source of evil is left tentative. The author explores the elusive nature of evil and the contributions of the individual and the state in it. The Bad Man is portrayed as an inextricable cross among the self-destructive tendencies of the human beings, the cosmic evil, and the extreme capitalistic impulses. As in no other text to follow, Welcome to Hard Times, through Blue, reflects the ethical-aesthetic bind of Doctorow and the narrative symbolizes the dilation in the narrative consciousness.

This schism and play intensifies in pitch and energizes the narrative in The Book of Daniel. "In the face of their own death, the Rosenbergs became, despite themselves and their official defenders,

symbols of the conflict between the human and the political, the individual and the state, justice and mercy", writes Leslie Fielder on the political and humanistic echoes of the Rosenberg case (qtd. in Levine 41). After targeting the capitalistic ethos of the American individualism in the first novel in a general way, the writer zeroes in on a specific incident in the American history and exposes the brutal imposition of the state's will on two individuals. As a part of his insistent analysis of the constitution of the personhood, he brings to the fore the cardinal role social identity can play in causing havoc in personal identity, the other crucial component of identity.

The Book of Daniel justifies the description its author gives it: "threnody on the agony of the Left" (qtd. in Trenner 38). It could as well be described as a "threnody on the agony of the left out", left out of political justice, written out of existence. This explains Doctorow's statement that the novel is not about Rosenbergs, but about the 'idea' of Rosenbergs, how the Rosenbergs are born and how far the society is accountable for the despicable phenomenon. Because in a way what Daniel feels has happened to him as a result of the legacy of evil--the effect of being made non-consequential, of being rendered nameless, a condition in which their proper name has become a synonym for a sin that spells exclusion--is something the Isaacsons themselves have gone through during their life time. The tormented life of Daniel being a legacy

of their supposed crime, the Isaacsons are always lurking behind the shadows.

Early in the text, Daniel comments on Paul's attitude to American democracy: "the implication of all the things he used to flagellate himself was that the American democracy was not democratic enough...They were Stalinists and every instance of capitalist America fucking drove them wild" (BD 51). If filtered out of the maddening rage of the narrator, the statement can go a long way in showing the dilemma of Paul, that of Daniel, and by extension that of Doctorow too. Even if Paul has been a critic of the ideology of the Right, he had faith, a sense of belongingness, in America. He has believed in the judiciary where only the guilty will be punished. It could be termed naïve that a man who worried that USA was not, "purer, finer, more ideal" (BD 57), expects mature sense of political fair play from the same country. It is not so since in the kind political dispensation the writer has in mind, there has to be sufficient room for the realisation of one's self. Whether an individual has got the amount of conformism the government finds right is not to be taken as a deterrent.

Community belonging is the hub of the realisation of identity. As Daniel says in relation to the treatment provided to the inmates of the asylum for the mentally deranged, "the theory is that the person's normal environment is therapeutic. The theory is that the person wants to go

of his race. "What was the sense of his life if people walked out of the theatre and forgot him?" (RT 79), he muses. He seeks an artistic solution for a racial, class-induced problem. This fear of the possible obliviousness puts him in the class of Daniel as he too is tormented by the fact that his parents' alleged crime has classified him, nullifying his potential for a free existence. Houdini's dissatisfaction pushes him to flying, literally. Even his successful European tour fails to enthuse him. "He wondered why he had devoted his life to endless entertainment" (RT 81). This fear eggs him on to stretch the limits of the possible and attempt daring acts of escape. His frantic gesture of attempting to quiz the blast victim regarding the essentials of his miraculous escape is not without its comic side. Yet it deserves to be emphasised as the act reveals the sense of desperation Houdini experiences as a result of his art being infinitely removed from reality.

In Ragtime Houdini's craving for recognition by performing convincingly reveals Doctorow's return to his theme of representation and the art's ability or inability of performing it. The "endless process of dissatisfaction" (RT 52) that Father felt is similar to the acute dissatisfaction experienced by Houdini. But it is closer to a sense of failure manifest in Blue as he attempts to narrate the past in to existence. The significance of Houdini hinges on the fact that through the character

home" (BD 17). But the culture that apparently fosters them, which the people hold tightly as their own despite its imperfection, betrays them in innumerable ways. The story of Paul and Rochelle is one in which the circumference of their existence is gradually shrunken by the intrusion of the state machinery.

Daniel's situation is not different either from that of his parents. The novel explores how Daniel and Susan suffer for being the offspring of the fictionalised Rossenbergs. The society, the state, which destroys his parents, has virtually defined his destiny too. "I live in constant and degrading relationship to the society that has destroyed my mother and father" (BD 84), states Daniel on the ineradicable society-imposed crisis of his life. The state has labelled and classified the individual and so there is nothing he is capable of that can upset the agenda it has set for him. In the words of Daniel, "If I left the school today my classification would still be 2A, which covers any situation not in the national interest" (BD 84). This is what prompts Daniel to his thesis as far as the relationship between the society and the individual is concerned. He declares: "the final existential condition is citizenship. Every man is the enemy of his country. EVERY MAN IS THE ENEMY OF HIS COUNTRY. Every country is the enemy of his citizens" (BD 85). Shifting quickly into the period of war where the commanders order the death of their own men, Daniel continues:

> In war the soldier's destruction is accomplished by his own commanders. It is the government, which puts rifle in his hands, puts him up on the front, and tells him his mission is to survive. All societies are armed societies. All citizens are soldiers. All governments stand ready to commit their citizens to death in the interest of their government (BD 85).

Powerful as it is, the statement holds crucial place in the Doctorowian thinking on the duplicities of existence.

In Daniel's lust for authenticity in existence, time and again he encounters the resistance offered by the state.

> There are certain convictions that the American democracy would no longer permit you to hold. If you were a Jewish communist, anti-fascist, if you cried peace! And cheered Vita Marcantonio at the progressive party rally in the Yankee stadium; if you were poor; if you were all of these things, you know what was coming (BD 145).

The semantics of disaster show the jury perfecting the conspiracy, expanding it and driving it deeper.

> We are charged not with committing espionage, but with conspiring to commit espionage. Since espionage doesn't have to be proved, no evidence is required that we have

> done anything. All that is required is evidence that we intended to do something...Coincidentally enough, under the law, the testimony of our so called accomplice is considered evidence...This allows them to put Dr. Mindish on the stand. By Jake's own precious law anything Mindish says against us have the weight of evidence (BD 207),

rages Paul. "By the roles of evidence in this trial verdict is foreordained. If the testimony of Mindish is admitted as competent, the conspiracy is proved. Because it would not be admitted except under the assumption that a conspiracy existed" (BD 207), reasons Rochelle. It is clear that although she and Paul will be found guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage, it is for the crime of treason they will be sentenced. The picture of the gigantic imposition of the whole elite political machinery on the individuals is self-explanatory.

The crime of someone who belongs to the lower class, who thinks differently, is always considered to be never against another human being, but always against the order and authority of the state. The system of justice is possessed and trivialised by its travesty of the society and the travestied version is projected as the authentic one. The individual is rendered helpless in this gigantic imposition of the state on the people. The ultimate deprivation of human rights occurs when one's voice

becomes irrelevant because it is explained away as the result of something in one's background. Daniel's feeble effort to reintegrate himself "involves trying to pull something positive from a traumatic experience" (Tokarcyzk 8). This is impossible since the society denies the individual foot hole through sustained suppression of his social participation. What makes The Book of Daniel a fiercely touching book is this telling portrayal of the gradual entrapment of two individuals by the state owned legal machinery.

Jack. P. Fein who does the reassessment piece in the *Times* on the tenth anniversary of the execution calls it "a piss-poor trial" (BD 227). He rejects the argument of the State that it possessed indisputable evidence to nail the Isaacsons' complicity as meaningless. Fein says that a friend of his in the Justice department has actually told him otherwise. The friend has informed him that though such a report did exist, it actually contained information, which favoured the defence. Like this every piece of analysis implicates the detestable role played by the state in having orchestrated the murder of the Isaacsons. In a trial in which there are "no less than seventeen abuses of due process" (BD 242), the prejudice could easily be deciphered.

Though The Book of Daniel is a novel dwelling on the semantics of self-denial emanating from the foul play in the award of justice to an

American couple, the symbolic ramifications of the issue are far wider. What evidences this strongly is the perceivable pattern into which the narrative occasionally falls. A notable feature of the book is the numerable discussions, references and descriptions of instruments of torture, modes of punishment and submission and programmes of annihilation in the history of mankind perpetrated by the ruling or the majority only on the strength of number or sheer power. Every instance of the kind powerfully illustrates the methodology of suppression practiced by the majoritarian and fascist impulses. But stripped of the ideological, nationalistic and racial trappings, every one of these testifies to the way the individuals who attempt to assert themselves and to uphold the path of truth are systematically targeted and eliminated. In the novel, when the bus carrying the Leftist sympathizers returning after attending the Paul Robeson concert are waylaid, narration abruptly shifts to the Russian purge trials of 1938 and Bukharin's defence of it. Similarly, after describing the inexplicable arrest of Paul, the novel all of a sudden describes "smoking", a Japanese mode of torturing unapologetic Christians in the sixteenth century (BD 122). The book then returns to the modes of strangulation adopted by the government to force the Isaacsons into submission. Again when Williams exclaims whether no one has informed the children of the arrest of their mother, the narration breaks in to another description of torturing called "knotting" (BD 143). This time

it is one practiced by the eighteenth century Russian Czarist regime on the serfs. It follows another brief reference to nineteenth century European tradition of "burning at the stakes" (BD 144). Apart from pointing to the severity of the agony of the sufferers, it also puts on display the kind of punitive culture American system covertly values to perpetuate injustice, denials of selfhood.

It is extremely significant that the kind of references into which the text often breaks are punishments meted out by either primitive races of the undemocratic past or by the fascists and totalitarian regimes. What these references point to is the description of the pathetic state of injustice rampant in democratic America. If such a gross miscarriage of justice is wilfully inflicted by the state on a couple for merely daring to be politically different in the so called modern America, how far has the society progressed since the sixteenth century Japan and the Czarist Russia?

It is not just the governing apparatus of the country which is in the dock in the trampling of the individual freedom in the book. The finger of accusation is trained as well on the Leftist community here. As a collective with shared ideals and a sense of belonging, Paul has expected the Leftist colleagues to help him in his moment of distress. But the betrayal Paul and Rochelle felt in the hands of the American Left constitute another vital chapter in the communitarian oppression through

isolation. "The party made no efforts to help them". Ascher tells Daniel in the novel (BD 236). Caught between the governing community whose judgement precedes that of the jury and the communist party that kept aloof except for the belated interest in deriving publicity out of the trial, the Isaacsons alienation from the State is complete. The plight of Paul is not unlike that of Blue in Welcome to Hard Times. Both carry the zeal to civilize and to educate the people around them. Both experience betrayal by those around. Both are conscious, Blue in a residual way and Paul in a major way, of the responsibility of the State for the condition they are in.

The novel works as an indictment of the phoney idealism of the American culture that gags the freedom and authenticity of its individuals. Fittingly it opens with a scene in a mental asylum and closes with a scene in the Disney land, the abode of the American "short hand culture" (BD 305). From a beginning metaphorically portraying the sickness of culture, it culminates in an icon of the country's technological innovation and acme of joy rides. The radical process of reduction which substitutes Mark Twain's Life on Mississippi with a boat ride of five minutes points to the ontological transfer it has bred. What Doctorow implies is the whole sale separation which has come to reside between the actual and perpetuated values.

However heavily loaded the text is against the evil machinations of the state on the individual, the individual too stands indicted on a lesser

degree. The activist in Doctorow can't go the whole hog because, as usual, the artist comes into play restricting and mystifying the quest. It succeeds in limiting the quest itself as the end declares the openness of the closure. Apart from Daniel's find of his quest as the equitability of evil, Jack Fein also impresses up on the narrative the fact that the Isaacsons acted guilty. So, "the truth was beyond reclamation" (BD 312). Even then the naked violation of a person's integrity on more or less trumped up charges and the insistence on taking their lives is barbaric on the part of the State. Decision, responsibility, freedom--theses are the ingredients which largely constitute the personhood of an individual. When the society turns its back on its people merely for the reason that they exercised their freedom within the limits of the constitutionally permissible, it amounts a denial of the right to exist.

Daniel too experiences this refusal of the freedom to exist and to realise himself when he feels that the society has already analysed and classified him. His rebellion would justify their theory of his genetic criminality. Like the "Compson Blood" in Faulkner's Sanctuary, Daniel believes that the Isaacson blood is contaminated by criminal urge. The genetic criminality of which he is conscious incorporates existential echoes too. It is the agony of being alive inherited, not earned. Yet the societal contribution to the same could not be further emphasized. He cannot indulge in anything that will define the originality of his existence.

All his actions will reinforce the further integration of his state-defined persona. Every attempt on his part to develop a sense of personal identity is bound to fail as the society thwarts his membership in it.

Racial discrimination is an allied subject where a feeling of inherited sense of evil is fostered by the invisible society. Ragtime narrows down to one such instance where Coalhouse walker, unlike Daniel, follows the issue of individuation to an apparently different finale. Concluding their discussions of the allegorical implications of the characters of Ragtime, Harter and Thompson state: "located beyond or in conflict with, his more accessible political views lies the dark principle that all motion is circular, not linear..." (6). But what the quote implies is what the present study intends to portray, say, the flux of individuation caused by the politics of the activist tendencies of the artist which manifests in the mutual approximations of narrative and consciousness. If the statement is read in conjunction with Paul Levine's remark that

> Ragtime depicts the growing class conflict which characterises the era of the emerging modern American state, where the belief in the sacredness of property took precedence over the commitment to the principle of equality before the law (57),

the message completes itself.

In Ragtime Doctorow's experimentations with the essentials of personhood carries on from where he has left off in The Book of Daniel with a significant alteration. There are striking parallels between The Book of Daniel and Ragtime theme wise. Ragtime also depicts an act of political injustice. There are actually three figures in the novel who suffer from feelings of social alienation and injustice on account of their social status of belonging to the ethnic minority and consequent prejudices. Significantly all the three of them--Coalhouse Walker, Houdini and Tateh are artists too. Even though in all the three cases the antagonistic forces are represented by the social apparatus--be it the immediate community about or the powers that be--the novelist puts three entirely different options for those individuals to confront the challenges to their urge for self representation/realization. Houdini seeks to remedy his situation through intensification of his art and by moving from the fictional to the real. Coalhouse walker, the musician, is coerced to take up arms to bargain for justice. Tateh, the silhouette artist bids farewell to the working class proposition and embraces capitalism. Hence, unlike in The Book of Daniel, Ragtime opens up differing avenues along which these suppressed individuals seek solution to their conflict with society.

Indisputably the major sufferer and the prominent thesis of the text is Coalhouse Walker, the black musician. Subsequently the predominant plot line and the core questions of origins of individuation are characterised

through Coalhouse Walker. When the men of the Emerald Isle Fire Station led by Wilkie Conklin destroy the car owned by Coalhouse, it triggers the central crisis of the text. Coalhouse believing in human dignity and legal equality explores every possibility to redress the grievance in formal and legal way. His desperation as each of the constitutional right is denied to him, coupled with the death of Sarah, caused by her attempt to petition the Vice President candidate on behalf of her husband to be, makes him accept lawless terror. With black youth who are similarly inclined, Coalhouse unleashes terror, blasting fire station after fire station in the vicinity. This destructive path to justice culminates in capturing the Morgan Library with threats of demolitions if his demands are not met. It yields justice as the authorities produce Wilkie Conklin and make him repair the car back to its original condition. But at the end Coalhouse Walker is killed as he steps out of the Library.

Ragtime introduces a few curious alterations in the situation presented in the earlier novel. If for Paul Isaacson's plight the whole society is to be held responsible, in the case of Coalhouse it is basically a crime perpetuated by the firemen and Wilkie Conklin that breeds trouble. Secondly, unlike Paul, Coalhouse decides to take on the ruling establishment and employs violence, disregarding the consequences of his act, which ironically leads to more injustice. If Paul dies thanks to an effete jury, denied of justice, Coalhouse dies having realized his goals. If

Paul's residual complicity in the alleged crime is implied in the Ragtime. Coalhouse is morally clean while he is insulted. True to Doctorow, the precise manner of death of Coalhouse is left ambiguous. The question whether he is killed as a result of his attempt to escape or whether he attempts to raise his hand as a sign of surrender or he simply invites his death with a seemingly aggressive attempt is unanswered. Significantly the answer could go either way. The alienation Coalhouse experiences is as chronic as that of the Isaacsons but since he is not given to eloquence, since he is not seeking any kind of narrative or artistic expiation, it could impress up on the reader only gradually. But in the final triumph of Coalhouse, he becomes a criminal.

In a way the fate of the Isaacsons and that of the Coalhouse Walker and fiancée Sarah are the same. They are all victims of the state's imposition on the individual. They are products of the abuses of the due procedures of the law. What provokes the whites like Wilkie Conklin is the way Coalhouse has conducted himself. It surprises every one that he, like Lucas Bauchamp in Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust, seems to be least conscious of his colour and ethnic status in the society. "He was not unaware that in his dress, and as the owner of a car he was a provocation to many white people. He had created himself in the teeth of such feelings" (RT 131). When he is blocked on the road, demanding a non-existent toll, they are questioning his right to exist. Even then, "it did not

occur him to ingratiate himself in the fashion of his race" (RT 133). As he approaches attorneys they refuse to represent him. When father approaches a lawyer he is familiar with, his response is underlining Doctorow's ideas of a racist America. "When a property owner in this city walks into court with a Negro, a charge like this is usually dismissed" (RT 139). Another black lawyer responds similarly to Coalhouse: "I want justice for our people, so bad I can taste it. But if you think I would go to west-Chester county to plead on a coloured man's behalf that some one deposited a bucket of slops in his car, you are very much mistaken" (RT 139). Not more helpful is either the county clerk or the policeman on duty in the station. Thus if the efforts to extract minimum of justice in the case of Isaacsons are caught in the labyrinth of legal machinery at the highest echelons, that of Coalhouse Walker is thwarted at the lowest levels.

When the name Coalhouse establishes itself as a byword for murder and arson, the population rises against Coalhouse as well as Conklin. News papers judge, "that any man who takes the law into his hands places himself against a civilized and resolute people and defames the very justice he seeks to enforce" (RT 178). This is where the crux of the enquiry of Doctorow lies. It is a case of the state taking the law prejudicially into its hands and there by defaming the constitution it is bound to uphold, that causes the crisis to begin with. When he exhausts the legal means. Coalhouse crosses over to the other side. in the process

ending up defaming the very justice he seeks to enforce. If justice is the fulfilment of one's true self, neither the white community represented by the likes of Conklin, nor the state apparatus seem to help seek such a realization. Borrowing the terms of Daniel, when the radical makes the final connection, then society judges him no more fit to live. The only connection left to be made is the one between himself and death and the society assures that. Coalhouse exemplifies both the extremity of injustice inflicted by the society and the extent of personhood achievable by the individual.

Unlike Coalhouse Walker, Tateh decides to fight society on a different level. Tateh is a Jew in needy conditions struggling to live of his income by making silhouettes. When he first appears in the novel, he is seen in the company of his daughter Sha, tied to him by a rope to prevent her from being stolen to slavery. He is the President of the Socialist Artist's Alliance of the Lower Eastside. He travels with his daughter and finds a job in a mill. But soon the mills strike work. As he is waiting for the train which will take his daughter to her adopted home as per the arrangement made by the union, he is mercilessly beaten by the police who prevents it on account of its humanist mileage. When he gets away from the scene, he concludes that "this country will not let me breathe" (RT 100). He decides against going back to the mill for work. "From this

moment onwards Tatch began to conceive of his life as separate from the fate of the working class" (RT 101).

Tatch's is an interesting case in which he is denied justice by the country for being poor and a socialist. He decides to change himself into adaptability even if it is at the expense of one's ideology. But more than the fact that he shifts his ideological position, what deserves to be investigated from the perspective of the immediate context is the reason for that. He sells his silhouettes, movie books and gradually rises to wealth.

There are two kinds of evil Tatch encounters in America which spoil his humble efforts at life: Slavery and Capitalism. He can't let his daughter free. He ties her to his apron when he toils in the streets with his art as he is afraid of the lurking evil of slavery. "Young girls in the slums are stolen every day from their parents and sold in to slavery...married women, children, any one they can get their hands on" (RT 40). he states. It is also the country that keeps his workers underpaid where he draws under six dollars for fifty-six hours of work a week.

Vestiges of this feeling of betrayal by society are evident in the utterances and activities of Harry Houdini too. But it is difficult to assess how far it is real and how far fictional in a man who is perilously poised between fiction and reality, unable to differentiate between the two. Like

Doctorow it is dissatisfaction that drives the escape artist to farther and farther daring tricks. One of the groups who fail to endorse the talent of Houdini is the opulent. "People who did not respond to his art profoundly distressed Houdini. He had come to realise that they were invariably of the upper classes...They looked on him as a child or a fool" (RT 31). Hence the artistic drives of desperation of Houdini have its roots in the lack of social recognition and this spurs on his need for self-assertion.

These three characters are not the only instances which illuminate the villainy of the state or the society. Ragtime is a text which, through the adroit use of its ironic and historic voice, maps the acts of injustices heaped on immigrants, ethnic minorities and the politically different. There are many instances in the novel, which make one remember Daniel's postulate that every country is the enemy of its citizens and that citizenship is the final existential condition. Ragtime's sweeping narrative often picks up sights/states of the immigrants' plight, the high handedness of the treatment of the immigration officers, their shabby dwelling places and the contemptuous way they are treated by the Americans.

> Millions of men were out of work. Those fortunate enough to find jobs were dared to form unions. Courts enjoined them, police busted their heads, their leaders were jailed and new men took their jobs...One hundred Negroes a year

> were lynched. One hundred miners were buried alive. One hundred children were mutilated. There seemed to be quotas for these things. There seemed to be quotas for death by starvation (RT 37),

the rambling narrative of the book in a casualness oozing with irony lists the multitude of socially, politically motivated denials of life in the heartland of America. Notwithstanding the progressive disappearance of the ironic voice as we move towards the end, the novel testifies to the awful fate the industrial America has prepared for the economically deprived and politically non-conformist.

One of the widely debated statements in the novel is Freud's judgement on America as he decides to cut his visit short and return home. "America is a mistake, a gigantic mistake", he says to Ernest Jones (RT 36). When quizzed on the connotations of this statement, the author comments on the way the countries fail to live up to their constitutional responsibilities. He expands his verdict on America to imply the way any other country could be guilty of the same negligence, reminding the reader of Daniel's thesis of citizenship as the final existential condition.

An offshoot/agent of the culture which distorts the lives of people is technology. An issue Doctorow takes up as one of the main fictional concerns in his later works, including foregrounding it in the The Water

Works, it exerts ample power in Ragtime too. A novel which attempts to record the turn of the century American cultural ethos, Ragtime can not afford to ignore the potentialities of technology spreading far and deep. Typical to Doctorow, it is not through the capitalist figures of the kind of Ford or Morgan that he has achieved this, but through receivers of progress like the early Tateh and the nameless rest. As long as technological advance is counted as a cardinal yardstick of cultural progress, it is bound to feature as a leading instrument of stifling human individuality. From The Book of Daniel onwards each work of Doctorow has exposed how for the apotheosis of technology man has paid the price in suffering. Ragtime and Loon Lake are also significant in their exposure of dehumanisation the technological advancement has bred. The novelist has made excellent blending of the political and philosophical strains of his fictional quest in Ragtime where Ford and Morgan speak of the relative merits of the conveyor belt and the interchangeability of parts. One of the major virtues listed is the fact that not only that the parts are interchangeable but the workers who operate it also are. The statement has heavy ramifications as it comes from a writer who is burdened with the cyclical nature of happenings and the fluidity of identity. Ford is a believer in reincarnation and Morgan has immense faith in the argument that except for the chosen few like him, the rest simply constitute the human flock, the human fodder for the umpteen experiences of existence.

Since Ragtime concedes the repetitive nature of life and fiction, the marginal human role in the control panels of technology is not without its implication too. Loon Lake further studies the intricate relationship among technology, self and state.

> He was free! That was what free men were like, they shone their freedom over every one...All the intelligence I had of him...had not prepared me for the impersonal force of him, the frightening freedom of him (LL 105).

Joe's unbounded admiration for the frightening freedom personified by F. W. Bennett the millionaire has foundation of the mixed nature. The most basic one of course is his wealth. If all the characters of Loon Lake are split vertically into two classes, the division will be along Capitalist-Working class lines. This have-have not split determines the texture of the novel. This is only to be expected of a novel that evokes the depression years of the 30s as its backdrop. Coming after The Book of Daniel and Ragtime, it reads like a rather subdued version of the author's customary plunge into the cultural chaos bred by the moneyed and the powerful. At the surface the novel has the placidity of a lake, but the inner currents are sufficiently turbulent to incorporate the politics of denial unleashed by the state on the individual.

The young frontline characters of the novel, Joe, Clara, Penfield and Lyle James belong to the working class. They all are engaged in an effort to find their roots to establish themselves. They battle their ancestry to realise themselves individually and there by justify their sense of belonging, separate from that of the serving class. Similar is the manner in which each of them fights their parents in real terms. Warren doesn't want to take after his parents and realise their dreams of he growing into a union leader in the mines. Joe, who resents and rebels against his father and Clara, who grows up as the daughter of a man who runs a funeral decorative service, show the urge to fight their way up. Balanced against them are the likes of Bennett and Sim Hearn, the proprietor of the freak show and members of the ruling class.

The prime accused in the novel is Bennett and the principal sufferer, Joe of Paterson. Significantly Paterson is the center of an industrial strike and like Lawrence in Ragtime, Doctorow uses it to invoke the echoes of the same. Joe's rambling life in the novel has been along the land dotted by the industrial concerns of Bennett. From the glamorously lit train, through Loon Lake and Bennett Autobody Works back to Loon Lake. This collision track of the sufferer and the suffered high lights the continual friction of the individual and the setting. Ragtime stresses amply the industrial wreckage the lower classes are made to bear as The Book of Daniel dwells on the Jurisdiction and the political limits

of it. Loon Lake is zooming in on the capitalism in which land becomes a commodity. In wilderness as luxury, the themes of creativity and capitalism fuse in the novel: the wilderness as bought isolation and isolation mandatory for creative enterprise.

The descriptive passages of the novel often paint the seamy side of life as it gets filtered through the capitalist psyche. Unlike the ironic voice in the Ragtime, in Loon Lake it is a distant yet engaged voice tinged with irony as well as gloom. "But down on the docks men slept in the open pulled up like babies on beds of news papers, hands palm on palm for pillow" (LL 12). Again, "we were like birds or insects, pestilential when we buzzed or flocked in great numbers, but one sole specimen could be tolerated with a certain scientific interest" (LL 19), Joe states about the condition of the jobless.

Joe of Paterson is moulded in his bitter hatred of the wealthy, almost equal to the rage of Daniel. But if Daniel's rage is occasionally directionless, that of Joe is precise. Joe is impaired by the adolescence-driven restlessness and desire for freedom as he is unsettled by his underprivileged roots. Not far behind in him are the traces of the anguish of being alive. He resents the isolation that money confers on the rich, which the rich wilfully accepts.

> I looked up the hill to the house and felt the imposition of an enormous will on the natural planet. I felt Loon Lake in its isolation, the bought wilderness, and speculated what I would do if I had the money. Would I purchase isolation as this man had? Was that what money was for?... The man made automobile bodies, and they were for connection, cars were democracy we were told (LL 75).

Despite Joe being a recipient of the rigors of the capitalist extremities, it is only once that he is directly subject to the same, that too on his own choice. After running away with Clara from Loon Lake, he lands in Jackson Town broke. He joins the Bennett Autobody Works Number Six on the assembly line. But soon the company closes down anticipating the possibility of a strike. Yet the indirect consequences of the sufferings of generation are very well etched in the way Joe's life is portrayed. Joe's recklessness, his distrust of the affluence, desire for fame and the search for autonomy, the hatred of belonging to one place--all of these are greatly caused by his inherited baggage of ignominy and invisibility of the lower class. This is where, in a limited way, the Doctorowian theme of inherited evil steps into the novel. But unlike in Welcome to Hard Times and Ragtime, in Loon Lake, to a great extent, evil is shown to be a result of the capitalist forces. Since Joe has set out quite early in his life to arrive at fame and freedom, he is not susceptible to the evil of his parents

particularly. Yet being a contemporary of the contemptuous and limiting culture, he too is subject to the same circumstances.

Paradox though it is, the only one character in the novel who advises him to be himself, to realise his potential, is the man whose capitalist empire is the colossal hurdle in ensuring that millions exist in what Tateh in Ragtime calls "varying degrees of unrealised hope" (RT 75). Bennett advises Joe when he turns down an offer from him of a permanent employment: "Find your level. Get in, get into the place that's your nature, whether it is running a corporation or picking daisies in a field, get in there and live to it, live to the fullness of it, become what you are" (LL 109). It is one of the ways in which Doctorow permits into his text an ideological irresolution.

It is the failed poet Warren Penfield who has borne the brunt of the severity of the Depression. Penfield carries flashes of Tateh in him the way he finally ends up as the poet in residence of the Loon Lake under the patronage of Bennett. But in the way these characters are constituted, there are major differences. Warren, the son of Jack and Neda Penfield, is born and brought up in the extremely limited surrounding of mill life in the 30s. Though he is the boy of the year in his school, the vicissitudes of the immigrant mill workers prevent him from higher learning as the mother wished. Dreamy though he is, he finds the strength to question the people when his parents die in mine disaster. He reaches Loon Lake to

kill Bennett. Again in the winter of 1919, Penfield is at the scene of the Seattle general strike. He is thrilled to see the working class so quickly pick the basics of management. He counters the opposition of his landlady with the argument that if one takes away people's fear and give them their dignity, the genius of the race could be released.

Apart from Bennett, Sim Hearn is the character representing the deprivation cultivated by the capitalist in all its viciousness. The freak show owned by Sim is one of the brief stops of Joe in his picaresque. The brutal exploitation that Sim Hearn looses up on the deformed and hence exhibition-worthy with the cool nonchalance of the capitalist is portrayed in the mass rape of the Fat Lady. The scene is so repulsive in its graphic presentation that it can hurt the reader more than the portrait of Bennett whose sketch is poised delicately on the brink of humanity and Capitalism. No trace of ambivalence graces the figure of Sim. The absolute quiet he maintains as the mass rape proceeds is the picture of the Capitalist in his vulgar, immune isolation.

Clara Lukacs is the other character who carries, "the fluent yowl of injustice" (LL 85) on her face and for Joe her face is the reminder of many such in his place, Paterson. "She was an eastern industrial child, she had come off the streets like my streets, she was born of the infinite class of nameless workers, my very own exclusive class" (LL 100). Joe's feeling for class is caused by the sameness of their backgrounds. Clara's

significance in Doctorow's scheme of things is underscored by her proximity to death early in her life. Loon Lake, which seemed to be exceptional from the family of Doctorow's fiction early on account of this, returns to the fold with the family profession, the dressing of the dead bodies. Death, being a core metaphor in the fiction of Doctorow, defines the presence of Clara, nick named 'Clara Cadaver'. Doctorow has stated that it would be incorrect to argue that his books are "death haunted". Rather, he states, "the preoccupation is not with death but the meaning of it" (qtd. in Morris, "System of Knowledge" 441). For him, death can denote injustice. Being brought up in a mortuary like atmosphere, she "didn't know that dead people were that unusual" (LL 147). Her criminal lineage "was some kind of contamination she was born into for no fault of her own..." (LL 149). When Lukacs expands his business, Clara rises to the position of a receptionist, clad in black. For the rise of the business, the man is greatly indebted to his ability to make no judgements, to keep his mouth shut. No wonder that Clara as child assumes that all people dead has a hole in their body. There fore Clara Lukac's early premises has the hazardous blend of death and exploitation--the natural exploitation which comes in a culture of the kind she resides in added to the usual criminal connections the funeral parlor has. The life she graduates into as Tommy Crapo's possession, in brutal subjection, is the final statement on the genealogy of evil and injustice in Doctorow.

F. W. Bennett, in whose abode and among whose aides Clara dwells, is presented as a mixture of the good and the bad. This is not dissimilar to the strategy Doctorow has adopted in the case of Morgan or Ford. One of the remarkable passages in the Loon Lake testifies to it. While commenting on the life of Bennett, Joe states comparing the socialist and capitalist systems:

> The benefits of such a [Capitalist] system while occasionally random and unpredictable with periods of undeniable stress and misery depression starvation and degradation are unevenly distributed to a greater and greater percentage of the population. The periods of economic stability also ensure a greater degree of political freedom and among the industrial western democracies today, despite occasional suppression of free speech quashing of dissent corruption of public officials and despite the tendency of legislation to serve the interests of the ruling business oligarchy, poisoning of air water the chemical adulteration of food the obscure development of hideous weaponry, the increased costs of simple survival the waste of human resources the ruin of cities the servitude of backward foreign populations the standards of life under capitalism by any criterion are far

> greater than under state socialism in whatever form it is found British, Swedish, Cuban, Soviet or Chinese... (L.L. 157).

Each virtue of capitalism which thrives at the expense of a multitude of occasional evils tells the story in unambiguous terms.

Loon Lake is a novel in which Doctorow has attempted a balanced blending of his artist/activist proclivities. Notwithstanding the final artistic solution attempted, it would be honest to admit that still the put on effect of Joe's epiphany at the police station is the result of the effectiveness of the activist side of the life of the Depression. With Joe's moment of truth at the police station, the narrative is thrown wide open, leaving the fictional doors ajar for ambiguity to barge in. At this stage it is worth asking whether Joe's perpetual failure in achieving personhood could be attributed to the capitalist bind of Bennett to which he had fallen, or to the adolescent freak in him; Whether Clara's state is the cause or effect of her "cadaverous" condition in the past. Also worth enquiring is the contribution of capitalist creed in the making and unmaking of Penfield who even otherwise is hardly tuned to reality, whose penchant is for building imaginative realities. Perhaps as in no other text of the writer, Loon Lake exemplifies the schism at the core of the narrative consciousness. As in Ragtime, there is a narrative death towards the end as the author attempts the reconciliation of the dual tendencies. The stage where Joe really battles himself as he proceeds to an acceptance of Loon

Lake and its master is an assertion of this. Like the narrative of Ragtime chasing the story of the Young Brother to wind up itself, Joe's unacknowledged acceptance of wealth, his early nemesis, reveals the constrains of the controlling consciousness.

It always fascinates Doctorow that culture that seems to offer enlightenment at the beginning ends up as a kind of prison. Like the town which brings it's own Bad Man as it progresses, culture matures itself into its evil potential and people seek liberation in artistic impositions. In The Book of Daniel, Daniel's is a voyage to set the facts of his parents and those of his life straight. In the case of the Isaacsons, clear victims of political machinations of preternatural calibre, culpability falls short of achieving fool proof clearance. No thorough analysis of the texts is required to give the responsibility of the crime to the state. Yet even after realising the fully said, the final narrative nail on the state's coffin is only placed in position, not hammered home with force. The possibility of a minor prank on the part of the Isaacsons against the Rightist state leaves the narrative sufficiently open for the slit to reveal. In Ragtime the crisis of individuation and the tug between the state and self, though explored to a rarer dimension, space for thoughtful queries are left alive. Walker, Houdini and Tateh, in that order raise those. Stalking the state-self continuum, they bring to light many of the unpondered questions of the relationship. If the societal make up is the villain in the denials of

personhood, the narrative bares its capacity to fathom the duality of perception. Loon Lake's weaving of the ethic-aesthetic duality is an eloquent testimony to the thread we have been tracing in this chapter. The simultaneous, dissynchronous lives of Joe and warren embody the stated duality as continuum.

From Welcome to Hard Times to Loon Lake, the major fiction of Doctorow unarguably foreground the dual proclivities of Doctorow's fiction through the split of self-narrative-society inclinations. The ways the two polarities approximate one another in the novels mirror the play of consciousness of the narrative. All the afore-listed texts come heavily down on the oppressive cultural scenario of America. But still all the four novels analysed above in terms of its critique of the American culture in specific and of the human condition in general permit the presence of deterrents other than those of cultural origin. From the Bad Man who comes with the land to ambiguous acceptance of Bennett, the millionaire, the thesis holds this ambiguity. As the narrative/narrator concedes the inability to fix the sin of the society in the denial of selfhood, the investigation splinters itself into metaphysical, existential and epistemological fragments. The complexity of meaning one self and knowing meaning is what the liquidity of narrative consciousness finally affirms in Doctorow.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Integrity of Irresolution.

The novels of Faulkner, Barth and Doctorow are narrative transcriptions of crises in existence. What unfolds in them are consciousnesses struggling to contain the mutual approximations of individuals seeking to constitute themselves narratively and the text attempting to build up a stories which will explain themselves. These texts, which have their genesis in the existential spaces of the mind, present efforts at autonomy of individuals and narratives. For the protagonists of their fiction, like for Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury, "narrating is the act of asserting a self that is filled with unarticulated, warring fears and desires" (Lockyer 42). But the stories, which will straighten themselves out, are caught in the metanarration and polyphony of the language which the individuals use as their medium. The self-conscious protagonists and the self conscious texts--the self conscious protagonists who seek coherent identities through narratives which in turn engender self consciousness of the medium, language--are locked in mutual tension. The texts are possible only through the writers/narrators while the writer's integrity rests on the narrative resolution of the crises/past. A search in which the object is the subject

and subject is the object, the ontological and epistemological questions melt into each other circularly. Hence the novels of the writers under study acknowledge this "integrity of irresolution" (Saltzman 35) through their narrative consciousness.

The major characters of William Faulkner strive to cure their endangered existence through the narrated essence of their lives. Faulkner's fiction is a territory in which the negotiation between the self and the world is "both urgent and impossible; in which the need for protected boundaries is as intense as the awareness that these boundaries cannot be protected" (Weinstein 175). Hedged in by race-induced dilemma and the inability to effectively communicate crises, they exist in the struggle to create a sense of belonging. Quentin Compson's existence in the self-induced imaginary incest, battling the inherent/inherited existential pain, as well as Sutpen's abortive persistence at building a mansion to prove himself is at the bottom a reflection of this struggle. They are urged into expression/action to redress the ambivalence at their core concerning their identity. Metaphysical and social doubts push them to desperation and to attempts at expression through words and deeds. But as Rosa's case illustrates in Absalom, Absalom!, the urgency and fervour of narration disrupt the goal of expressive consolation. Doubts lay siege to self and scepticism submerges the act of communication. "The terrible

responsibility of communication" (Meriwether 70-71) worsens the plight as the burden of their tales only increases with attempts at unburdening themselves. Neither the attempts at expression nor the aim of bringing out the social roots of the inherited/inherent evil legacy offer them the identity they are after since who they are and what they know are one and the same. Hence, as the knowledge they seek fail them, these characters' beings continue to be hung in the self conscious tales which seek a liberation. The consciousness and narration grapple in an act which characterises their mutual construction.

The "narrative equals language equals life" (FB 236) motto of John Barth stresses the significance of this mutual constitution/ consumption of the ingredients of narrative consciousness. Barth shifts the emphasis Faulkner laid on perception and articulation and places it on the bewildering plurality of perceptions and choices in the narrative called life. What begins as an acceptance of the significance or the lack of it in everything in The Floating Opera and End of The Road grows into an ironic-comic celebration of the plurisignification called life. Suitors of the totality of self like Ebenezer Cooke and Burlingame, Ambrose or Giles concede the circularity of their search for life's meaning. The self-consultative fiction which their narrative quest breeds only demonstrates the feeling of exhaustion the attempt at replenishment of self leads to.

Barth's treatment of the theme of narrative consciousness thus reflects his arguments about the need of using the theme of exhaustion to counter the feeling of exhaustion of literary possibilities. His fiction counters the sense of exhaustion of self by expressing the emotional equivalent of a narrative crisis. The crisis of narration/expression reflects and aids the crisis of existence and vice versa. This labyrinth of selves--of the text and the individual--leads to narrative consciousness in the fiction of John Barth.

Doctorow who feels that "art and life make each other" (qtd. in Trenner 38) is seen to explore the same phenomena in a different milieu and context. In Welcome to Hard Times Blue traces the cause of his failure to the cosmic elusiveness of evil as well as of meaning. Daniel's narrative search for the truth of his executed father's alleged sin makes him accept the equitability of evil and the elusiveness of everything. Ragtime follows the crowd of self seekers to their inconclusive ends: Coalhouse Walker into a victorious justice which kills him while Houdini is stuck between fact and fiction. Joe in Loon Lake displays the transparent transfer of life into art--an imaginary denouement for a real life crisis--as usual in these writers.

All the heroes/central characters of Doctorow's fiction are narrators as Witnesses. They are all engaging (in) the necessary yet futile

exercise of recalling/recording the past. They have to construct narrative, an alternate reality as part of their quest for truth. A clear delineation of the past, where the roots of their agony lie, is enmeshed in the history of the society they belong to. They all struggle and in the end accept the approximation to truth that one can never extricate oneself from the circularity of knowing and being as "for all Doctorow's highly perceptive protagonists the problem of composition is inextricably connected to, if not identical with, the subject of composition" (Parks 124). As the messages and the medium trade places the artistic quests announce their own collapse. These contradictory pulls of the self, narrative and society, at the end, lead to a dialectic of ambivalence. It problematises the self of these questors. It is this play of fissures Doctorow's fiction depicts while attempting a reconciliation. The private passion to narrate oneself to truth, to connect, necessitates the awareness of the futility of the search. Yet the futility could be supposedly contained only by attempting such an act of narration.

"There is a regime language that derives its strength from what we are supposed to be and a language of freedom whose power consists in what we threaten to become. And I am justified in giving a political character to the non-fictive and fictive uses of language because there is conflict between them," states Doctorow ("False Documents" 17). The

regimental totality of self sought by the individual is rendered incompetent by the inherent freedom of the medium. Hence attempts at actualising the supposed selfhoods of the characters of the fiction of the writers studied here run into impositions of freedom of the medium they use.

As questions of ontology and epistemology encircle each other, the novels of these writers reveal the fluidity of the creating/created consciousness. Life depends on knowing oneself while knowing through art/narrative depends on being. Existence depends on knowing the essence while essence is possible only as long as one can narratively compose oneself. The essence could be reached only through a diagnosis of social evil and this will be effective only through a narrative reclaiming of truth. But language is inherently incapable of communicating such a truth. Hence the attempt of the individual to thrust the task on the narrative boomerangs. The individuals are caught in this bind and their narratives bear testimony to this.

Estrangement operates at different levels in the fiction of Faulkner, Barth and Doctorow and it leads to the tension which we have analysed in the previous chapters. The fiction of the writers mentioned is built on the lives of its protagonists who seek to demystify their existence through a narrative recovery of their past. Alienation between the individual and the society, language and the text, medium and message, expression and

enactment operate at various levels in them. Characters who are caught in the conflict with themselves owing to their conflict with the society narratively lead themselves into further depths of vertiginous displacement of selves. A consciousness which seeks a narrative expiation circles its way back to itself since consciousness itself is structured like/with language. The vantage of knowledge sought through the achievement of clearly delineated selfhood gets tangled in the skeins of a consciousness which is over tuned to the world. Knowing and being hence pursue each other and this fluidity defines the narrative consciousness.

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