

## Revision of the American Frontier in Doctorow's; *Welcome to Hard Times*

**Zohreh Ramin**

Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature,  
University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

E-mail address: zramin@ut.ac.ir

### ABSTRACT

The present paper seeks to demonstrate how Doctorow revises the history of America in his *Welcome to Hard Times*. The novel is written in the tradition of a parody which is the most characteristic technique employed in postmodern fiction. Setting his novel in the late nineteenth century Dakota County, Doctorow debunks traditional notions of the west as a land of endless opportunity, freedom and success. This he achieves through the inversion of character, setting and events in the cyclic structure of the novel. But the novel is not only a parody of the western. In this novel parody is a tool which provides Doctorow a means to reach a broader objective; by inverting traditional notions of the western, Doctorow not only the reader revise his understanding of the western myth of frontier expansion in particular and the American dream of hope for a better future and economic prosperity in general.

**Keywords:** Revision; Historiographic metafiction; parody; western; American Dream

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Doctorow wrote *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), his first novel, quite accidentally in an attempt to "make something serious out of a disreputable genre."<sup>1</sup> Assigned to read and provide a synopsis of numerous westerns as a requirement of his job as a reader of scripts for CBS Television and Columbia Picture Industries, Doctorow had mastered the genre and found that he could "lie" about the West better than any of his predecessors. When the book was published in 1960 to wide critical acclaim, Doctorow was relieved to have fulfilled his claim since he had managed to imaginatively compose a narrative about a region which he had never set foot on.

However, behind Doctorow's apparently modest assertion, there lingers a disturbing truth. Doctorow depicts a subversive image of the West in his Western narrative which primarily distorts the reader's conventional expectations of the genre. Doctorow takes one step further than his contemporaries and unveils the "lie" about the West and the founding basis of the American myth of optimism.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The sixties was a time of intense disillusionment and startling recognition for the American nation. A combination of political and social factors in the 1960s in the US led to what is commonly called a spirit of "regeneration."<sup>2</sup> The presidency of John F. Kenedy had at first sparked rays of hope in the hearts of numerous Americans who voted for him. Nevertheless, the war in Vietnam and widespread protests against it, the advent of the civil rights movement and the rise of black power and an alarming increase in violent murder and gun crime throughout the decade, all helped the rise of a counter-culture which had already begun with the Beat Movement of the 1950s, and later developed into a widespread disbelief and distrust about authority and official power:

The pervasiveness of corruption, violence, scandal, and cover-up in American politics, exemplified by the assassinations of John Kennedy, and his brother Robert and the civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King, and the Watergate scandal which brought down the by-then President Nixon in 1973, convinced cultural figures in America that reality, even history, was not transparent, but a kind of 'front' for the *real* story which was unfolding behind the scenes.

Although metafiction had already been employed by earlier writers across the world, yet at this point in the history of America it became an appropriate technique for translating social and political matters into literary ones. John Whitley in "Twentieth-century American Novel" traces the new themes of the American novel in the twentieth century, acknowledging the necessary political nature of the novel of the 1960s and 70s<sup>3</sup>. Whitley (2006) provides examples of novelists of this era including Doctorow who wrote with a conscious awareness of the necessity to intermingle fact and fiction – made possible by the development of the technique known as metafiction. Authors who exploited this technique permitted themselves the liberty to question the nature of reality. Unsurprisingly, as Nicol has stated, this was an immediate response to the spirit of the age:

The determination to explore fictionality in the 1960s, then, was motivated by a sense that everyday reality was always already fictionalized, either because of its sheer absurdity, or by the power of the media in shaping it and presenting it to the viewer, or because it was being actively manipulated by unseen hands. (75)

However, in employing this technique, writers did not all share the same view point. The writers of this tradition of American literature can be roughly divided into two broad groups. The first being those who as Patricia Waugh in her ground breaking book *Metafiction, The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) has designated practiced "aleatory art"(12). This is a totally random form of art, which its practitioners believed to be the best way to reflect the chaotic, frenetic and frenzied contemporary world. Outstanding literary figures that practiced aleatory art include William H. Gass, Robert Coover, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme, who produced fiction which was principally about fiction itself with no extrinsic reference to the outside world. Authors writing in this tradition produced fiction within fiction; endless tales and tales within tales. As an instance of such innovative metafictional work, Gass's *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* (1968) makes use of a variety of visual devices including different colors for different sections of the book rather than pagination, different typefaces, coffee stains, and a variety of other innovative techniques to draw the attention of the reader to the text and language.

The second group of metafictional writers are those whose work are initially bound to conventions. Such writers will not, like practitioners of aleatory art, pull the rug from under their readers' feet by engaging in innovation straightaway. Rather, authors of this camp use familiar themes and conventions but then abuse them for the sake of innovation. By laying bare the device of composing fiction and questioning the truth of the fictional world, these writers, Waugh contends, intend to *deconstruct* the truth which has structured the real world (12).

Written at a time in which the counter-culture movement had already gained prominence in the United States, Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) profoundly reflects the spirit of the age in which it was written; one of intense disillusionment and extreme cynicism. However, for Doctorow, unlike the practitioners of aleatory art, sheer disillusionment in the physical world did not result in taking refuge to the fictive world. Doctorow takes advantage of metafiction not to abstain from engagement with political and the social matters of his time, but to reflect his concern and critique of the past. Although his first attempt at writing long-prose fiction, *Welcome to Hard Times*' retrospection to the American past reflects ideas and themes which will frequently emerge in Doctorow's later fictional and non-fictional writing.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps what distinguishes Doctorow from other historical novelists is his simultaneous anticipatory concerns.

*Welcome to Hard Times* is not only a representative of the literary writings of its time, but a very outstanding one indeed. It simultaneously reflects the age's concern with the genre of the Western, the technique of metafiction and it contributes to the historical evolution of the novel in the United States. Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua (1989) has divided the evolution of the novel into three stages; the realistic aesthetic of the nineteenth-century, the modernist experimentation of the early part of the twentieth century, and the liberal and existential novel of the period after World War II. Citing John Barth, Bevilacqua observes the narrative levels of Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* as recapturing the spirit of all three stages mentioned above, at the same time exemplifying the transition from a "literature of exhaustion" to a "literature of replenishment." (1989: 78)<sup>5</sup>

Despite the novel's simple narrative, *Welcome to Hard Times* embodies a multifaceted ideology. The novel is a parody of the Western and a self-conscious work of metafiction, but both these techniques serve to highlight Doctorow's major ideological attitude. Doctorow's revision of the American frontier through a self-conscious narrator ultimately revises aspects of American cultural identity.

The historical context in which *Welcome to Hard Times* was written provides a helpful background in interpreting the work. Doctorow wrote his first novel at a time when metafiction had gained widespread popularity among American writers of the 50s. The Western was a genre which had envisioned in the minds of many Americans the truth about the history of frontier expansion, as a crucial period in the history of American. It was also considered as an appropriate genre to practice the American dream. For contrapuntal authors like Doctorow, parody was a helpful means of reorienting the very foundations of this myth, providing an alternative, yet darker and gloomier story.

During the 1960s, American writers became fascinated with the history of their country. Historical novels had previously appeared in the works of eighteenth-century writers including Sir Walter Scott. But what distinguished the historical novels of the 1960s in America was a new way of looking at history. This involved a revision of historical context, character and events. Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) has labeled novels written in this tradition as "historiographic Metafiction" for they are not only a rewriting of history but a self-conscious attempt at reconstructing the past (5). *Welcome to*

*Hard Times* is a novel written in the tradition of historiographic metafiction, a technique that has had advantages for Doctorow on more than one plane.

### 3. PARODY OF THE WESTERN GENRE

The Western is perhaps the only genre with a specific time and setting. It is set in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the Southwestern states of the US (Cuddon, 1998: 983)<sup>6</sup>. Like many other genres, the Western has undergone a process of development, so that the early classical Westerns differ greatly from Westerns of a much later date.

As Phillip French in *Westerns* (1974) has alleged, the Western has always been about America rewriting and reinterpreting her own past (24). The genre of the Western is one of the most traditional and genuine American genres expressing the specificity of the American cultural experience. It is especially the ideas of the frontier, harsh life, violence, outlawed gun fights and the symbolic landscape and the inventory of characters such as gunslingers, villains, beautiful ladies and prostitutes that have not only formed specific aspects of the genre of the Western, but also a myth of American cultural identity (Cawelti, 1976: 193)<sup>7</sup>

For America, the West was the frontier, free, unexplored, uninhabited territories and wilderness, a place of paradise and at the same time challenge, a place where civilization and nature met, and where a man could prove his heroic capabilities. There, a man's past and his history were irrelevant in comparison to the present and future. The West was a symbol of wish fulfillment. Many writers have written in this tradition; beginning from Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crevecoeur and James Fennimore Cooper in his Leather-stocking novels to late-nineteenth-century novelists including Owen Wister and Louis L'Amour. The Western then became the persistent American theme of civilization versus nature, or innocence versus experience. As John G. Cawelti has said "The symbolic landscape of the western formula is a field of action that centers upon the point of encounter between civilization and wilderness, East and West, settled society and lawless openness." (193)

According to Simon Dentith, parody may challenge the world to re-examine the parodied text, but it is sometimes critical of the world rather than the hypo-text (18). In *Welcome to Hard Times*, the polemic is undoubtedly directed to the world, rather than the Western genre. This world which Doctorow is indicting is the timeless American world of secure optimism and assured confidence.

Primarily, Doctorow sets out to debunk the myth of the West through a serious revision of the genre of the Western. The novel is written in the late 1950s, but takes as its historical setting the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cynical and dark vision which governs the atmosphere of the novel reflects the pessimism of the historical period in which Doctorow wrote the book.

Many writers like Doctorow have been engaged with writing reconsiderations of the Western, in the form of parody. Robert Coover's *The Ghost Town* is similar to Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* in that through undermining the western genre and its conventions, both novels undercut the importance of the cultural value of the Western and frontier myths and their importance for the formation of American cultural identity (Kušnir, 2004:106)<sup>8</sup>

However, while for novelists like Coover, the major target of their parody was essentially the genre, exaggerating certain Western themes including violence and fighting, Doctorow not only sets out to revise the genre of the Western but also targets American faith in hope. What distinguishes Doctorow's work was that unlike other writers whose parody was directed towards the hypo-text, Doctorow's challenge was a much broader one, directed at the American faith in hope and prosperity.

### 3. 1. Subverting Stereotyped Character: heroes and heroines

Doctorow reorients the reader's expectation of the genre through remodeling stock characters and criticizing the process of American settlement. Traditional Western stories incorporated a heroic, lawful young hero/ mayor, whom the townspeople could rely upon to restore peace and order, eliminating threats to the people or the town. *Welcome to Hard Times* subverts our expectations of a Western story primarily through the story's protagonist. Blue, the *unofficial* mayor of the town, is a reluctant, passive and unreliable hero/ mayor who fails his people at two critical instances in the story. Blue lets down his people at the opening of the novel when The Big Man from Bodie invades the town. As the townspeople ask for his help, he turns them down one by one by evading responsibility, deviating from the model of heroism in the classic Western tradition;

Avery: "Blue, that gentleman's in my place, you got to get him out of there."

Blue: "I saw him pay you Avery."

Avery: "I got stock behind that bar, I got window glass in my windows, I got my grain and still in back. There's no telling what he'll do."

Blue: "Maybe he'll leave soon enough."

Avery: "He cracked Fee's skull!"

Blue: "A fight's a fight, there's nothing I can do." (6)

Blue is not the ideal reliable male hero whom the "heroine" can depend on. Blue disregards Molly's anxiety regarding the Bad Man's return, claiming to be prepared for him. However, when the Big Man finally does return, Blue and those who helped him run the town once again fail to stand up against this violent intruder. The genre's traditional assumptions of the good hero fighting lawless evil and corruption are thus inverted as Blue becomes the anti-hero.

That Blue is unofficially the mayor of the town only intensifies Doctorow's subversive intention. Blue's position as the mayor is not authentic, since, as the novel makes clear, he was never elected by the people of the town. Blue keeps the records of the town, just in case one day it is recognized as a settled town, and this is the sole reason why he is referred to as mayor by the townspeople.

But just as Blue fails to represent the typical Western male hero, his female counterpart is also no idol of beauty and chastity. Molly is a prostitute and rather than adopting a discourse of love and forgiveness, Doctorow charges her with vengeance and violence. Upon continually seeking protection from Blue and being discouraged by him, Molly realizes Blue can never be her hero. Instead, she turns to Jimmy, the only child referred to in the novel, who loses his father at the opening of the novel by the hands of the violent intruder. Although at first Molly appears to be maternally concerned with Jimmy, as the narrative unfolds we learn how she molds him as an instrument of her vengeance against the Bad Man.

### 3. 2. Subverting Traditional Family Structures

Blue's attempt and failure in building a new community in the town is primarily reflected in his attempt to build a family. Molly is never happy with Blue, and her doubts and

anxieties are never Blue's concern. Jimmy never sees in Blue the father he lost at the hands of the Bad Man. Like his continuously imposed hope for the future of the town, Blue struggles to be hopeful about what Michelle Tokarczyk (2000) has called his "blended family" by wedding Molly and adopting Jimmy (112). But soon he learns that his effort is futile for the forged-family is too much of a mismatch.

In fact, the entire story lacks any evidence of the existence of a true family. Besides Blue's unnatural family, the only familial relations we observe in the novel are Ezra Maple who is searching for his brother, and the Swede and his wife Helga. Apart from Jimmy, there is no mention of any children in the town. Doctorow's portrayal of the frontier family; hence, subverts the idealized American classical model.

### 3. 3. Parody and Self-conscious Narration

In *Welcome to Hard Times*, it seems that the inversion of primary Western values and ideals has been carried out with the purpose of transcending sheer parody. By introducing Blue as a self-conscious narrator, Doctorow reorients the traditional elements of the genre to draw the reader's attention towards the very techniques and elements which had initially informed it. The dying mayor who is also a historian recounts his experience with the failure of the Western myth and Doctorow's central idea and major theme of the novel is voiced by Blue at the close of the novel "like the West, like my life: the color dazzles us, but when it's too late we see what a fraud it is, what a poor pinched-out claim" (186). But how can we relate Doctorow's simultaneous employment of parody and self-conscious narrative style?

In "Cross the Border, Close the Gap" (1971) Leslie Fiedler considers the Western as one of the most typical genres of popular culture employed by serious writers of the sixties for serious purposes (461). To explore the purpose behind Doctorow's employment of the popular Western form in this novel, considering the novel's narrative technique is essential. What makes the novel adaptable in its contemporary literary context is the conscious narrator of the story.

Doctorow's departure in the novel is twofold. Through employing parody, Doctorow deviates from the traditional expectation of the genre. Furthermore, he also introduces a self-conscious narrator. Blue narrates the events but also reflects his contemplation on his narration and invites the reader to contemplate on both "I'm trying to put down what happened but the closer I've come in time the less clear I am in my mind. I'm losing my blood to this rag, but more, I have the cold feeling everything I've written doesn't tell how it was"(199).

The effect of metafiction on literature, as Patricia Waugh informs us, is principally to draw attention to the *frames* involved in fiction, which are usually concealed by realism. These frames have become invisible in realist writing but metafictional writing strives to make them visible. The significance of recognizing framing in fiction is that it makes us realize what we see in the fictional work is a construction. Doctorow breaks the frames of the traditional Western story by continuously having the narrator intervene in the natural flow of the story, providing comments and justifying his actions. The novel thus reflects Doctorow's particular obsession with writing and creating. Blue is depicted as recording both the history of the town and also struggling to record his own experience, hence constructing a unified identity. Blue's narration of the Western story is also his attempt at self-construction.

Blue narrates the story of Hard Times' fall, rise and fall. But Doctorow complicates the narration by inserting a conscious narrator who simultaneously narrates and comments on the notion of writing and the possibility of apprehending and recounting the truth. Blue's obsession transcends the traditional norm of story-telling as the previous incidents have

drastically transformed his earlier convictions and hopes. The most outstanding instance for this is when he tries to comfort Molly by telling her how prepared they had become for the Big Man's return "You see this time we'll be too good for him"(51) but later on he realizes the futility of such confidence "Of course now I put it down I can see that we were finished before we ever got started, our end was in our beginning" (87).

Blue doubts his ability and efficacy in recounting the events truthfully, for he believes his memory fails him in providing the exact truth of the events "I have been trying to write what happened but it is hard, wistful work. Time is beginning to run out on me, and the form remembrance puts on things is making its own time and guiding my pen in ways I don't trust "(149). In other words, Blue is conscious of the fact that as a recorder of the town's history, his mind and memory place specific frames on the events that have happened, making it impossible to provide a narrative which is a truthful representation.

Blue serves both as the story's narrator and as a self-conscious writer who is struggling with the tensions between fact and fiction. Doctorow has intentionally created a narrator who keeps track of the town's accounts, records and property, and at the same time struggles to recapture the history of the town as a participant in the incidents. Blue later realizes his bookkeeping has not been helpful in seeking truth "I scorn myself for a fool for all the bookkeeping I've done; as if notations in a ledger can fix life, as if some marks in a book can control things" (187). However what Doctorow is striving to convey via the self-conscious narrative voice is that Blue's plight is the plight of all historians; the impossibility to recapture the past in a way that can be a full-fledged account of past events. But if Doctorow, whose voice we hear through Blue, breaks the frames of the Western myth of frontier expansion, he is also skeptical of other frames including the optimistic American dream of hope and faith of a better future.

Although *Welcome to Hard Times* does portray the negative aspects of the capitalist system, it is similarly incapable of offering an alternative theory of salvation. In fact the novel is profoundly pessimistic of any possibilities of social change, demonstrating evil and chaos as an inseparable part of capitalism.

#### 4. REVISION OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Doctorow employs parody to dark satiric ends. Through subverting the reader's expectation of the Western, Doctorow questions the very early historical foundations upon which America has been constructed, thus calling for a reconsideration of the country's history. He challenges conventional American myths and ideologies. As Hutcheon has said of *Welcome to Hard Times*;

In parodically inverting the conventions of the western, Doctorow here presents a nature that is not a redemptive wilderness and pioneers who are less hardworking survivors than petty entrepreneurs. He forces us to rethink and perhaps reinterpret history, and he does so mainly through his narrator, Blue, who is caught in the dilemma of whether we make history or history, makes us. (134)

Doctorow also attacks the founding ideology which informs the very structure of American people and society; their self-reliance and strong materialism. The townspeople of *Hard Times* are entrepreneurs, recalling the motto set by the early American Founding Fathers which encouraged hard work and labor as a guarantee to a wealthy and prosperous

life. Doctorow's ironic perspective on this familiar American motif is voiced in the narrative through Zar, a Russian settler who primarily came to the country believing in the myth but soon found what he had anticipated was nothing but a mirage:

I come West to farm ... but soon I learn, I see ... farmers starve ... only people who sell farmers their land, their fences, their seeds, their tools ... only these people are rich. And is that way with everything ... not miners have gold but salesmen of burros and picks and pans ... not cowboys have money but saloons who sell them their drinks, gamblers who play with them faro ... not those who look for money but those who supply those to look. (63-4)

As with many other materially-driven individualists, Zar decides to take the devious route to wealth and prosperity by supplying the gold seekers of *Hard Times* with what Michelle Tokarczyk's Marxist reading regards as the "false need" for women in his whorehouse.<sup>9</sup>

While characters set out to construct a better life, the harsh and violent realities of the frontier yield to no myth or dream. All hopes finally end in disillusionment and failure. The words of Hayden Gillis, employed by the Office of the Governor to record new town settlements reflects beautifully the main theme of the novel, voicing the author's critical perspective of frontier America;

Over this land a thousand times each year towns spring up and it appears I have to charter them all. But to what purpose? The claim pinches out, the grass dies, the well dries up and everyone will ride off to form up again somewhere else for me to travel. Nothing fixes in this damned country, people blow around to the whiff of the wind. You can't bring law to a bunch of rocks; you can't settle to the coyotes, you can't make a society out of sand. I sometimes think we are worse than the Indians. (140-1)

Through *Blue*, Doctorow questions the Western myth of renewal and hope. The vicious circle of the story, the theme of destruction, construction, and destruction turns the novel into an anti-myth. The story represents a challenge to the long held belief and optimism in the American myth of the frontier and the progress of history. The novel recalls Terry Eagleton's idea of history as one long process of human tragedy and suffering, as the story ends in hopelessness and disaster: "History, for the great majority of men and women who have lived and died, has been a tale of unremitting labor and oppression, of suffering and degradation." (52)<sup>10</sup>

On one level, then, the story is a Western, even though it is a parody. But on another level, the story is about the narrator's attempt at recounting history and finding his own identity and position in his narration and in the world outside his narration which specifically focuses on the American frontier.

*Blue* believes that a prosperous town can surely stand against and defeat the Bad man, should he return. But the novel has broader implications. Like all Americans who have been taught certain traditions by their forefathers, Blue believes with hard work and labor comes prosperity and with prosperity comes the guarantee of a better life; "sure a winter brings summer we'll draw our Man from Bodie ... But you see this time we'll be too good for him... [A] Settled town drives them away. When business is good and the life is working they can't do a thing, they're destroyed" (152-2).

But he soon learns the futility of such false hope, since evil, symbolically represented in the figure of the Bad Man, had never left the town in the first place. Blue's hopes are shattered once he learns when it's too late, that wealth and prosperity do not guarantee security. Faith in false beliefs had earlier encouraged Blue, making him hopeful of the future of the town, and it is this illusion and misconception that is the author's major target in the novel; prosperity and material wealth does not harbingers a better life.

Doctorow's parody of the Western in *Welcome to Hard Times* is a serious attempt at subverting the American myth of a hopeful future, guaranteed by hard work and on a more general level, the American dream of a prosperous life. A dream that has been constructed on the idea that civilization brings moral and economic success is just as readily vulnerable to being reconstructed, and the novel shatters such naïve and immature and optimistic visions in the American consciousness.

Doctorow deliberately chose the setting of the novel as occurring quite late in the historical development of the American frontier in order to pinpoint the idea that with the expansion of the frontier capitalism advanced, but that this advancement, as he reflects in the story, only resulted in a vicious circle. Stephen Cooper in "Cutting Both Ways: E. L. Doctorow's Critique of the Left" has stated how "Doctorow uses the mythic West to expose the myths of capitalism" (113).

The town ends where it began; another devastating attack by the Bad Man, this time with an accomplice, which aggravates the situation even further, completing the cycle of death-rebirth-death. To aggravate matters, Jimmy is envisioned as a future Bad Man; hence, anticipating similar events in the future of the town as history will repeat itself. But what is worth mentioning at this point is that Blue still clings to the possibility of a brighter future as his final words and thought imply his concern for posterity and the hope it brings with it.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Patricia Waugh defended the utilization of metafiction as a new technique at a time when critics attacked the practitioners of the technique, claiming it as being solely for playfulness and as signaling the death of the novel. Waugh's response was that not only was metafiction not sheer playfulness but it also marked a new birth for the novel since the technique entailed a new approach to explore the inherent abilities/disabilities of the genre in reflecting truth/reality.

Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* corresponds to Waugh's defense. The novel not only makes use of metafiction to reconsider a certain point in the history of America, but it also explores the capacity of writing to represent truth. Through parody, Doctorow attempts to break the frames of traditional western genres.

By inverting certain elements of the genre and inserting an extremely self-conscious narrator, Doctorow draws attention to the frames that earlier writers had been obsessed with. However, although *Welcome to Hard Times* does portray the negative aspects of the capitalist system, it is similarly incapable of offering an alternative theory of salvation. The novel is profoundly cynical of any possibilities of social change, demonstrating how evil and chaos is an inseparable part of capitalism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Allen Weinstein, "American Conversations", E. L. Doctorow, *The National Archive Experience*, September 25, 2008, Doctorow describes his first experience as a writer as follows: "it turned out to be a novel about the Dakota Territory in the 1870s, and I started out thinking of a parody, and then I got more interested in the idea of making something serious out of a disreputable genre. So there's a structural parody in that book, but it doesn't make fun of anything, and the book was published, and it got pretty good reviews, and I thought I'd really gotten away with something because, of course, I'd never been west of Ohio, where Kenyon was. In fact, I thought - being a New Yorker, I thought Ohio was the West. And, um--you know, there's a great tradition of this kind of thing. I mean, Kafka wrote a book called "America" without ever having left Prague." (6) Doctorow has also mentioned this in his nonfiction book *reporting the Universe* (2003).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example Bran Nicola's *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) especially chapter three: US metafiction: Cover, Barth, Nabokov, Vonnegut, and Pynchon.

<sup>3</sup> "Twentieth-century American Novel" by John Whitley is a chapter from the book: *A New Introduction to American Studies* (2006)

<sup>4</sup> For instances of such fictional work see novels such as *Ragtime*, *The Book of Daniel*, *Loon Lake*, *Billy Bathgate* and *The March*. For non-fictional work see Doctorow's *Reporting the Universe* (2003)

<sup>5</sup> See Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua, "The Revision of the Western in E. L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*", *American Literature* 61 (March 1989): 78-95

<sup>6</sup> Cuddon, J. A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998): 983

<sup>7</sup> For more on this see John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976) p 193

<sup>8</sup> Jaroslav Kušnir, "Parody of Western in American Literature: Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*, and R. Coover's *The Ghost Town*", *Theory and Practice in English Studies* 2 (2004): 106.

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Tokarsczyk looks at Zar's speech as instance of the Marxist notion of "false consciousness" for as he explains, the miners do not really need women to survive.

<sup>10</sup> In *Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) Terry Eagleton reveals how the postmodern notion of history (with a small h) as a matter of constant mutability, multiple open-endedness, and a set of conjunctures or discontinuities is an illusion for history has continually displayed nothing but consistent and persisting realities of wretchedness and exploitation.

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