

THE PROFANE BECOMES SACRED: ESCAPING ECLECTICISM IN DOCTOROW'S *CITY OF GOD*.¹

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This paper offers an analysis of Doctorow's *City of God* both as a kaleidoscopic novel on twentieth-century culture and as a creative playground whose aim is to escape postmodern eclecticism and bring forward a new moral stand connected to contemporary scientific concepts and a posthuman understanding of life. Metafictional techniques and the role assigned to voice and metalepsis are analyzed as apparent postmodern strategies that paradoxically help to dissolve the cultural antagonism existing between science and religion/metaphysics, a blurring of categorical borders that also seems to announce the end of that eclectic postmodern ethos that has dominated the last decades of the twentieth century.

Is there any way out or beyond postmodern uncertainty within the postmodern literary project? Can creative literature make the human being advance into any sound comprehension of the real or, on the contrary, is there no exit to escape from the continual signifying game? As I see it, E.L. Doctorow has written *City of God* (2000) in order to illustrate the cultural end of the second millennium and its critical and cultural paradoxes. A postmodern writer basically preoccupied by the limits between history and fiction, text and reality (Williams 1996), in his latest novel Doctorow goes further in his attempt to fight the contemporary impact of cultural relativism (see Norris 1997: ch. 2).

Being as it is a new reflection on old concerns of the author, *City of God* has a main story that unfolds mostly around the end of the year 1999. This time the novelist has not decided to go back to the near past of the United States in order to scrutinize the social and political forces then operating, as he did in some of his best-selling novels such as *Ragtime*, *The Book of Daniel*, *Billy Bathgate* or *The Waterworks*. Now the narrative unfolds in the city of New York at the end of the twentieth century, both a setting and a period overcharged with symbolism that allow the writer to analyze, in a complex and impressively metafictional way, the state metaphysical inquiries have reached by the turn of the millennium.

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In critical circles it has now become an accepted notion that postmodernism and the popularization of poststructuralist notions have meant, in the realm of philosophy, one more turn of the screw in the elimination of metaphysics and of all sort of beliefs in transcendence, an elimination that has mainly resulted in an eclectic way to view life. If, as signaled by Nietzsche, God is dead, then transcendence and the old values rooted in what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence must follow the same path. However, twentieth-century culture has not always offered such a pessimistic answer to the human existential plight: every time transcendence and, by definition, religion and metaphysics have come to an apparent end, critics, artists and, in general, intellectuals have found the way to turn God's death into a new belief also rooted in a Logos or first cause. In the first stages of postmodernism, myth –the safe existential haven for many modernist artists– became the parodied target among creative writers (see Barth 1966), a situation that demanded new ways out of existential anguish. Among them, the popularization of scientific theories has certainly proven to be a very effective one. From relativity theory and quantum mechanics to the theories of chaos and cybernetics, western intellectuals have insisted on finding salvation in a godless universe that, as nineteenth-century physicists proclaimed, had been turned into an entity of pure force ruled by the law of entropy (see Hayles 1991: Introduction).

Not surprisingly, Doctorow starts the story of *City of God* with a long digression about twentieth-century theories on the creation of the universe and on the role of a possible God for this universe. From a narratological viewpoint, however, the beginning of the narrative induces us, first of all, to simply wonder who the narrator of this digression is. No doubt after having read the whole book we may decide that the narrator of the first two pages of the novel has to be its main protagonist, Father Tom Pemberton or, even better, it could be Everett, the writer within the main story who plays the part of Pemberton's biographer, or it could also be a reincarnated Ludwig Wittgenstein... In any case, *City of God* is to be understood as a kaleidoscopic novel mostly concerned with the necessity to find and live by a sound metaphysics, but then readers may still wonder why Doctorow seems to be so much at pains to display a variety of experimental techniques that make his novel a hard task to read.

As I will try to show in this paper, this highly metafictional book reproduces along its pages some of the main symptoms of the postmodern ethos, turning the contemporary insistence on blurring limits into a philosophical way of dealing with the existential plight of the human being. Creative literature may become a very powerful tool both to analyze and change cultural values and it is my main contention that in his latest novel Doctorow tries to control and eventually fuse together the need for transcendence with contemporary critical views on the uncertainty of human knowledge. Eventually, as a result of the writer's literary artifact, the two opposing forces are kept in a paradoxical balance, at the background of which stand contemporary theories on the science of chaos and on the notion of a posthuman being capable of escaping postmodern eclecticism.

The abundant presentation of blurred boundaries in the book is mostly focused on different aspects of contemporary culture and brought about by a series of strategies that can be summarized as follows: the crossing of narrative levels or *metalepsis* (Genette 1980); the crossing of ontological levels (mostly regarding the role of cinema and the figure of a writer who writes an embedded biography); the use of textual fragmentation manifested in a plurality of narrators (some of them historical figures); the repetition of motifs, key words or sentences in different contexts and by different voices; as regards narrative time, achronicity; the use of intertextuality, the title of the novel itself being the main metaphor in this respect; the crossing of traditional gender roles; the postmodern blurring of genre barriers (parody of the detective novel); the mixture of Christian and Jewish religions; and, finally, the dissolution of borders between religion and contemporary scientific theories. Obviously, a detailed analysis of every one of these strategies would prove excessively long for the purpose of this essay but some further comments about them are necessary in order to interpret Doctorow's shift to more metaphysical grounds and to demonstrate the quality of his novel as a summary of twentieth-century critical endeavors.

As stated above, the first section of the novel takes only two pages. Furthermore, this section represents the beginning of a literal "collection of fragments" narrated by a plurality of voices, a strategy that for the reader will no doubt bring echoes that come from modernism—especially from John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*—and from Doctorow's own best-selling novel *Ragtime*.² The accumulation of different fragments or passages narrated by different voices may overcome the confidence of readers that had enjoyed previous books by Doctorow such as *Billy Bathgate* or the most recent *The Waterworks*. Readers of *City of God* have to cope with a novel even more experimental than *Ragtime* since, to the strategy of using a plurality of narrative voices, the author now adds an intellectual density that demands some knowledge of contemporary physics together with a predisposition towards philosophical argumentation. In addition, Doctorow's novel also qualifies as "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 1988) for two of the voices that narrate this "disorderly" story (or, better, collection of stories) are well-known historical figures of our culture: scientist Albert Einstein and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Some sections of the novel correspond to a diary apparently written by its main protagonist, the Christian priest Tom Pemberton, whose vocation is being a detective for both human and heavenly matters.³

² A novel that, as critics have also suggested, shows the traces of Dos Passos' experimental strategies. See Foley 1978.

³ The use of such a popular genre as the detective novel in an attempt to blur the limits between high and low art is a postmodern feature that Doctorow also deployed in his previous novel *The Waterworks*, but in his latest work the use of this genre also functions to enhance the metaphorical role of the detective as the character who is basically in search for an answer (not necessarily the clarification of a crime). Of course the detective qualities of the protagonist of a novel have become a device abundantly used by postmodern authors, such as Umberto Eco in *The Name of the Rose* or Thomas Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

On top of the latter sections, that is to say, on a narrative superior level, stands the figure of Everett the writer, whose role is to fictionalize Pemberton's life in a book. Female rabbi Sarah Blumenthal—who will eventually marry Pemberton—also acts as a mediator in the act of reporting to the readers the conversations in which her father told her about his experiences in a Lithuanian Jewish ghetto during the Second World War.⁴ But the actual chapters we read of those experiences have been written by Everett. To complicate things further, we also meet a voice that turns all events—up to the very last page of the book—into a cinema script, a strategy that easily reminds us of the metafictional use Pynchon makes of cinema in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). However, Baudrillard's echoes are also ironically overwhelming in a novel that comes to signal the end of the twentieth century: even *fictional* reality (the script of the story in the novel) is nothing more than a copy of fictional reality (the story) in the pages of the book, that is to say, a perfect *simulacrum* or copy of a copy with no *real* original in sight (cf. Baudrillard 1988). As happens with the encyclopedia in Borges's celebrated story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", here it is the movie world that enters the fictional status of the book to devour it all! Or, as one of the narrative voices puts it:

Something weird has happened, so that I'm convinced that the people who ostensibly make them are no more than instruments of the movies themselves, servers, factotums, and the whole process, from pitching an idea for one, and getting the financing and finding a star, I mean, the whole operation ... in fact the entire booming culture of movies—all of it is illusion, as the movie is supposed to be, a scripted reality, whereas it's the movies themselves that are in control, preordaining and self-generating, like a species with its own DNA. (108-109)

Doctorow's irony on contemporary critical interpretations of the real seems to be rather obvious in this and in many other passages of his book but, as stated above, other strategies such as metalepsis or the crossing of narrative levels abound in *City of God* to add to the kaleidoscopic polyphony created by the multiplicity of narrative levels and narrators. Among the latter we can find an ornithologist (perhaps Everett himself?) and the existential songs of the Midrash Jazz Quartet, which are nothing but commentaries on real twentieth-century American songs; to these variations on the narrative voice we also have to add the poeticized biography of Everett the writer, the dramatic song of the Vietnam veteran or the voice of Frank Sinatra himself.

The effect of this complex metafictional game is, of course, overwhelming and apparently chaotic but, as readers interested in postmodern fiction—of which Doctorow is, no doubt, a great expert—, we may realize that the novelist is playing

⁴ Another postmodern use of a literary subgenre, in this occasion the Jewish-ghetto diary or report, that comments on the limits existing between experienced reality (the events of the Jewish report Pemberton looks for are supposed to be true) and the way those events are recounted in a written story (Everett has consciously modified Sarah's conversations with her father and changed them into the episodes we read in Doctorow's novel).

with his technical strategies in order to pursue the most characteristic human intellectual quest: the finding of a sound metaphysics. As happened some decades earlier in the European Theater of the Absurd, the "form" again helps to enhance the "contents" of the artistic work⁵ and readers, as theorists of chaos, may start finding a certain order under the apparent chaotic presentation of the story (see Gleick 1987). Of course, the device is not new in the contemporary American novel. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-5*, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* or DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* are remarkable products of this strategy, but in his latest book Doctorow chooses to insist, by using this complex technical apparatus, on the contemporary human need to (re)create a new supportive metaphysics that can put an end to cultural relativism and to widespread postmodern eclecticism.

Despite the achronic presentation of events and ideas, readers who are ready to accept the challenge may gradually discover that the main topic of the book is already present in the first two pages of the story: how to connect our recent beliefs in scientific theories and discoveries with the traditional role of religion. No doubt we will soon trace here the obsession of a former historian whose imprints are also very clear in *The Waterworks*: Henry Adams. However, it is my contention that our contemporary writer starts his intellectual path where Adams left it: at the beginning of the twentieth century. Where Adams's concern is with entropy, Doctorow's is with relativity, quantum physics, language, and the theory of chaos.⁶ No wonder, then, that two of his narrative voices correspond to the historical figures of Einstein and Wittgenstein, that his fictional heroes are a Christian priest and a female rabbi, and that the very title of the book reproduces that of St. Augustine's.

In order to analyze how the author's philosophical endeavor progresses in the pages of such a complex metafictional text the first thing we should take into account is that, the same as happens to the writer himself, both Einstein and Wittgenstein come from Jewish stock. And so does Sarah, the female protagonist. The Jews are a race inexorably associated to the religion and accompanying ideology of Judaism, to which Tom Pemberton, the Christian priest, finally wants to go back. Being both a human and a heavenly detective, Pemberton concludes that his religious—that is to say, metaphysical—doubts demand a return to the origins of Christianity, when it still was a sect of Judaism. But *City of God* is also a heavily parodic novel and Pemberton is more than once associated with an experience that

⁵ As Hinchliffe puts it, in this type of theatre "the ideas are allowed to shape the form as well as the content: all semblance of logical construction, of the rational linking of idea with idea in an intellectually viable argument, is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage" (1969: 1). However, the understanding of Doctorow's book demands the replacement of Hinchliffe's "irrationality of experience" for the postmodern notion of the instability of the self, as I explain by the end of this essay.

⁶ A scientific shift that the author symbolically stresses by reintroducing in his latest narrative the figure of McIlvane, the detective newspaperman and protagonist of *The Waterworks* (1994), a novel in which Doctorow's personages visit that "universe of force" that characterized the turn into the twentieth century. In *City of God* McIlvane is already a decrepit person humbly waiting for his death (244). The validity of the thermodynamic interpretation of the Universe effected by Henry Adams in his famous *Education* has, like McIlvane, come to an end.

characterized many modernist fictional protagonists: revelation. He thinks that the theft of the big crucifix in his church and its posterior localization on the roof of a Jewish synagogue is a heavenly sign (30-31, 42)⁷ that Pemberton, in his role of detective, finally interprets as the necessity of reconciliation between the old and the new, the Jewish and the Christian. This belief eventually takes him to conversion to the old faith and to marry Sarah, the female rabbi. However, revelation at the end of the twentieth century comes in a not very conspicuous way. As the priest tells Everett the writer,

As a secularist, you don't understand—if there is a religious agency in our lives, it has to appear in the manner of our times. Not from of high, but a revelation that hides itself in our culture, it will be ground-level, on the street, it'll be coming down the avenue in the traffic, hard to tell apart from anything else. It will be cryptic, discerned over time, piecemeal, to be communally understood at the end *like a law of science*. (254; my emphasis)

The motif of the reconciliation of opposites is an ancient idea revitalized by modernists and postmodernists alike. However, Doctorow updates it by relating the necessity of reconciliation to the battlefield on which science and religion have traditionally been fighting. At the beginning of the book the unknown narrative voice starts its digression about the expanding universe to conclude in a series of questions that cannot be answered without the help of transcendental revelation: in the views of this first narrator the idea of God is counterbalanced by its existential reflections on the infinitude of the universe. The intellect, this first voice concludes, is not capable of solving the human existential plight. After these first two pages readers may conclude that for the rest of the novel revelation —unless in a parodic way— is out of the question, but our human longing for metaphysics has already been activated as the key ingredient in the story.

This first narrative voice comes back only a few pages later to denounce the absurdity of the universe being created out of sheer chance, something as absurd, the voice thinks, as the idea of a Creator. Notwithstanding, this narrator remembers that Einstein called God "the Old One" while also attempting to track the deity's existence in his own work in physics (25). For a more clarifying interpretation of the narrator's words and of its existential panic readers should also consider that Einstein was not only the scientist that proved that humans are not equipped to perceive the continuum space-time, which implied that our poor perceptual faculties can lead us only to an incomplete knowledge of the Universe. The laureate physicist was also one of the first and most eminent researchers in quantum theory, that part of physics that centers on the study of subatomic particles and that early in the twentieth century brought about many shocking notions such as the impossibility to measure,

⁷ A "sign" that is certainly very symbolical on a textual level because, when thieves take it, they carry the crucifix from East to West and from Lower to Upper Manhattan, in this way reenacting both the typical American motif of "Go West!" and the Christian belief in the ascension to the heavens.

in a single act of observation, the position and momentum of an electron, from which follows the fact that the observer always interferes in the act of observation (see Nadeau 1981: chs. 1-2). This notion, formulated by Heisenberg in his famous "uncertainty principle", represented a shock for those modern minds that so far had believed in the power of science to eventually find out all ultimate truths about life. Eventually Heisenberg's principle invaded even the grounds of literary and cultural criticism (Solomon 1988: 75) and was understood as one more scientific concept to support the intellectual fight against metaphysics and the spreading of eclecticism. The other great historical figure in the book, Ludwig Wittgenstein, is also enraptured by the quantum dilemma and ready to give Doctorow's readers his views about the uncertainty principle:

Yet here they do one experiment proving that light is composed of a stream of light packets or particles or quanta ... and follow this with another experiment proving that these quanta have the properties not of particles but of waves. Depending how, in the submicroscopic realm, you choose to observe or measure light, so will it respond as one or the other: Light partakes of mutually exclusive states of being! (192)

Wittgenstein's doubts in the passages of which he is narrator echo some of Pemberton's doubts (or is it Everett the writer's?) and no wonder this is so because when one comes to consider the issue of religion, the eminent Austrian philosopher and the fictional protagonist of the book follow parallel but opposite paths: Wittgenstein comes from a Jewish family that turned Catholic; Pemberton is a Christian priest soon to turn Jewish. However, whereas Pemberton is engaged in his quest for religious clarification, the former embodies one of the most remarkable intellectual attempts to put an end to metaphysics in the twentieth century. Wittgenstein's best known work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, saw the light in 1922—the "magic year" of modernism—and constituted a direct blow to anyone who believed transcendence was ever possible or that language was an efficient means to elucidate metaphysical questions. Linked to disquisitions about the philosophy of language (that branch of criticism that proved to be so remarkably important in the twentieth century), the *Tractatus* is a little book written in propositions, a feature that provides readers with an added difficulty. From its first enunciation, "The world is all the case is", to the concluding proclamation that language is only a ladder that should be discarded after use, Wittgenstein's book carried out, from the grounds of logic, a thorough attack that crushed all modernist beliefs in the magic nature of language to know the world, an attack that obviously extends to the rejection of the fashionable modernist image of the epiphany that, within Doctorow's novel, leads to Pemberton's notion of revelation. Such was the impact of *Tractatus* on its own author that Wittgenstein became assaulted by existential notions and suicidal ideas. Paradoxically his pessimism had to be counterbalanced in Doctorow's novel by some *philosophical* views of Albert Einstein, despite the fact that the famous scientist was the father of relativity theory and therefore responsible to a certain extent for the spreading of relativist notions. However, Einstein was also responsible for the comprehension of the curvature of

space and its continuous expansion, ideas that have contributed to a certain optimism in contemporary physics and cosmology (Davies and Gribbin 1991; see Hawking 1988: 35-52). In this way, *City of God* produces again a strategy that both blurs categorical limits and suggests another mirror image: the two historical narrators are a famous philosopher making scientific inquiries and a famous scientist inquiring into philosophy.

With the amalgamation of antimetaphysical ideas, those of Wittgenstein, and the resurrection of the Principle of Life (or the anthropomorphic God the Creator) in the notions that insist on the continual expansion of the Universe —Einstein and the theorists of chaos— philosophy and science take the place of religion in Doctorow's novel. Literally, if in the twentieth century the death of God had been proclaimed and a secular economy was to overcome religion, the novel discloses that a look back at the intellectual and cultural panorama of the last few decades shows that humans are not ready to give up their old metaphysical expectations. If traditional religion fails, science appears to replace it. However, in Doctorow's terms, science —by becoming a "new religion"— paradoxically enters the grounds of culture to deny the validity of modernist theories on human ontogenetic and phylogenetic evolution. These theories, defended by such outstanding thinkers as Sigmund Freud and James G. Frazer, had virtually proclaimed the end of religious beliefs and the definite entrance into a rational stage of evolution defined by scientific thinking and the inevitability of death (Jackson 1981: 63-72; see Frazer 1922).

In his presentation of the paradoxical and often confusing struggle between science and religion along the twentieth century, Doctorow —together with some contemporary critics— is very much aware that the now fashionable theory of chaos offers a very neat metaphysical replacement for traditional religion (see Hayles 1991: Introduction, and 1999: chs. 10-11). Not surprisingly, then, by the end of *City of God*, Sarah, the politically correct female rabbi that postmodernism has made possible, enunciates the possibility of a reunion between science and religion as a way to transcendence and final revelation:

Suppose then that in the context of a hallowed secularism, the idea of God could be recognized as Something Evolving, as civilization has evolved—that God can be redefined, and recast, as the human race trains itself to a greater degree of metaphysical and scientific sophistication. With the understanding, in other words, that human history does show a pattern at least of progressively sophisticated metaphors. So that we pursue a teleology thus far that, in the universe as vast as the perceivable cosmos, and as infinitesimal as a subatomic particle, has given us only the one substantive indication of itself—that we, as human beings, live in moral consequence. (256)

Sarah's suggestion is, of course, of a pantheistic kind or, using a more recent approach, it sticks to beliefs in a universal blueprint defended by contemporary scientists of chaos (Prigogine and Stengers 1984, Gleick 1987). But her words and her quest for the idea of God are also to be associated to the very title of the novel,

ATLANTIS 24.1 (2002)

that is to say, to the original text written by Augustine, a Christian saint and philosopher that to a certain extent is also mirrored in the figure of Tom Pemberton. Both the historical personage and the fictional protagonist of the novel can be qualified by traditional moralists as lecherous types but they show, above all, their main shared concern in trying to demonstrate the existence of God, a concern that in both cases ends up in a matter of faith: for Augustine and for Pemberton God exists out of an act of believing in Him. The issue at stake is no small matter and more so if readers realize that the original *De civitate Dei* was a text that powerfully influenced Descartes and, more specifically, the seeming rational model he defended in his celebrated *Discourse on Method* (1637) (Marías 1974: 109-14). If "I think, therefore I am" constituted the core of rationalist enlightened philosophy, it also opened an impressive intellectual gap between the self and the world, a gap that the secular twentieth century could not close again by resorting to an anthropomorphic God the Creator in whom philosophers did not believe any longer. At his wedding day Pemberton finally renounces the traditional Christian God of injustice (266) and dramatically, as Sarah had already proclaimed, announces the necessity to remake the figure of the Creator, a necessity that informs his own return to the beginnings in Judaism. Needless to say, Pemberton's religious return to the beginning parodies again, now on a textual level, the modernist insistence on mythic structures represented by the circle or Jungian mandala (see Manganaro 1992: 115-17, Campbell 1968).

By that time, however, we approach the end of the book and there is a change of narrative voice: readers recuperate the thoughts of a narrator very interested in cinema—as Wittgenstein was—, somebody who can even be trapped in a cinema universe that has created us all and that finally puts an end to Doctorow's false reality or true fiction by suggesting that a movie script could be written whose setting is nowhere but in a futuristic dystopic Upper West Side. Such a movie may feature "a vitally religious couple who run a small progressive synagogue", the protagonists of the very story we have been reading. Thus, at the end of the novel we go back to the metafictional loop, to the understanding of the universe as discourse that characterized the fictions of Borges, Nabokov or García Márquez. *City of God* finally becomes a Moebius strip of sorts that insists on the argument that we humans cannot escape the web of semiotic representation: the more philosophical side of Wittgenstein may have triumphed again, but probably at least part of Doctorow's readers have tried to transcend, to recuperate the old metaphysics, to reach from or in New York the rewards of the City of God.

The novelist's outstanding literary effort symbolically puts an end to a millennium that, in cultural circles, has finally witnessed a growing belief that after five hundred years humanism is over and that the twenty-first century is already a time for post-humanism.⁸ In this new period Marx, Freud, poststructuralist thinking

⁸ A belief of which the author has been very conscious since at least the early 1980s, as his own words demonstrate in an interview with Richard Trenner: "The assumption that makes fiction possible, even modernist fiction—the moral immensity of *the single soul*— is under question because of the bomb. To write fiction now as it has been written may be to misperceive or avoid the overriding condition of things,

and the new science have finally made it impossible for the notion of a unified and stable center of consciousness to survive (Badmington 2000: 4-10). Further inquiry into the issue may even preoccupy readers with the idea that the post-humanist being is already in the process of becoming not just psychically but also physically a post-human entity (Hayles 1999; see Gibson 1984). Certainly both notions, the posthumanist and the posthuman, are frequently reflected and commented upon in *City of God*. As suggested at the beginning of this essay, experimental strategies centered on a plurality of voices and narrative levels, and an overt play with some reiterative signifiers textually translate as a warning that a human stable self is nothing more than humanist wishful thinking. Cultural relativists might think that Doctorow's overt "game" with some signifiers in the book seems to respond to popularized Lacanian and Derridean views on the topic: language traps us in a prison-house where ultimate clear meanings can never be found as more signifiers can always be added on to the message commenting on the previous ones and so demanding a continual shift of meaning. Notwithstanding the relativist interpretation, this textual strategy also allows the novelist to connect different characters, different scenes and different times in order to sustain the notion of an existing hidden pattern underpinning the whole novel despite its apparent fragmentation. The issue is, of course, one more hint pointing at the theories of chaotics as defended by eminent scientists such as James Gleick (1987) or Jewish Nobel laureate Murray Seligman, an actual personage in Doctorow's novel (252-53). One of the most powerful strategies Doctorow creates to illustrate the never-ending game of signification refers to the term "skull", that he moves around different contexts and applies to various people who apparently show nothing in common. Einstein begins one of the sections he narrates with the sentence "This is my laboratory, here, in my skull" (36) words which are repeated verbatim at the end of another section this time narrated by the unknown voice which is so fond of turning every story into a cinema script (52). And again "skull" becomes one of the terms used by Sinatra to introduce himself to his audience (225). The result of this textual game is again one of blurring critical limits: it points towards an underpinning textual structure but also enhances the controlling power language has in the human representation of the real, one of Doctorow's favorite critical issues as already shown in his celebrated essay "False Documents" (1977).

After so much consideration of postmodern, poststructuralist, and scientific views in his novel, Doctorow at least leaves an open gate to hope: whatever humans may be and may become in the near future, we still have that longing for transcendence or, as Pemberton finally puts it, we still hope "that this travail of our souls will find its resolution in You, Lord" (268). The fact that people like Pemberton, Sarah or Seligman demand God the Creator to be redefined as Something Evolving, in accordance with contemporary physics and cosmology, still means that there exists "an evolved moral sense" (p. 256), a longing for metaphysics and, eventually, a way out of total eclecticism. Does it mean that Doctorow believes

which is that we're in the count-down stages of a post-humanist society" (Trenner 1983: 50; cited in Williams 1996: 74; my emphasis).

ATLAS 24.1 (2002)

that the lack of values represented by postmodern culture is coming to an end? Perhaps it does. In any case with *City of God* the writer has reminded his readers that there is always a way out for the signifying animal we call "(post-)human being".

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