Eliza Batista de Carvalho Dornas

The Normalization of Evil Actions in Doctorow's *City of God*

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the normalization of evil actions in Doctorow's *City of God* from a philosophic point of view. The novel deals with the concepts of good and evil in the contemporary world, defining the most different types of evil actions, from natural evil to world wars. This work focuses on the normalization of evil actions in the B-movie script written by Everett, the novel's narrator; on the evil acts presented by a veteran in his monologue about the Vietnam War; on the ex-*Times* guy story; and on the Second World War account. The concepts of evil, evil action, moral reality, and normalization of evil actions used in this dissertation follow the concepts discussed by Augustine of Hippo, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, and other contemporary philosophers. The emphasis is on how *City of God's* characters perceive their evil actions and how their victims normalize these actions. *City of God* shows that a victim's constant exposure to evil leads to its normalization, which ultimately, creates a state of indifference, in which evil becomes routine and fails to shock and to promote change.

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1. Introduction

"I ask how many times
the world may come to an end
before the world comes to an end?"
(Doctorow, *City of God* 179)

The American writer E. L. Doctorow lives in New York, the setting for some of his most acclaimed novels. His first successful novel, *The Book of Daniel,* published in 1971, is a semi-historical novel based on the trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Written in 1975, *Ragtime* is also a historical fiction based on the events that had taken place in the USA from 1900 to 1917. *Billy Bathgate* (1989) tells the story of a boy who grows up in the Bronx and joins the criminal gang of Dutch Schultz, who supposedly existed. *City of God*, from 2000, also takes place in New York City and uses historical facts as the stories' background. Doctorow's last novel, *The March* (2005), is about Major General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea during the American Civil War.

These are Doctorow's most important novels and they show that the author follows a pattern using history to create fiction, in response to or as a critique of violent and polemic facts. He recreates what is considered real life, giving the readers another version of facts, because, as he states in one of his interviews, "history written by historians is clearly insufficient" (*Billy Bathgate*). Doctorow writes his version frequently establishing dialogues with other literary, philosophical, or theological texts. In *The Book of Daniel*, he uses the Bible to dialogue with the novel. In *City of God*, he refers to Augustine's philosophical and theological text of the

same name, as well as to the work of Albert Einstein and Ludwig Wittgenstein in order to discuss the nature of belief, the mystery of human consciousness, the existence of God, the act of telling a story, and the existence of evil.

E. L. Doctorow's *City of God* is set in New York and the narrative revolves around Reverend Thomas "Pem" Pemberton, an Episcopalian priest. The story begins with the robbery of the cross in Pem's church. Later, the cross is found in a synagogue on the other side of the city by a couple of Jewish rabbis, Sarah and Joshua. Pem befriends them and falls in love with Sarah, whose father had survived World War II concentration camps. Everett, the narrator, wants to write Pem's biography, for which he interviews the reverend throughout the novel. Other secondary stories are: Sarah's father talking about his war memories, Joshua's death, the Vietnam War veteran's monologue about his own life and the war, the First World War seen through the eyes of Everett's father, the Second World War story told by Everett's brother, the "ex-*Times* guy" looking for unpunished criminals whose stories the papers did not conclude, and the B-movie screenplay that Everett imagined.

Pem and the Jewish couple start meeting more often to find out who stole the cross and left it in the synagogue. Sarah's father reporting his childhood in the Kovno ghetto during World War II prompts Pem and the couple to search for a diary written by a man who was a member of the Jewish council in the ghetto. His diary contained a series of documents and photographs of the ghetto that could incriminate and convict S.S. Schmitz. Schmitz is supposedly living in the United States under a different identity. The former Nazi was not judged for his evil actions during World War II due to lack of evidence.

Joshua decides to travel to Europe to look for this diary and is assassinated there. Pem and Sarah continue their investigation and they fall in love with each other. The reverend decides to convert to Judaism and they marry. Meanwhile, a man retires from *The Times*, and feeling bored for having nothing to do, decides to put an end to unfinished published stories. One of these stories is about S.S. Schmitz. The "ex-*Times* guy," as Everett calls him, travels to where the suspect lives, looks for him, and ends up running him over with a bicycle by accident. After that, he goes back home and on to the next unfinished story of another criminal, a Guatemalan colonel. After the ex-*Times* reporter finds and kills the Guatemalan colonel, Everett gives no further information about his tale.

The backgrounds of the characters in the B-movie share the same lack of information; they have no names and no past. The B-movie is a story about a man who meets the wife of another man on a dinner party; they start having an affair, and the lover takes control over the married woman and her life. The husband receives a proposal to work at a very important company in Japan; the lover convinces the wife that this would be a very good opportunity for the husband, and the couple moves to Japan. Before going to Asia, the lover undergoes a plastic surgery to look like the husband and takes his place. Eventually, the lover kills the husband and sends the head to the wife, who, apparently overcome by guilt and horror, calls the police and commits suicide. The lover is found guilty of the husband's death and the story ends. Everett does not reveal anything further about the lover's fate.

The narrator imagines another movie script by the end of the novel in which the cities around the world become bigger, more polluted, and more violent. Then, when it is the worst of all scenarios, when men can no longer put up with all destruction they have brought to their world, the audience is presented to a couple

who runs a small synagogue, the hero and the heroin, on the Upper West Side. The readers can only infer this couple is Pem and Sarah because it is a progressive synagogue and because of the location. Both the movie and the novel end at this point.

Everett refers to movie scenes or themes several times throughout the novel. Real movie scenes need no descriptions or interruptions because everything is there for the audience to see. In the novel, the dialogues of the movie scenes are presented in a similar, although inverted way: there are no descriptions, no interruptions. All we have are the characters' lines; any reference to someone or to a location is in the characters' lines. Everett strongly criticizes movies because they help sell a certain way of life, not only a politically correct one but also a wrong or evil one, as in the B-movie. Everett also refers to movies as another form of creation, such as storytelling. He discusses the act of writing and makes it clear for the reader that he is writing a novel, that he is creating another world, and therefore he has no commitment with truth or reality. Just like Pem, as he questions God and the Church, Everett refers to God as another narrator, the One who writes the world where Everett lives. He compares books to movies, for both are part of the creative process of storytelling and neither is concerned with the truth.

Everett tells his own story in the first person, but as if he were talking about someone else. He also talks about his father, who went to World War I; narrates the experiences of his brother in World War II, and retells the story of a Vietnam War veteran whom he apparently interviewed. The war stories presented by Everett are a major mark of how ordinary people are capable of the cruelest acts – they show that evil is inherently human.

Pem presents a different point of view from Everett's "Author's Bio" On his wedding day, when he is no longer a Christian priest and is about to be converted to Judaism, he gives a speech addressed to God. He questions God and His position in the world where evil seems to be in control, where men perpetrate all kinds of barbarities in His name. The priest concludes his speech saying that men should remake their image of God.

The many characters of Doctorow's *City of God* come to life through Everett's voice and are somehow linked to each other by a series of evil actions. It is a paradoxical relation in most cases, because the evil acts are considered absurd, but are accepted at the same time. There is no attempt to fight, undo, or even react against these evil actions.

According to Immanuel Kant's definition of dehumanization, evil is the process of treating a human being as a means. The analysis of the evil actions in E. L. Doctorow's *City of God* and the characters' perceptions and reactions to them shows how and why evil is normalized. This study defines evil as having two aspects: an absolute aspect that is part of our moral reality, regardless of the existence of God or any transcendental matters; and a relative aspect, in the sense that each social group develops its own set of moral standards, according to social and historical conditions.

The first chapter will contextualize the novel *City of God* by E. L. Doctorow and its reference to Augustine's *City of God*. In addition, it will discuss the theoretical background on evil used to analyze the evil actions described in the novel.

The second chapter will present the evil actions in the movie script and the Vietnam War. In these narratives, victims strangely normalize evil actions, even when they are aware of their evilness. Following the theories discussed in the

previous chapter, these actions will be analyzed considering the characters' different roles and involvement in them, including the narrator's. In the Vietnam War story, for example, there are two moments to consider: when the veteran is in the war and when he tells the narrator about it. He offers two different perceptions of the actions he suffered and committed depending directly on the moment of his life. Therefore, time in this story is essential for the analysis of evil actions and their normalization, as it interferes in the veteran's perception of them as victim and perpetrator.

The third chapter will focus on other actions that, although perceived as evil, are also considered normal by the characters. In this part, the narratives of the Second World War and the ex-*Times* guy stories will be analyzed as a case of normalization and banalization of evil actions.

The fourth chapter will discuss the "Author's Bio" section in which Everett talks about his father's and brother's experiences in the two World Wars. Here, he presents his thoughts about evil and evil actions contrasting them to Pem's wedding speech, in which Pem still looks for a City of God, in order to show how these two characters refer to the City of Men as described by Doctorow and to the City of God as idealized by Augustine. In addition, showing that evil is a constitutive part of the City of Men, which even Pem acknowledges and which is normalized by this city's inhabitants.

Finally, the fifth chapter will show the differences among the evil actions studied, explaining the particulars and the reasons for the normalization of each evil action by the characters of Doctorow's *City of God*.

2. Evil and Evil Actions

Evil is commonly defined as that which governs and gives rise to wickedness and sin. It refers to a very complex phenomenon that permeates our daily life more than we imagine. To understand evil is to understand societies, their characteristics, and moral realities.

Evil is the denial, violation of, and disrespect for another person's humanity, causing psychological, physical, moral, economical, and social harm. The perpetrator of an evil action intends to dehumanize the victim. Evil is an absolute concept because people who belong to different moral realities recognize and identify its existence; at the same time, evil is relative, because it manifests itself according to different moral realities (Jeha, personal communication). Evil is universally accepted and acknowledged, having all kinds of different forms and manifestations.

One of these manifestations is excessive pride or self-confidence, the "hubris" of classical Greek tragedies. The extreme expression of this pride and self-confidence happens when man, disregarding his limits, creates a new moral reality that he can control. He denies his human nature and starts acting as if he were a god. Man consciously puts his humanity, now made divine, above anyone and anything. By doing so, he denies, disrespects, and violates other people's human condition, thus committing evil. All kinds of consequences come from hubris: madness, fanaticism, and social evil.

Depravity is also a manifestation of evil; it is the state of being wicked, vicious, and corrupt. To be depraved is to be evil with other people either to satisfy oneself or because one does not recognize the moral codes of that group. What defines depravity is the fact that the doer does not regret his actions. Evil is all

around. There is neither person nor society that has never experienced it at least once. It is at the core of the human race as good is, ruling human societies as good does.

Rather than explaining or trying to solve the problem of evil, the emphasis of this study is on evil actions. They occur when a person is made into an object to satisfy someone else's needs or desires; the perpetrator dehumanizes the victim and generates unnecessary suffering. Evil actions are socially understood, as they exist only in relation to others who are dehumanized. Evil has always been a polemic subject and studying it from a secular point of view makes it possible to place it as part of human reality and morality.

Many philosophers have discussed evil and evil actions. According to Nicola Abbagnano, the philosophical discourse approaches the concept of evil from two fundamental perspectives: the metaphysical and the subjectivist point of view. In the metaphysical perspective, there are two different conceptions of evil: one that considers evil as opposed to "being," and another defining evil as a duality of the being. Zoroastrianism propagated the concept of evil as a duality of the being, opposing divinity to anti-divinity. Being is divided into two antagonistic principles, good and evil, eternally in conflict with each other.

The metaphysical conception of evil as opposed to "being" was supported by Stoic and Neo-Platonist philosophers in which evil is the condition for the existence of good. The Stoics thought that evil does not exist as such; all the things that exist must be considered good; thus, evil would have to be non-existent. This concept of evil as non-existent influenced Christian theology, especially through the works of Augustine, the bishop of Hippo. The non-existent principle of evil, or evil as the

absence of good, is essential to the discussion about man's true nature and the possible causes of evil actions.

Religions often see the world as ruled by two opposed forces: good and evil. From this point of view, God is the representative of this absolute good, and Satan, His opposite, is the evil one. Good will not be discussed here as a concept or feature of the human race. All the efforts will concern evil and its existence among human relationships. Evil will be seen as having both an absolute part, in that it is part of our moral reality, and a relative part, in the sense that each culture develops its own set of moral standards.

Augustine states that no nature is evil; evil is only the privation of good. Evil "is not any substance: for were it a substance, it should be good" (*Confessions* 7.12.18). He believes that all things come from God, the Supreme existence, and that the only thing contrary to God is non-existence (*City of God* 12.1). Because He is good, all existence is good. Augustine argues that there is no cause for an evil choice. The evil will/intention is the cause of the evil act, but there is no cause for an evil will. If one says that an evil will can be the cause for another evil will, Augustine answers, "For nothing causes an evil will, since it is the evil will itself which causes the evil act; and that means that the evil choice is the efficient cause of an evil act [. . .] An evil will which is caused by an evil will is not the first; the first is that which has no cause" (*City* 12.6). That is to say, an evil will caused by another evil will is not the first will of all; the first evil will has no cause at all.

The bishop of Hippo claims that nothing can be evil in essence. Everything is essentially good because everything was created by the Supreme existence, which is good; evil is the defection, as he names it, caused in good things. "For this failure does not consist in defection to things which are evil in themselves; it is the defection

in itself that is evil" (*City* 12.8). Man is essentially good because he is God's creation and everything He creates is good. Man does not have evil in his nature; the faults man commits are evil in themselves, and when man fails and commits an evil act, it is a voluntary failure, not a necessary one.

Thomas Aquinas agrees with Augustine; for him, evil cannot mean any kind of nature, resulting that it is only the absence of good. He discusses evil habits connecting them to vices, trying to show that vice is opposed to virtue in terms of reason and not of essence. In his words, "human virtue [. . .] is in accord with man's nature to the extent that it accords with his reason; while vice is contrary to man's nature to the extent that it is contrary to the order of reason" (*Summa* 71.2). Man's nature can then be virtuous or vicious only in terms of intellectually determined choice, given that his actions are defined by reason itself, and not by essence. Man is made good; anything evil in his nature results from his own doings.

Augustine's idea of evil appears in all the doctrines that identify good as being. Leibniz, in *Theodicy*, considers God as the material cause of evil, in its positive force, and not in its form, which is privation. The same happens in Hegel, who considers evil as the absolute nullification of the will.

Augustine's *City of God* is especially important. First, because it is the seminal treatise for Christianity and Christian moral and ethics; it does not only deal with religious themes, it develops an important discussion on the origin of good and evil and on human nature. Second, because there is a relation between Augustine's and Doctorow's works that goes beyond the use of the same title by the latter. Augustine in a certain way is describing, explaining and defending God's City, that is, God's world as it was supposed to be, all good and all perfect; Doctorow, on the other hand, describes God's world as it is shown to him, and in this world, evil can

be found as an existing thing. Doctorow's novel can be seen as an answer to Augustine's *City of God*. Religion represents the City of God, and New York and the world of wars the City of Men.

Doctorow's *City of God* not only deals with the problem of evil, as philosophically discussed, but it also refers to Augustine's *City of God* in several aspects, for instance, its fragmented narratives, its various literary genres which also refer to the Scriptures, its metaphysical discussion on faith, and its title. The two works represent different ideas in different moments. The first one shows the contemporary world, with its contemporary ideas on religion and God, which are constantly put into question; and the second one shows fundamental ideas from a moment when religion and God were absolute certainties that were not open to discussion. These are important connections one may establish between these two books and in this work, the focus will be on their content and on Doctorow's reference to Augustine's work rather than on their structure. Structure may certainly be discussed here but not as the main goal.

Augustine talks about the City of God as the one men aspire or should aspire to, a city where there is only one God, who is the True and Supreme Existence. Doctorow, on the other hand, talks about a City where men show no respect for the City of God, where men do not fear God and do not aspire to a City where everything would be good and perfect because they do not believe there is such a place, because they think God has abandoned this earthly city where they live. In this City, men do not believe in God as the Supreme Existence and they do not think they may go to the City of God because they do not believe there is such a place. Men fear no God and no consequence to the evil they do exactly because they are allowed to do all that.

An example of this parallel is Everett's discussions with Pem. The former is a skeptical man and the latter, an Episcopalian priest. Everett argues with the priest about God's existence and, at the same time, he makes fun of this discussion as if it were absurd because he thinks God really does not exist so there would be no point in discussing about Him. When he starts writing his B-movie, which is a story about a husband, a wife and the wife's lover, he is making fun of God's world, of God's creation. He creates a world in which people are weak and situations are forged to show how flawed human beings are, how easy it is to manipulate and destroy them. Everett shows a world in which people are corruptible for no apparent reason. For example, the wife apparently had everything she needed and wanted; nothing seemed to bother her until the lover came into her life. Apparently, she had no reason to betray her husband, she had no reason to destroy him, but she was manipulated by her lover and helped him perpetrate all the evil actions he wanted. In the end, she regretted all she had done but it was too late, she could not have her life back. She could only realize what she was doing when there was no way back. She had reached a point of no return. If God created this world and these are His creatures, how can these actions not be evil? How can this situation be good and perfect? And if evil is non-existent, how can it not exist when there are many other examples of this wicked world, many other evil actions, many other victims and so much "normalization" of all these actions?

Pem, on the other hand, in spite of having changed religion, believes in God with true faith. In his wedding speech, he discusses several aspects of both Cities, describing all kinds of horrors the world has seen and God has permitted, showing how

> the relentless and unimaginable genocidal cruelties shuddering across the world in our age have brought You into disrepute, and the uninhibited degradation of the idea of life has thrown some of us into the despair of cursing Your name and impugning Your existence. (266)

Only to say that men need to remake God, not in the sense of making up new stories or new holy books, but in the sense that men need to remake the idea they make of God. They need to understand that God cannot and does not interfere in human actions; He gave human beings free will so that they could decide and respond to what they do. He cannot be responsible for human actions and men need to remake their idea of God, that is, they need to understand that they are the only ones to blame for their own actions and that God does not and will not interfere in those. God created the world and everything that is in the Universe, He created a City of Men and a City of God and men should be worthy of them. Pem asks "for reason to hope that this travail of our souls will find its resolution in You [. . .] For the sake of us on this little planet of Yours" (268). Men's only salvation is to find peace and resolution in God.

Pem and Everett are then representatives of the two cities. Everett represents the City of Men and its inhabitants who have no expectations of a Heavenly City, and Pem represents the men who long for redemption. As Julio Jeha says in his article "Entre *Logos* and *Mythos* em *City of God* de Doctorow," these two central characters oppose each other in their search for the truth. Everett is rational and secular and Pem represents the sacred. In spite of skeptical, the former cannot find any satisfactory answer to the mystery of the Universe because all the explanations he finds are somehow incomplete; however, he cannot accept a religious explanation.

Doctorow dialogues with Augustine through the voices of Everett and Pem, the latter defending the City of God, as Augustine does, and the former questioning it, as Doctorow intends to do in his novel. The American author concludes that it is impossible to explain or understand the world without the sacred, even if this sacred needs to be remade, as Pem remarks in his speech. *Logos* may be the author's tool in the search for the truth, but *mythos* prevails (Jeha, "*Logos* e *Mythos*" 7).

Augustine uses in *City of God* a philosophical and theological discourse, differently from Doctorow. The latter uses the discourse of literature, fiction, in the form of a fragmented narrative composed of small narratives that, in spite of being connected, are independent from each other. Moreover, in spite of being fictional, these narratives come from a "given life" (*City of God* 51). The memories of the Second World War are told in the form of a diary; the B-movie is a movie script; Everett and Pem's conversations are presented as messages; the Midrash Jazz Quartet as songs; and Everett's thoughts are presented as an impersonal narrative. All these narratives are fragments of a bigger narrative, the novel, and they can be seen as "resonances with everyday truth" (51), that is, the City of Men.

Doctorow's response to Augustine's *City of God* does not offer one single sort of narrative or discourse. It does not fit a definition of narrative but embraces several definitions. Each story needs a specific kind of narrative so that all of them together attain their purpose of describing the City of Men, where evil would be one of its constitutive characteristics rather than non-existing as Augustine claims. Doctorow uses various genres to deal with a common topic. At first, the parallels to the literary collage of Scripture, the narrative and philosophical jumble, can confuse the reader, because the stories interrupt each other creating a feeling of endlessness and disconnection. Doctorow answers Augustine with a lack of linearity and

fragmented plots, illustrating how we perceive existence, even if it is a perception by fictionalized human beings. Doctorow inverts Augustine's *City of God*, in which evil does not exist, to show that, in the City of Men it is a common phenomenon. Whereas Augustine describes a city where men are guided by faith and with Scripture-based rules that express the will of God, Doctorow portrays a City of Men without love or faith in God. For Doctorow, evil does exist and men act according to their principles, which are not always in agreement with God's will.

Augustine of Hippo does not consider good and evil in terms of moral laws neither as Kant nor as nature as Nietzsche does. The three of them discuss the same topic from different perspectives. Kant and Nietzsche take a secular point of view and Augustine, a religious one. The German philosophers, subjectivist in their approach, understand evil as a negative desire opposed to good, the former being as real and as substantial as the latter, thus eliminating any metaphysical explanation. This perspective, which Nietzsche, Kant, and other contemporary philosophers support, provides a reflection for the complexities of evil and evil actions in a secular 20th century context, as described in Doctorow's novel.

An evil action needs an intention, a perpetrator, a victim, and a moral reality. If there is no intention, there is no perpetrator. The perpetrator must have an intention to do the action; he becomes the perpetrator while materializing his intention and doing the evil action. There might be times when the intention is not to cause evil in itself, but rather to cause good to someone other than the victim, or even, to protect oneself. However, once this action results in dehumanization, in unnecessary suffering, it is considered evil. Also, there must be a victim who suffers the action. Finally, it is necessary a moral reality within a certain community that underlies and

agglutinates these elements. As the emphasis is on the evil actions and its elements, the punishment that the perpetrator may suffer will not be studied.

In the present study, the concept of good is not relevant; the focus is on evil and its existence in human relationships. Sometimes, religion will be referred, but only in order to understand the process of normalization of evil actions. The religions present in the novel will be used to place the characters within a moral reality, without any judgment of value or subjective opinion. Religion will be discussed only in those cases where it is part of the moral reality, to show how it interferes in people's perception and perpetration of evil actions.

Doctorow's dialogue with Augustine's *City of God*, the various literary genres used to develop the bigger narrative, Everett's and Pem's function in the narrative, the intertextuality with other works such as Einstein's and Wittgenstein's are all important and relevant aspects of the novel. However, the focus of this work is on finding a definition of evil action and based on this definition describe and explain the evil actions present in the novel and their normalization.

2.1. Moral Reality

Moral reality varies according to time, society, and even to economic structure. In religious societies, for example, religion becomes morality. Stephen de Wijze names it "moral reality" and describes it as "a continual balance between theoretical principles and deeply held moral convictions" (215). These "deeply held moral convictions" are the inner sense of morality and justice everyone has before having any rational organization of them. The theoretical principles are the main beliefs recognized by the majority of people in a certain society as "correct"; they help adjust the "deeply held moral convictions" (or "moral sensibilities"). These

principles change constantly. A “moral reality” would be an implicit agreement within a community that recognizes the rules adopted as necessary and expects every member to respect them.

Kant sees the principles of evil and good within the concepts of morality and humanity. He defines humanity as an existing end that limits our actions; that is, our actions must be guided by the limits of our own and the others’ humanity, and by the “pleasure arising from the idea of the existence of a thing” (298). Pleasure in doing something or in something’s existence guides human beings, who are always searching for happiness. In Kant’s words, “a rational being’s consciousness of the pleasantness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence is happiness” (298). Happiness is the feeling of pleasure that accompanies human beings throughout their lives and of which they are aware.

According to Kant, the principle of self-love and the principle of morality guide all human actions. The former guides them toward a certain direction with the single purpose of finding happiness. In Kant’s words, “the principle which makes this [happiness] the supreme ground of determination of the will is the principle of self-love” (298). The latter is an imperative that commands men and constrains them to actions they may wish to do. The difference between both principles is that the first one only advises and the other commands (305). These principles allow rational beings to live differently from irrational ones because they lead human beings to act differently from their own instinct. They guide and limit human actions through reason in a way that men can consciously make rational decisions, which permits humans to live in community, respecting one another. These principles constitute the rational beings’ humanity.

Considering these principles and the notion of humanity that derives from them, Kant defines moral, immoral, and evil actions. Moral actions are guided by the principle of self-love and limited by the principle of morality. Although guided by the principle of self-love, immoral actions oppose the principle of morality; that is, the perpetrator ignores the moral rules in order to perform an act that only suits him. Evil actions, says Kant, ignore the principle of morality and have as their main purpose the violation of the other's humanity. Guided by the principle of self-love, the perpetrator disrespects the principle of morality and aims at the violation of someone else's humanity.

Kant sees both concepts as determined by the moral law and not as natural concepts; nothing is truly or essentially good or evil. Once established, a moral law determines what is good or evil. One could only infer that the dominant classes establish the moral law in a way that there would be a dominated class to submit to this law. Then, good and evil actions would be relative and dependent on one's point of view or one's position in society.

One may say that evil is, then, a relative concept: one act can be evil in a western society and virtuous in an eastern one. But if it is accepted that evil is a relative concept, it does not mean that there is no absolute evil. The idea of which action can be considered evil is relative, but the existence of evil is acknowledged in the most different cultures and that makes it an absolute concept. Cultures may have different concepts of evil; thus interpreting an action would depend directly on their "moral realities."

2.2. Perpetrator

The idea of evil must also be connected to the relation between victim and perpetrator. According to Enrique Dussel, evil is "the destitution of the other as person, the alienation of someone in some respect" (298). Although the author considers evil directly connected to sin, a secular use of his definition is still possible. By "the destitution of the other as a person," Dussel means "dehumanization," the act of violating the victim's humanity, of disregarding the victim's right and freedom of being. Exploring one's labor, treating a person as inferior, doing any kind of physical or psychological harm, repressing any kind of manifestation the other would wish to have, all this would be an interference in the other's human condition and would be considered evil.

Despite being contradictory and sometimes vague about the concept of evil, Nietzsche gives a short definition of it in the beginning of *Anti-Christ*. He characterizes good as "whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man," and evil as "whatever springs from weakness" (22). Later on, he states that any form of anti-nature is vicious. For him, "moral" is a tyranny of arbitrary laws on which the world was based and became what it is today. Dehumanization is directly related to weakness, for if one's condition of human being is diminished, this person is weak or was made weak. In other words, if one is destitute of one's human values, either one has no force to fight back and prevent it from happening, or is not aware of the fact, or did not even realize what was happening until it was too late. In any of these cases, the person is dehumanized because of this weakness; therefore, evil is done.

In Dussel's definition, evil comes from outside and the victim cannot avoid it. For Nietzsche, evil comes from within, the person's own weakness is responsible for

the evil done to her because, if she were strong, evil would not have happened. According to Dussel, evil is a social construction: “in concrete reality one sins only *in relation* to others” (299); according to Nietzsche, all unnatural behavior is evil; evil is the disrespect of the person toward oneself. He also considers that evil has a social dimension; people are forced to act against their own nature in order to live in society, which is ruled by “the tyranny of arbitrary laws.” The point of accordance between the two authors is that both consider evil as the denial of one’s own human condition and nature.

Stephen de Wijze also defines evil in a social and moral context: “the origin of evil or sin lies in a negation of the other” (298). For Wijze, dehumanization, annihilation of the moral reality and pain to any living being are the three conditions of evil. Wijze’s definition of evil is closer to Dussel’s and Kant’s, who also related evil with the violation of human condition and the disturbance of the pre-established moral. Dussel, Kant, and Wijze believe that members of a society unconsciously establish a moral reality that must be respected. For these philosophers, humanity is an inner condition of the human race that must be valued and that is, perhaps, an inner and natural “rule” automatically stated in the moral reality.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, seems to believe that morality is created by an arbitrary set of social laws. It is not relevant for Nietzsche if these laws are good or bad. What matters is the inner nature of each human being, which must be appreciated above all. Nietzsche’s ideas seem deterministic; he believes there are people who were born to be strong, others who were born to be weak, and none of them could go against their nature.

In the first essay of *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche states that good and evil have no natural origin, as their definitions change due to different perspectives,

cultures, and conveniences. He asserts that men are predestined to be strong or weak, and the concepts of good and evil will vary according to one's strength or weakness. He points out that the concept of good was established by the upper class, the noble and powerful one, opposed to the lower, plebeian class. In that way, "good" is not used to refer to those who did good things or to whom good things were done; good refers to a certain group of people who detains the power (economical and political) and decides to label themselves and their deeds as "good."

Based on the idea that society is divided into the strong and the weak, Nietzsche develops his concepts of good and evil. First, he highlights the fact that the noble, the aristocratic (strong) class follows its own morality in a way that it maintains the weak class under control, also defining good and evil in a more convenient way: the strong are the good ones. Nietzsche also thinks that men are born to be exactly what they are; there is no such thing as evolution. If one is born weak, one cannot become strong. For Nietzsche, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything" (45). Man is only an agent in service of strength; man has no choice, no free will. One must judge the action, not its perpetrator, for he is not important.

Nietzsche talks about another important class, the priestly people. This is when "man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and *become evil* – and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts!" (*Genealogy* 33). The priestly people are the ones who control human nature, who inverted the notion of good and evil present in "noble people's morality" because, in order to keep the weak under control, they start justifying their inferior position as the will of God, someone they should obey, respect, and fear so that they could be awarded after death. They are

responsible for the growing hatred the weak people would hide against their condition of weak and against the noble and strong ones. This hatred would be disguised as faith, as love for God, and to this process of "hating and hiding," Nietzsche gives the name of *ressentiment*.

This *ressentiment* has inverted the values defended by the other morality in a way that the good ones are now the weak men, who are oppressed but know they will be rewarded, and the evil ones are the strong men, who oppress the others. This inversion first took place with the Jews who inserted religion into the lives of men giving birth to what Nietzsche calls "the slave revolt in morality" (*AntiChrist*). Then, the notions of good and evil became relative. To say what is good or evil, one needs to establish the perspective from which he perceives society, the morality from which he is analyzing the situation: the morality of *ressentiment* or the morality of noble men.

Together with this slave revolt and *ressentiment*, there is a notion of "natures that are denied the true reaction," that is, a man that must go against his own nature because of the social reality that is imposed on him. In other words, the idea of *ressentiment* gives birth to the idea that some men are denied their strength because they were born in an unfair society, and therefore, they must have faith in God who placed them in this society with a purpose and who will grant them His kingdom.

Nietzsche's conception of human nature (strong or weak), this lack of option, of power to make a decision, and of the impossibility of acting against one's nature is very deterministic. The weak ones are imprisoned in their "weak nature" and can only act according to it; the same happens to the strong ones. Considering that "the deed is everything", this conception is very simplistic for there is not a moral judgment of the individual, all man's deeds can be explained and even excused by

his impossibility of denying his own nature and by his duty to this nature. If it is not possible to escape from that and if “there is no ‘being’ behind doing,” man does not have the intention to do evil or good, man does not have any guilty or innocent conscience, and therefore, man cannot be punished or rewarded for doing either evil or good.

Nietzsche’s views can be further criticized. According to André Comte-Sponville, Nietzsche practiced self-contradiction more than any philosopher did. Nietzsche states that man is destined to follow his own nature and that the strong rules over the weak, while later he writes that man is forced to act against his own nature by society (41). There is certainly an opposition between weak and strong based upon a power struggle, but man is more than nature; he has conscience and ability to reason. Man is also a social being; he needs to follow certain rules. Once there are rules, breaking them becomes possible and people do break them. Nature must be constrained by society so that society itself becomes possible. Moral values must be created and changed as society changes because it is the very reason for morality to exist, just as man is the very reason for society to exist. As Comte-Sponville concludes, Nietzsche is one of the few philosophers who, to define good, chooses strength instead of righteousness, instincts instead of reason, and hygiene instead of moral values. Morality and moral values depend on one’s position in society, a position determined not only by one’s weak or strong nature, but also by one’s moral values. Yet, one cannot establish where the natural features end and the social ones begin. Everything is interrelated; man is not as plain as Nietzsche describes him.

Moral reality is the relation between the principle of self-love and the principle of morality. Nietzsche sees them as arbitrary laws put together to control

men, to serve as a justification to men's weak nature, to disguise weakness and to legitimate the domination of the strong over the weak. For Nietzsche, there are no inner or social principles; there is only nature, power, and strength in human relationships. The arbitrariness of moral laws is not relevant in his concepts of good and evil. What is relevant is how these laws define good and evil and are used to interpret man's actions, placing him on one side or the other.

Nietzsche also talks about happiness as "the feeling that power *increases* – that resistance is overcome" (*Anti-Christ* 22), it is different from Kant's principle of self-love or private happiness, although ultimately creating good and evil opposition. Kant states that the principle of self-love or private happiness guides all rational actions, causing either pain or pleasure. Nietzsche, on the other hand, defines happiness as power, which is also responsible for opposing good and evil. According to Nietzsche, everything in human societies is related to power. The perpetrator of an evil action is guided by his will to power, ignoring the group's moral reality.

At this point, one may say that Nietzsche contradicts himself because in the *Genealogy of Morals*, he states that man cannot choose to be weak or strong, because he is determined to act according to his own nature and in the *Antichrist*, he states that man acts in a way or another because of society. The answer to this argument would be that man does not choose to act; he is led to a certain behavior by society, and he still has no options, only his natural identity and his identity determined by society and moral reality, which are arbitrary, power-guided structures.

According to Nietzsche, there are no inner or social principles; there is nature, power and strength and they control human relationships. According to St. Augustine, there is good, God and the world. All things are good because all things are God's creation. In addition, Kant argues that if one follows the two basic

principles there would be no evil. Nietzsche and Kant believe evil exists; they can identify evil actions, and they oppose evil to good. Augustine does not believe in evil as an existence nor does he oppose evil to good. As St. Thomas Aquinas argued, there is no evil in essence only in terms of reason, that is, in terms of action. Nevertheless, essence and reason sometimes get confused. According to Augustine's thoughts, man would be following God's will, for nothing happens unless God predicted and wanted it to. They would not be evil in essence because God did not create anything essentially evil. They would be perpetrating evil actions, but predicted actions; they would be perpetrating evil actions in terms of reason (not of essence).

2.3. Victim

Besides a moral reality and a perpetrator, a victim is necessary for an evil action to be recognized. An evil action must always be done against someone. Even if the victim does not think he is suffering in any way, the action is still evil. However, it is not enough for the perpetrator's intention to be evil in order to characterize an action as actually evil. There must be a dehumanized victim.

When the perpetrator does not intend to be evil but the action violates the victim, the action is evil. However, the victim's view of the action may not necessarily determine its evilness. There are cases in which the victim does not feel violated, but the violation occurs; cases in which the victim is dehumanized and still does not consider what happened as an evil action. Reaction is not a constitutive part of evil actions; on the contrary, reactions are not expected to exist once evil actions are done by the strong against the weak. In this case, it is implicit that the weak do

not have strength to react, because if they had, they would not be victims of such actions.

In cases where the victim lacks the perception of the evil perpetrated against him, or when the victim lacks the feeling of being dehumanized because he got used to being treated this way or because it is not possible to react, the evil action has been normalized. In other words, a person born and raised under constant evil actions may not realize them for what they are. In such situations, evil becomes normalized, not banalized, for this person.

Although similar, normalization and banalization are different concepts. The banality of evil is the perpetrator's inability to see, to understand, and to interpret an action that has all the features of an evil action as evil. Hannah Arendt defined the term in *Eichmann em Jerusalém*, her analysis of Adolph Eichmann's judgment. For Arendt, when the perpetrator recognizes an evil action as necessary to achieve a higher good, he justifies and banalizes it. Normalization of evil, on the other hand, happens when a victim fails to interpret an action that has all the features of an evil action as such. This victim normalizes an evil action because it has become normal, habitual, either due to frequent occurrence or to the impossibility to react against it. Doctorow's *City of God* has many examples of evil action's normalization.

2.4. Evil Actions and Normalization

In the novel, several actions exemplify the normalization process. In Everett's B-movie, the wife's lover controls her and her husband in a way that violates their human condition. The lover intends to destroy the husband just because he can. The wife is not aware of what is happening until it is too late. When she is unable to tolerate the situation, she complains to the police and commits suicide. It is not clear

if the lover is found or arrested, but he never regrets his acts. He wanted to harm the husband and the wife; he was not concerned about himself or what could happen to him if he was discovered.

Another normalization of evil action occurs in the Vietnam War narrative. As described in the novel, in the Vietnam War the American soldiers were sent to a country they did not know, to fight a war that was not theirs and to kill people at will, as if they were useless objects to be discarded. The man who tells Everett about Vietnam is paralyzed, but, even if he walked, he would still have psychological scars. In Vietnam, the veteran had to act as the soldier he was expected to be, as "the executioner" who "lived in satanic bliss" (219). He had no option and at that time it was normal for him to do just as he was told; he would "kill whoever needed to be killed" (219). Back home with what is left of him, he recognizes his evil actions during the war. However, he considers his acts as normal occurrences, because he did what he was supposed to do. The veteran says, "This was not war, this was life as it is, / and was and always will be" (219). This war veteran does not have a name or future. He is just a voice speaking for those who lived through that event.

An important normalization of evil actions is narrated through the Nazis dehumanization of the Jews, in the World War II tale told by Sarah's father. He survived through living in a ghetto, being taken to a concentration and to an extermination camp. He narrates the Nazis' evil actions as if he was the secondary character in a movie. He says, everyone acted as if "what was happening was routine, as if this terrible power of the Germans over us were normal" (79), as if life in the ghetto was normal. Apparently, everyone else was used to it.

The ex-*Times* guy story shows a subjective process of evil normalization. He decides to end stories the papers have started because "justice fails again and again to

catch up in time to effect just endings" (187). The men he is about to kill must pay for what they did. Thinking he can kill them because they were once evil, he does not realize he acts in the same way those evil men did. There is also a will of power involved because the evil men do not know someone is coming after them; the ex-*Times* guy is in control and, eventually, he succeeds. He has not always been like that, though he led a mediocre and boring life and now he feels he can make a difference. He thinks his evil deeds will change his life for the better. For him, killing has become not only normal, but also good and just.

At last, Everett talks about how the wars narrated in the novel affected the world. He says that "the bones of the First World War are impressed in the continent's tectonic plates / under the weight of the bones buried over them" (135). Everett does not mean a person but whole populations killed during the war. He states that wars have become normal to the people during the twentieth century, so normal that "Europe's beaches are adrift with sanded bone / That her farmers in their fields plow up loops / of chained vertebrae / Her rivers at night are luminous with the risen / free radicals of calcification / and the archaeologists of her classical cities / find skulls in tiers under the streets" (135). Everett describes the war events and results through literary cynicism as if he were merely telling the story of his family who migrated to America, "the promise of the new world, / and superseding of the historical disaster / that was Europe" (138). He tells the story of his brother in World War II and calls it a tour, ending it before he went home; after all, going home did not really matter. Being there mattered. He leaves his brother where it mattered, in the center of his discussion of how normal war has become, of how men are turned into evil doers because of the supposed higher good, of how evil has become both banalized and normalized.

Pem also discusses evil and its normalization, but from a religious point of view. He addressed his wedding speech to God talking about how evil has become part of the world He has created and about how it has become normalized which is his point of accordance with Everett. However, he believes that the only way out would be in God but not God as traditionally conceived, a new remade God.

These are the most significant evil actions in the novel. These actions show the most different manifestations of evil done by perpetrators who have their own and different motivations. In spite of having identifiable motivations, it is still obscure why these perpetrators would commit such actions, as they violate not only the group's moral reality but also someone's humanity. Eve Garrard, in "Evil as an Explanatory Concept," states that the evil doer fails to recognize any moral reality, or "reason-giving force," as she names it (330). Although these actions show "a very dreadful condition indeed, given how central practical reason is to our conception of what it is to be a person" (331), society, and at times the victim, fails to recognize them as evil. Evil actions are those in which the victim is dehumanized and the evil doers are the ones who do not care about this dehumanization, or even, perhaps, do not even see their victims as human. Garrard considers evil in terms of action but she leaves two components of these actions out of her discussion: the victim, and the intention or will, as Augustine calls it. If one is to think about evil as an *act*, it is essential to consider all its constitutive parts: the doer, the action, the victim, and the intention. Society feels that someone's humanity was violated on behalf of someone else's principle of self-love but fails to interpret it as evil and does not worry about the origins of the evil action.

An origin of an evil action, Colin McGinn says, is the evil character and evil itself as connected to pain and pleasure. The evil action is defined as that which

causes suffering to someone so that the evil doer can have pleasure, in which case pain is the end in itself (61). In Kantian terms, this means disrespecting the principle of morality and having as an end someone else's dehumanization in order to satisfy one's principle of self-love. McGinn points out that the evil character is something that is developed just as the good character is, that is to say, one chooses to act in a certain way, respecting or not what morality has established (84). In this case, the victim is the one who suffers the action not only in terms of being the target but also in terms of feeling pain, harm, and loss.

McGinn follows Kant's ideas instead of Nietzsche's. McGinn believes that people have good and evil within; they are free to build up their own characters considering some elements that would condition this choice. He states that good and evil are both primitive, inner concepts, and that morality recommends good, although evil is also a constitutive part of human character.

Considering that, besides the moral reality of a group, the "reason-giving force" of the individuals must also be seriously measured. An action that is seen as evil in a group's moral reality, can be perceived as normal, good, or simply necessary to reach an objective according to its victim's or even its perpetrator's moral sensibilities. To analyze an action, it is important to understand how the participants perceive and get involved in the action. This does not mean that moral reality must be ignored; on the contrary, only by observing and analyzing it, it is possible to consider the other features of an action.

Besides the origin of evil and evil actions, while discussing the normalization of evil actions, another question may rise, as Jean Baudrillard wonders in *The Transparency of Evil*, "How is such barbarity possible in the late 20th century?" (75). This is the same question Everett asks himself in the "Author's Bio" section, "How

many times the world may come to an end before the world comes to an end?" (179). The former answers that this is a false question, he thinks that the violence of today is not as "enthusiastic and sacrificial" as it was before. Today's violence is a violence with less passion and more image as coming from a screen (75), in other words, the violence, the evil one sees today is controlled and exposed by the media, by the possibility men found in producing and reproducing evil through the images, either in pictures or in words. This can be seen in the novel in the B-movie script and the ex-*Times* guy story in which the means of communication, cinema and newspaper, are both the vehicle of evil and the means of normalizing it. They make evil public and normal at the same time. And the answer one may find to the referred question is that it is not in fact a false question in the sense that it is not true, but false in the sense that it is a rhetorical one. Barbarities will always happen. The features, the purposes, the fashion may change, but they will still be barbarities, they will still be evil and men may still normalize them. The question is asked not in search for an answer, the answer is already known, but in an attempt to show that evil in spite of normalized and banalized should not be so. The intention in this study is not to answer that question; it is used here also rhetorically; the purpose here is to explain why evil actions are normalized in the referred novel.

The actions presented by the narratives of the movie, the wars, and the ex-*Times* guy are considered evil and will be analyzed specially from the victims' perspective. The Holocaust, the paradigm of evil in the 20th century, is of undeniable importance in itself. The literature on the subject is so vast, however, that it would be impossible to cover the topic properly here. Doctorow's *City of God* will be analyzed on the philosophical ideas discussed in the study of evil actions and their

normalization. Through the normalization of evil actions, Doctorow denounces Augustine's *City of God* and replaces it with a City of Men.

3. The B-movie Script and the Vietnam War Monologue

The characters perceive as evil the actions described in the B-movie script and the Vietnam War monologue. These scenes are both different in purpose and setting but the evil actions in them are equally normalized. The B-movie is a script narrated by Everett, and the Vietnam War story is a monologue in the form of a poem. This monologue is based on a historical event reported by a character. The constant exposure of the characters to evil in the B-movie and the institutionalization of evil in the Vietnam War story provoke the normalization of the evil actions described in these passages.

3.1. The Movie Script

In Doctorow's *City of God,* the B-movie starts with a comment on Moira, "a woman crossing class lines" (33). She meets someone at a dinner party and they start having an affair. Everett, the narrator, anticipates some of what is going to happen: "only way to go with this is to rev up their moral natures, put motors in them, but then all you have is a movie" (33). Everett can only understand and talk about the affair through a movie script. In this creation, it would be necessary to "rev up" the characters' moral natures, that is, to accelerate the ending of the affair by telling the audience what the lover, the wife, and the husband are most likely to do.

The term "moral natures" seems contradictory because moral is not natural; rather, it is a set of rules recognized and followed by a certain group. Moral rules exist to control nature and to prevent people from obeying their instinct, making life

in a group possible. In the case of human beings, nature includes reason, the natural human capacity of reasoning and deciding how to act, even if this choice does not always respect the group's moral reality. Based on that, "moral nature" is not a contradictory term; rather, moral nature would mean that both nature and morality are part of the characters' personality. There may be a portion or lack of morality, the "reason-giving force" as Garrard calls it (330), and a portion of nature that contains both good and evil.

The lover seems to have made his choice. He chose that woman just because he sat next to her at a dinner party (52). They start having an affair and the lover wants to take control of the situation. He starts the affair and manipulates it as he pleases, deciding "when they will meet, how they will conduct themselves, what endeavors he will think up for her in her torrid state of self-abasement" (33). Moreover, the wife accepts anything he is willing to give her; she "trains herself to ask for nothing more of the relationship than he will give" (33). The wife goes on with the affair because she lacks control of the situation, and because of that, she degrades herself, losing her self-respect.

At first, she accepts the lover's control because she wants to – she chooses to be controlled. Then, she is seduced because of "the risk of rising on a tide that would lift her with immense power beyond any possibilities of freedom she could have realized for herself" (35). However, what she really gets is only a different way of submitting herself to another man. She submitted herself to her husband, who worries only about himself and whom she was supposed to praise and admire and whose attention to her was a kind of self-congratulation (35). Later, she submitted to her lover, who wanted to control her life. She seems to have no will of her own; she has let herself be guided by her husband, who cares only about his success, and now

by her lover, who cares only about this enterprise he takes to extremes. She is deprived of her humanity because she does not search happiness; what she thinks as happiness is in fact the fulfillment of someone else's principle of self-love. In addition, by manipulating her to achieve his main purpose, the lover disrespects the principle of morality, turning the woman into a useful object.

On Nietzsche's terms, it happens because she is weak. She cannot and will not control or react against anything because she was born weak; she was born to be dominated. From this point of view, there is no dehumanization, because she is only assuming her role in society.

However, she chose to get involved with the lover. She is not a weak character by nature and not a plain victim of the lover's will. As the lover takes control of her life, she not only understands what is happening but also considers it normal and natural: "at this point in her mind she is so in thrall to him that everything they are doing seems entirely natural and normal" (50). She is so involved with the lover that she fails to see what is happening and normalizes his evil actions toward her and her husband.

The lover "envisions a grand finale to his enterprise that is so dangerous, so extreme, that he decides his life [. . .] may now be redemptively reconceived as an art form" (35). After he takes control of the wife, he gets bored and extends power over the wife's life and her husband's. He wants to decide what they will do, where they will have dinner, and what clothes she will wear. He wants to do what he plans just because it will please him. The lover even considers his control over the wife as a kind of art. His principle of self-love is the only thing he cares about. By doing that, he ignores others' principle of self-love; he also ignores the principle of morality, which should prevent him from disrespecting other people's humanity. Moreover, he

sees himself as an evil agent and as an artist. He wants to dehumanize the couple: the wife is his access to the husband, who is his ultimate target.

The lover does not seem to have a past; he does not belong to any religious or ethnic group. He does not have a family or friends and does not seem to have a life before he met the wife. As the narrator points out, “more precisely, his nihilist moral endowment [. . .] has erased any secondary compensation of character that is conferred by a religious or ethnic qualification” (35). His appearance is also important for his plans. He must not cause disgust or aversion; he must be attractive to seduce the wife. His sex appeal is also important for the script, as Everett expects the audience to identify with the lover.

Certainly, the lover’s power over the husband is only possible through the wife, who is now also a mistress. The husband is a very straightforward person, too self-absorbed to be dishonest or dirty. He is “a squeakily-clean narcissist, the only affair, though all-consuming, is with himself” (49). His narcissism blinded him to his wife’s affair and to the manipulation of the lover. In addition, the lover was very careful and encouraged the wife to work for the husband’s success and improvement.

Under the lover’s supervision and advice, the couple moves to Japan. The “wife/mistress” travels before the husband “in order to familiarize herself with the lay of the land, find a new house in the right neighborhood and so on” (50). The lover goes with her and chooses everything for their new house. While the couple settles in Japan, the lover travels to Budapest to undergo a plastic surgery that will change his face into a copy of the husband’s. He then returns to Japan and takes the husband’s place, kills him and sends his head to the wife. Betraying her husband and letting the lover interfere in their life is beyond good and evil; it is just natural. Now

she also lacks the “reason-giving force” that would prevent her from accepting the lover’s control. She has apparently become a perpetrator.

In fact, she lacks the perception of what is happening. She does not notice how she has gone from victim/person to victim/object. She fails to see how she is only the lover’s tool to get to her husband and how she is being manipulated in helping her lover’s evil actions. It has all become “natural and normal.” As the lover’s victim and the husband’s direct perpetrator, she has normalized her own condition of victim/object. The wife does not realize that, at this point, she has been dehumanized. She still sees in the lover a possibility of “freedom she could have realized for herself” (35). Evil is so present in her life that it is difficult for her to recognize it. She is not only victimized by her lover’s evil actions, but she also victimizes her husband. When she realizes what is taking place, she calls the police and kills herself. According to Nietzsche’s theory, she could only be submitted to all that because she was weak; therefore, she would never be able to prevent any of that from happening. Even her suicide could be interpreted as a weak reaction; a strong person would have reacted or would have never allowed it to happen.

The lover, who takes the husband’s place, is “brought to trial as the murderer of himself” (85). The audience never gets to know whether the lover is convicted, if he is sentenced to prison or to death. It does not really matter at this point, for he has achieved his goal: he destroyed the husband, and the wife, with his help, killed herself.

The wife could see, at last, that she had been victimized, dehumanized and how she, not only helped, but was also a fundamental tool to her husband’s victimization and dehumanization. The husband, although unaware of his own dehumanization, felt pain and loss because of someone else’s actions. But even this

pain did not bring awareness of the dehumanization process, nor helped the husband prevent it. When the lover becomes the husband, the husband is deprived not only of his life, but also of his humanity because he can no longer be.

From a Nietzschean point of view, the husband would be considered a weak person, as strong people are born to manipulate and not to be manipulated. The only strong character in the B-movie would be the lover. He is in control; he decides what is going to happen. Moreover, he is destroyed because that was also part of his plan. In spite of all that, in Nietzsche's terms, there are no evil actions in the movie script, because evil is the denial of one's true nature. As the lover is strong and the couple is weak, the three characters involved were only obeying their nature.

In Kantian terms, the wife would be both a victim and a perpetrator. She is the lover's victim and the husband's direct perpetrator. Despite that, she is unaware of that fact until the lover gives her the husband's head. Both the wife and the husband are deprived of their human condition. The lover does what he wishes to achieve his happiness. Evil is then present in the B-movie. The actions committed are evil because there is no respect for the others' principle of self-love and the principle of morality.

As for Augustine's ideas of evil and evil actions, the actions described in the B-movie are undoubtedly "not good." However, the lover is not essentially evil in the sense that he was not created in evil; he just chose that which is the lack of good because he is proud, because he does not recognize God as the Supreme Existence. He is not an inhabitant of the City of God as Augustine had idealized it; he is an inhabitant of the City of Men as portrayed in the B-movie, which the narrator claims to have come from "given life," from "uncanny resonances with everyday truth" (51). In the B-movie, everyday life, with its good and evil, inspires and serves as raw

material for fictional creation. The narrator makes it clear that even though the B-movie is fiction, it could only be written because there are similar events in everyday life.

The couple is in a certain way weak or is made weak by the lover. According to Augustine's point of view, the couple's weakness comes from a situation that they could not prevent from happening. The husband can be considered weak because he is drawn to anything his wife wants if it will improve his status. He is vain. He never finds out what happened; he finds the lover in his house, unaware that he is his wife's lover. He sees a man exactly like himself but does not realize he is the victim of a perverse plan. His wife is also weak. She did not realize her lover's intentions and even if she had, she would not care about it. She even trained herself not to question their relationship; she became addicted to the danger he had become to her (33-34).

She was easy to manipulate because she wanted to be free but the freedom she found was a complete subjection to her lover's desires. People are not born morally weak or strong; they acquire a weak or strong morality throughout their lives, and they are always able to change their condition if they want to. The wife is made weak by the lover's manipulative force. Both the husband and the wife are responsible for their positions as victims, which does not diminish the lover's responsibility as a perpetrator.

The husband's reaction is passive; in fact, he can do nothing. The wife, on the other hand, has an active reaction. As she cannot undo or erase everything that had happened, she reports the lover to the police and takes her own life. Telling the police can be a way of preventing the lover from doing anything like that again. Committing suicide is her only way out, for she would also be punished as an accomplice. She is aware of what happened but she cannot tell the police that her

fake husband, who is in fact her lover, has killed her real husband. They would think she is insane because of the lover's appearance being the same as her late husband. Then, she "calls the police to tell them her husband has murdered the derelict camped outside their house and that they will have all the evidence they need hanging from a string of beads around her neck" (84). The evidence is not shown in the novel and no one will ever know exactly what the wife's opinion about her own case was.

The lover, on the other hand, the indirect and effective perpetrator, is stronger than the other two characters. He creates the destructive situation by manipulating the wife. He is a Nietzschean man, who believes he is serving his own nature and that evil would be to deny it. He is conscious of the reason-giving force, the principle of morality, and the moral reality that would prevent him from following his principle of self-love regardless of anything else. The lover is aware that everything he does is to dehumanize the couple just because he takes pleasure in it. He knows he is perpetrating evil actions that will cause terror.

There is no essential good or evil nature in the couple and the lover. The lover perpetrates evil actions and the wife helps him. The difference between them is that the wife does not have an evil intention, and she suffers loss and harm because of these actions, which also makes her a victim. She does not harm the husband directly; she helps her lover do what he plans. The lover is responsible for the evil actions, and though he chooses evil, he is not essentially so.

The lover's thoughts are in the future tense, and they become predictions as the story goes. The lover even predicts the wife's reaction to his plan:

> If residual feelings of affection in the form of pity or terror will operate in her, perhaps to the point of revealing the truth to him, so

> that even at risk of criminal indictment of herself, she will bring down the whole beautiful work of art to a crashing conclusion. (51)

He recognizes that his "work of art" may cause terror and criminal indictment. The lover does not lack "the reason-giving force"; he knows and recognizes it as a rule in society but does not care about it.

The perpetrator does not normalize his evil actions. He means to do evil because he feels pleasure in doing so. His great skill is to do so in a way that his victims do not perceive themselves being victimized and dehumanized. They do not see evil, but the perpetrator is aware that what he is doing is evil, because it is the reason why he is doing it.

In *City of God*, the narrator of the B-movie reminds the reader several times that he is describing a fictional story. Although it could be based on some real evil actions, the people and the actions he describes are fictional. For instance, when the lover undergoes a plastic surgery, the narrator gives no information about this operation, because "this cannot be a story about details. It cannot depend on a realistic presentation of thoughtful worked out details to prop up its credibility" (51). The narrator does not count on details or verisimilitude to build his narrative because

> The movie should operate in the abstract realm where practical matters give way to uncanny resonances with everyday truth. Because evil as it is most often committed comes from the given life [. . .] it is not usually a thing of such high-concept deviance and requiring such extensive planning to perform. (51)

Evil is part of everyday life the same way good is, and anyone is able to commit evil because it does not need to be planned by a pervert or genius; ordinary people may be able to perpetrate any kind of evil action if he chooses to do so.

In other words, the movie is a reading of everyday truth/ life and evil does not usually come from sick or genius minds, it is taken out of life, it is natural in the sense that it is part of human nature, as McGinn would say; it is one of humankind's characteristics. It is essential in the sense that evil is an inner characteristic, but people are not evil or good, they choose to do good or evil according to their necessity to fulfill their principle of self-love. Augustine does not agree on the fact that men are neither good nor evil; for him, men are made good. But he agrees with McGinn and other philosophers on the idea that men choose to do evil or good. Augustine does not believe that evil is part of human nature, men choose evil in terms of reason, but it is not in their nature which is all good. They are able to choose evil because they are free to choose and act as they please because of their own wills and desires and men do not always choose to act in obedience to God. The explanation to why men would choose to disobey God's commandments is based on pride, which is the beginning of all sin.

From a secular point of view, this explanation would be that some people have an inner censorship in order to restrict their principles of self-love so that in their search for happiness and pleasure they do not violate other people's principle of self-love; others do not have any censorship, which seems to be case of the lover in the B-movie. Then, at the same time, the narrator wants the reader to understand that the B-movie is not true, that it is fiction, he reminds his audience that it could only be written because there is the "everyday truth" to give him the requested materials. And there is an audience to watch it. It has become so normal that the narrator ends the script by saying that what was supposed to be "a tale of subtle existential horror turns out to be a simple waxworks melodrama" (85). As in life, "a sociopath can never show restraint but must go on [. . .] in ever greater amplitude of his evil until

he is destroyed" so must the author let his character do until his character too is destroyed. This is why the movie is so appealing and sociopaths become movie stars. It has all become "natural and normal" (51).

Evil actions have become normalized because they are part of a "normality" of violence and dehumanization proper to the City of Men, which are repetitive and common practices in a city/world where people lack the respect for the group's "reason-giving force." And this portrait of life, though fictional, does not resemble the City of God in any aspect, quite the contrary. Then, besides being a response to Augustine's work, the B-movie section is an example of how the novel is also a critique, exaggerated perhaps but very much alike the City of Men ordinary people know and go to the movies to watch. In addition, it is an example of how the media, in this case, the movies use evil as a way to entertain people; because they entertain themselves watching evil, it becomes again normalized, this time by the audience. This is a barbarity, "a simulacrum of violence" (75) emerging from both passion and screen, as barbarities in the 20th century, Baudrillard reminds us.

3.2. The Vietnam War Story

As wars are part of human history, their frequent occurrence institutionalizes the evil actions of the participants, which become normal. The Vietnam War story is a nameless veteran's monologue about the conflict. He starts by introducing himself as a person unable to walk because he was "gut shot" (216) during the war. The story is narrated as a poem with no interruptions from his interlocutor. It is clear that the war veteran is talking to Everett because of the references to secondhand war stories from his father and his brother, but never referring to his own war stories (215). The veteran refers to Everett as "one of the lucky bastards who seem / to have slipped the

formation / that has marched quick time to this moment" (215), not having gone to war, not having lived through its horrors. This refers to what Everett says about himself in the "Author's Bio" section. He is "an observer obscurely situated / apart from all the huge historical terrors" (128), that is, the wars, the mass extermination of people in which his father and brother have taken part.

Everett wants a story about the Vietnam War. Although based on a real event, this is a fictionalized narrative, just like the B-movie. The story is divided into two periods: the past events in Vietnam, and the present moment when the veteran is telling Everett about it. He starts the story from the present, talking about his physical condition, the fact that he goes to this bar because of the "dark blue light" (215), and the fact that he does not have any notion of time there. Regular costumers know what he looks like and do not stare at or feel sorry for him. A woman in jeans smoking Marlboros does not care about him either, but she would take him to a room in the back, and in these moments, the war veteran feels that there is no history, he feels that time stops. He talks about his story and history as an amount of what happened before and after, "as in before when I had legs and after" (216). He talks about Saigon, Vietnam, about the whores whom the soldiers thought of as pieces of meat, war meat, just like themselves. The whores in Saigon "laughed as if they really liked whoring" (216) and the soldiers fought as if they really wanted to fight.

The veteran even talks about the Second World War, which he knows was not easy, but says that in that war soldiers were fighting for a cause. Justified by their cause, he says that Second World War's soldiers may find some forgiveness for all the harm and pain they caused and suffered. In the Vietnam War, there is no looking for forgiveness; the veteran did not fight for a cause, and does not even consider to have fought a war. The Vietnam War was just life and "everything that made military

sense was / irrelevant" (217). The veteran talks about natural and man-made evils and dangers of his war. He recognizes he was no angel and killed anyone who needed to be killed. He knows that, even though he was there to do everything he did, all of it was evil. The veteran says, "This was not war, this was life as it is / and was and always will be / as God gave it to us" (219). He was a perpetrator because he saw his victims as objects, dehumanizing them. He was also a victim because he had his humanity violated. Everyone in Vietnam War was following their principle of self-love, which was to survive, and to do that everyone had to forget the principle of morality. They were both evil doers and victims.

Two kinds of evil actions are at work here. The evil actions perpetrated by the soldiers in order to survive and the other kind of evil actions perpetrated by the government that sees soldiers as toys, as objects to be manipulated. In the first type, the soldiers are victims and perpetrators for they suffer harm and cause harm, though their motivation is not evil. In the second type, the soldiers are the victims and the government is the perpetrator, an official, institutional perpetrator. In both cases, the perpetrators knew that what they did was evil, and the victims knew what they were suffering. The evil actions perpetrated in these two moments are perceived as evil and at the same time are considered normal by the war veteran, as he tells Everett his story.

He talks about evil as part of life both in a spiritual sense, originated from God, and in a natural sense, when he talks about the predators, the preys, and the violin spider. In the spiritual sense, he develops the thought that if there is God, he must have made everything there is in the world, good or evil. And if the war actually happened, God may have allowed it. If there is evil in the world, God gave it together with life. This opposes the veteran's philosophy to Augustine's, who thinks

of evil as non-existent. The veteran, based on everything he reports about the war, can only think of evil as real and concrete. But Augustine would say that this evil and these evil actions happen because of men's wills and desires and not because God created them in evil. Doctorow's *City of God* does not only answer Augustine's *City of God* but also depicts a reality in which it is difficult to deny the existence of evil actions. Augustine does not believe people can be evil in essence; in fact, the will is evil and cause an evil action (*City* 12.6). In the Vietnam War case, the will is of survival; there is no evil will and yet there are evil actions. There is a war, the enemy is supposed to be killed and the soldier must guard his own life. This is what the war veteran does: he fights obeying the purpose of war, killing those who are enemies and trying to keep himself alive. They were fighting for their own survival; they did not consider each other's humanity because they were not considered humans either.

In a natural context, evil manifests in the struggle of the strong against the weak, evoking Nietzsche's ideas. The strong would be the predators, those who were born to rule, to dominate, and the preys would be the weak ones, who were born to be ruled. In this case, there are no predetermined predators and preys. The predators are the ones who could keep themselves alive and killing; the preys are the ones who would be killed. From a Nietzschean point of view, this would not be evil, but good; evil is the denial of one's own nature. Predators and preys fulfilling their genetic destinies would be natural. From the veteran's point of view, this is not good; he acknowledges it as natural but considers it evil, as evil is one of the many characteristics humans and animals may have. He shares the same ideas as Kant and McGinn. However, humans and animals differ: humans have reason, and reason restricts their instincts, it does not, however, restrains men's wills to perpetrate evil.

Animals follow their instincts. What would be considered evil in human relations is instinctive, natural and cannot be prevented in animal relations, as animals are not able to reason. The violin spider's tale, for example, is a legend that the veteran considers true. He sees it as the "chief arachnid of the satanic kingdom / of the earth" (219), its web woven in the middle of the jungle and supposed to get not only insects but also "crawling pests and small animals" (219). Once the web traps a man, it is impossible for him to release himself. The spider "spins around him with incredible speed" (219) and soon he is tightly woven, unable to move or pull the trigger. Then, the spider begins to suck the victim's blood. Everett seems not to believe in the violin spider's case, but the veteran tells him about "the browned desanguinated bodies" he found "lying flat, like bladders" (220). The violin spider fulfills its genetic fate. It does not kill for pleasure, but to keep itself alive.

The veteran concludes his monologue talking about a monument for the victims of the violin spider. He asks "how can there be [a monument] – monuments are for wars / and this was not a war, [. . .] but life objective, impartial" (220). Here life, the war, and the violin spider are the same thing. The violin spider can be a metaphor for the Vietnam War. The war is life as it is, and therefore there is no way to get rid of it or to avoid it, once one is trapped there is no way back. The veteran describes evilness as natural in the violin spider, just like in the Vietnam War and in life in general. They represent natural and spiritual evil as existent, showing predators and preys, victims and perpetrators, the strong and the weak fulfilling their destinies, playing their roles in the City of Men of which evil is part. However, because the violin spider is a legend, associating it with the Vietnam War reveals the lie behind the veteran's – and the government's – justification of war as a natural

evil. Even if the violin spider did exist, its actions would not be evil, because they are instinctive. That is not true for the war because it is not instinctive.

There can be no monument for this kind of thing. The veteran considers evil an integral part of the world and of all living beings, and in spite of that, he does not think it is something to be proud of. He thinks that "when we consider the varieties of life on this / satanic planet, [. . .] we can hardly congratulate ourselves for being one of them" (220). Thus ends his monologue. He does think evil is part of life and of human nature, which does not serve as an excuse for perpetrating evil actions. He refers to the world as a "satanic planet," a naturally evil place and he is not proud of it. In a certain way, he agrees with Everett that evil comes from "given life" and does not need any "high-concept deviance" or "extensive planning" (51) to be performed. Humans are varieties of life in a fallen planet and, therefore, they do not need to make any extra efforts to perform an evil act. Despite believing evil is a human characteristic, he does not want it perpetrated. However, he does not talk about how to control or prevent evil actions. Things are as they are and nothing can be done about it. His opinion may seem very pessimistic because evil is seen as uncontrollable and humans are considered unable to prevent themselves from doing evil. The veteran believes humans are incapable of reasoning and deciding which way to act, good or evil. In fact, there may be times when humans really cannot reason or moments when they can but evil is the only way out, as in the Vietnam War. In other moments, people do not realize that what they are doing is evil, as the wife failed to do in the B-movie. Other features also interfere in the interpretation and perception of an action as evil, such as time and the person's involvement with the situation. But all of this does not assure humankind's incapacity to prevent evil actions. Evil actions are often prevented and resisted.

In the present, things are different. The veteran can understand that he was also war meat and had been dehumanized and that none of it was normal. He cannot forgive his own actions, neither the one perpetrated against him. He is then able to understand that wars are not normal because they dehumanize those who fight. He understands now that humans have evil within and sometimes they make evil choices. Nevertheless, evil should not be normalized because it violates the one thing that differentiates human beings from animals: their humanity.

For Augustine, the City of Men is indeed a satanic place, where men must live before they can go to the kingdom of heaven. This city serves "the rebellious angels, the devil, and his demons" (12.1). In spite of that, men are just as perfect as any of the angels created by God because He created both in good and they can be perfect "during their pilgrimage on earth" (12.1) which is the only way to go to the City of God afterwards. Although men were made perfect, they are subject to change because they were not made out of God, but out of nothing and they were given the power to choose between evil and good (12.1). From this point of view, evil should not be perpetrated, not because of the others' principle of self-love or the principle of morality, but because it disobeys God's commandments for men's pilgrimage on earth.

3.3. Normalization

The victims and perpetrators in the B-movie and the Vietnam War story perceive evil actions as such. In both stories, evil actions have become normalized because they are part of a series of acts of violence and dehumanization proper to the City of Men where such are common practices because people lack the respect for the group's "reason-giving force" and people's humanity. The difference is that the

lover does not normalize his actions and the veteran, as a perpetrator, in the past, does. But, in spite of normalizing them, the veteran understands later that these actions are not normal. As a victim, the veteran recognizes that evil exists and that it is part of humanity, but he acknowledges that this should not be a reason or a justification for the normalization of evil. In the B-movie case, the wife thinks evil is normal, and when she understands it should not be so, she is so involved with it that her only way out is death. Moreover, this portrait of life, though fictional, does not resemble Augustine's *City of God* in any aspect; quite the contrary, this is a world where evil does not only exist but is a constitutive part.

4. The World War and the Ex-*Times* Guy

The characters in the tales of the Second World War and the ex-*Times* guy in Doctorow's *City of God* apparently do not perceive evil actions for what they are. This failed perception normalizes the evil actions described. The evil actions referring to the Second World War that Sarah's father narrates are at the same time interpreted as evil and seen as normal, daily actions. In the ex-*Times* guy story, evil actions are normalized and, therefore, how people see and deal with evil. The newspapers publish the evil actions; people read them and move on to the next story.

4.1. The Second World War Account

Sarah's father introduces his family, where they used to live, what they used to do for a living, and how the war affected and changed their lives. It is a partial account of the situation in the Kovno ghetto presented from the point of view of Sarah's father as a child. The perpetrators are present only as the ones doing the actions; they have no voice, no chance to justify or explain their evil doing, their motivations, or feelings about it. Therefore, the set of actions regarding the Second World War will only be analyzed and discussed from the point of view of the victims, especially Sarah's father. Psychological aspects will not be considered here, only in those cases when they are essential to the discussion and explanation of the normalization of evil actions. The Holocaust will be discussed in terms of evil actions and not as the historical mark it certainly is in the 20th century; nor will the account of Sarah's father be considered testimonial literature because, even though it is based on "given life," it is a fictional account.

Sarah's father lived in Ulm with his parents and a younger sister, Maria. Before the war started, they moved to Munich where he went to school and took violin lessons. There are comments on his teachers and their teaching methods; on how, from these methods, he learned "the Germanic principle of education from tyranny" (45); on what can be considered "a culture of socially respectable anti-Semitism" (45). The narrator does not mention the beginning of the war, nor how Sarah's father and his family ended up in the ghetto. He talks about his teachers and "a moment later: the Holocaust" (52-53). There is no transition from one moment to another; suddenly He is a runner in the Kovno ghetto whose function is to carry news, instructions, or messages and to observe the ghetto to report anything that happens there.

Sarah's father talks about his parents, their life in the ghetto, and how one day they leave for work and never return. After that, his name is changed to Yehoshua Mendelssohn, as he becomes a tailor's grandson and moves to his house. When S.S. Schmitz kills the tailor, the council is unable to relocate him and he moves to a room in the council building, where some of the other runners sleep. The council, composed of Jews selected by the Germans, is responsible for the ghetto administration and for the communication and negotiation between Jews and S.S. officials. Sarah's father also talks about two council members, Dr. Koenig and Mr. Barbanel. Koenig is a sort of maximum representative of the Jews and is responsible for everything in the ghetto; Barbanel is the man who writes the diary that Sarah's husband, Joshua, tries to find years later. Sarah's father knows about this diary because he is the one who carries parts of it to their hiding place, which is at first in the ghetto and later in the city outside the ghetto.

Some Jew members of the resistance visit the ghetto offering to lead as many people as possible out of there and into the woods, where they have been living since the beginning of the war. The council decides to help those in Kovno who want to take a chance, but no one could predict what would happen to the resistance members. Besides, escaping is not easy, and when the Germans start losing the war, it becomes impossible, as the Nazis' control of the ghetto gets tighter and more difficult to break away from.

The Jews do not know for certain what will happen to them; some believe they will all be exterminated; others think they are just moving to another ghetto. After some time, the ghetto is evacuated and the boy is put into a boxcar. He recognizes some of the people who are there with him, notices a girl next to him who dies in the train and this is the end of his account; he does not say where he ended up or what happened to him there; he survives and that is all.

People in the ghetto are dehumanized; the Nazis never see them as victims/persons, but always as victims/objects. The Germans dispose of their lives as they please. First, the yellow star on their clothes identifies them. They have to be identified like animals because they are inferior. Later, they are moved to ghettos where they live not only in the worst material conditions – no food, hygiene, or comfort – but also in the worst psychological conditions – no self-respect, no self-esteem, afraid of everything. They do not eat properly; they work long hours, are constantly deceived, and live under the threat of imminent death. No one knows when and why they will be killed. They know what is happening is evil, that life is different from that but they cannot react, as they have no strength or they do not hope to succeed, or even because they do not think it can be better. They get used to living like that.

This is a general description of the situation in the Kovno ghetto. Putting the Jews in the ghetto is the first evil action of all. In his report, Sarah's father describes several "moments of the purest terror" (55), moments in which evil is evident and still nothing is done against it. He is able to see the terror, "the particular horror" (59) of living in a ghetto under such circumstances but he is unable to react against it either because he does not feel he has the strength or hope to succeed or because he is only a child. Time passes and he is increasingly exposed to evil. He knows that "more and more of the normal things of life were taken away" (57), but that is the life they have and they go on living as if all they are going through is normal. The first particular evil action is the Germans burning the hospital because some of the patients are ill with typhus and they fear the contagion that would decimate the labor force. They surround the hospital and set it on fire with more than sixty-five people inside, among them twenty-three children. The boy calls it a particular horror and because of it, his father resigns from his position in the council; he does not want his "complicity in a life of helpless subjugation" (59) to continue.

The Jews never know what is about to happen until it does, and, according to the boy's father, the Nazis liked to amuse themselves disrespecting the Jews' humanity with the excuse that "it is wartime and things that are regrettable are nonetheless unavoidable" (60). The father calls the evil actions happening in the ghetto "the ungovernable forces of terror" (59) and says they must end. He thinks the council needs to protest, but some time after the hospital episode "emotions had become numb" (60). This event at first awakens the Jews' forgotten humanity and need to protest but as they can do nothing effectively about it, after some time it is as if everything is forgotten, as if they no longer had emotions. They become numb and the evil they suffer becomes part of their lives. They know their situation is not

normal or morally right but they are so exposed to it and the possibilities of reacting are so remote that they stop thinking about it as evil; indeed, they seem to have stopped thinking about it at all. It becomes routine and their concern is only to survive.

The Germans start selecting some people to work in the factories and the boy's parents think of volunteering, but the people who are selected are shot to death. He does not know whether his parents volunteered, but they left for work and never came back. This is when Sarah's father has his name changed and goes live with Srebnitsky, a tailor who is now supposed to be his grandfather. The tailor receives an order to sew a uniform to S.S. Schmitz and this bothers him. He, now Yehoshua, knows that "it violated the rule to remain anonymous as possible" (75) and because, if the tailor's abilities can keep them alive, this kind of exposure can also kill them both. When Schmitz goes to Srebnitsky's house to receive his uniform, the German laughs at what he considers a joke, "a Jew expecting to be paid" (76). Srebnitsky decides not to accept this dehumanization, not to take this situation of slavery as normal. He had been deprived of his own life a long time ago; dying could only free him. The tailor, in an act of protest and anger, slashes the uniform and is killed because of that. The boy watches the whole scene and is unable to do anything about it; otherwise, he would also have been killed. He runs to the council to save himself.

The Jews normalize the evil they suffer by not reacting to it and by ignoring the evil that other Jews suffer in order to keep themselves alive. They see people dying and being tortured but cannot do anything about it, in fear of also being tortured and killed. In a certain way, they have to cope with what the Germans do if they want to live. They normalize both the actions of which they are victims and the actions they see happening to other Jews. Reacting against any of the Nazi's evil acts

is always met with severe punishment of the one who reacted and sometimes of others who are not involved in it and whose only crime is to have been born a Jew.

Because of this, after the tailor's episode, the Jews in the ghetto are concerned with the punishment everyone would receive. When it is announced that the tailor would be hanged in the town square, where his body would remain for twenty-four hours, and everyone should be there to watch, people are relieved to know that no one else will have to pay for the tailor's disobedience. The Germans take every opportunity to show their power and cruelty. This is the first time Yehoshua sees the members of the council discussing a punishment. "In a sense," to his young eyes, "their calmness, the effect it had on me, was to propose that what was happening was routine, as if this terrible power of the Germans over us were normal" (79). This is the first time he sees the council functioning and it disturbs him, for he notices how everything in the ghetto has become usual, how the council does not really decide anything, and how important it is to follow certain rules, even if they disturb one's humanity, not to cause greater evil, greater damage. He learns how the ghetto works, how the Jews are commodities the Nazis negotiate, and puppets they play with to assert their power.

When Yehoshua is sent to the city to hide Mr. Barbanel's diary and is able to compare the urban area with the "pathetic impoverished little slave camp" (101) where they live, he understands the terrible loss he suffered and the "catastrophe that had happened and was still happening" (101). He is so used to life in the ghetto that he cannot even remember, understand, or feel his personal catastrophe, until he compares it with something different and better. The conditions in the ghetto somehow erases the Jews' previous lives, making them so busy with the concern of staying alive that they do not stop to think how they have been enslaved, how they

had their principle of self-love and morality erased from their minds, how their humanity has been violated in such a way they forget they are human and should be treated as such. Their personal, social, and economical catastrophe is so constant and seems so inherent to them that they stop interpreting it as such, normalizing the evil they are suffering. In Jean Baudrillard's terms, evil has become transparent.

As the Germans begin losing the war and have to hide their killing, Jews are selected to work in the fort digging graves and burning human remains. The feeling in the ghetto, however, is not of relief or expectation of freedom. They do not know what is about to happen and the possibility of finally being freed is in fact dangerous. All the enslaved Jews, dead or alive, are evidence of Nazi crimes, and these crimes can only be hidden if the Jews are exterminated. The members of the resistance visit the ghetto, offering a possibility of escape and criticizing the council's position in relation to all that has happened. The partisans think that in a certain way, the council copes with the Nazis, and perhaps they do, but this is how they keep themselves and the other Jews in the ghetto alive. They also fight and look for freedom, but in the partisans' opinion, they have been slaves for such a long time that they do not notice it anymore. Indeed, they have normalized their condition in the ghetto; in this case, however, normalizing it is not necessarily an escape but a protection and a way to go through all that. They are somehow resisting. People have different motivations and different reactions; even the lack of reaction is a response to all the suffering inflicted on them.

Some of the Jews escape to the forest with the resistance, but there comes a time when escaping is no longer possible and they are moved from the ghetto. Put into boxcars; they do not eat, drink, or see anything outside the train in their long trip. Yehoshua tries to remember the names of the people he knows who are in the

boxcar with him. He stops his account at this point of his own degradation and leaves the story and his comments behind him, as if that happened in another life, because even if he was able to turn and look at the people he once knew,

> what of them would I have recognized at this time of their degradation, when like myself they had been sundered from their names, when their beings were undone, when whatever they had been was in process of industrial transfiguration, when all together we were no more than a suspension of disjunctive torments of the living dying and stiffened dead of that boxcar? (143)

As he says, the Jews in the boxcar are living dead; they do not own their lives. Deprived of their houses, their families, their professions, their names, they are deprived of their humanity. They are commodities in a boxcar moving on to the industries of death. Some of them have numbers tattooed in their arms as objects that are identified by the owners, numbers they will never be able to erase from their skin or minds. Their beings are undone, and no one knows if they will survive. Sarah's father is unable to erase his past in the ghetto. Even now that he is a free man who could start a new life, with a wife and a daughter, whom he thinks are his blessing and consolation, he still remembers Yehoshua, his "constant companion, the shadow of my unlived past, the other-named boy of my lost history" (93). Yehoshua is a shadow of a life he did not live, of history lost forever.

Sarah's father and the other Jews have their principle of self-love disturbed because they do not act, while in the ghetto, in search of their happiness or pleasure. The Nazis violate the principle of morality because they do not respect the Jews' principle of self-love; they do not consider the Jews as victims/persons but as victims/objects ruling those lives to accomplish their purpose of destroying a nation.

The acts described are evil because the victims are dehumanized. In addition, these acts are normalized because these victims do not act against them, and end up failing to interpret them as evil. In this case they do know the actions are evil, but the circumstances are so peculiar that they get used to them in such a way that there is no other life they can recognize and becoming numb is a way to show resistance in the sense that nothing hurts anymore; there are no emotions, everything is normal.

The war is over, the survivors are freed, and some Nazi generals and members of the army are judged and convicted for crimes against humanity and other accusations. Others move from their country, change their names, and start a new life because there is not enough evidence to arrest and convict them. This is what happens to S.S. Schmitz, who, years later, would be killed by the ex-*Times* guy.

4.2. The Ex-*Times* Guy Story

The ex-reporter story starts suddenly; its nameless protagonist is a retired reporter, who used to work for the *Times*, had "a middling career" (184), never wrote anything really important or successful, nor was ever indicated to any important position. One month after his retirement, the ex-reporter misses the routine, the newspaper. At the same time, surprised by the outside world, he understands that the paper only mediates some of what happens in real life, "it is a simulacrum of the life of the world" (185). Now this man is "released into the dimensions of unmediated reality" (185), in a way that enables him to see and feel the world instead of reading or writing it.

The ex-reporter stops shaving, lets his hair grow, and goes out on the streets like a mad man observing people in their real lives. He tries to get rid of the rules that guide his life. This, however, does not set him free, for he still misses routine. When

he considers calling his ex-wife, he understands his need to do something about his life, and thinks of a plan of action that ends up being his motivation to live.

The ex-*Times* guy concludes that newspapers tell stories without closure and are always replaced by other stories that are never ended either. He thinks about the fact that people may have their trials and may be punished, people may die, and obituaries may be written for them. However, some obituaries are more important than others and he thinks about people such as Hitler and Stalin, whose death saved them from any possible punishment. He questions the fact that their crimes will never be "charged to them in the awesome voice of a God-inspired civilization" (186). At this point, Everett interrupts his narration to comment that the law does not have a punishment that would serve for such terrible crimes as the ones committed by such people. Because of that, the ex-*Times* person decides he is going to give closure to the evil people's open stories. He decides to be "the closure man" (187), and calls his ex-colleagues to ask for the clips to choose the stories he is going to complete. The first one is the story of S.S. Schmitz, the sergeant who commanded the Kovno ghetto.

The ex-reporter flies to Cincinnati, checks in at a hotel, rents a car, and walks around the city to get acquainted with the place and the people. He decides to buy a bike because he cannot observe things from the inside of a car. On his first day riding a bike, he runs over an elderly man, who happens to be S.S. Schmitz, and kills him. He runs away, throws the bike in the garbage, and flies back to New York. While reading a newspaper on the plane, he finds the news of a man who was killed by a biker. A witness to his crime could not give exact descriptions. No one would find out he is the biker who killed the S.S. commandant.

The ex-*Times* guy is now “a self-certified killer” and holds “his head up a bit more these days” (232). He feels prouder of himself, starts working out and gets himself a girlfriend. He is a changed man and will continue with his plan. The next on his list is a former death squad commander from Guatemala who owns a restaurant in Queens. In his third visit to the restaurant, the commander, accompanied by two men, approach him because they thought he was suspicious. He tells them he is the avenging angel; they have a fight; he spits on the colonel, who falls off his chair and hits his head on the floor. The ex-*Times* reporter runs away. The next morning, while reading the *Times*, he learns he has killed the colonel. This is the end of the ex-*Times* guy story, as sudden as its beginning.

The protagonist is an ordinary man with an ordinary life who, all of a sudden, starts ending stories and becomes the “closure man.” He does not just decide to end *any* story; he chooses the stories of people who should have been punished for crimes they had committed. The two stories he ends are the tales of two men who killed innocent people for their countries’ sake. Some would believe that Nazi officers had no choice but to obey the orders. In fact, they did everything they did because they chose to; they believed they were doing the right thing. The Jews were dehumanized and the officers considered that the evil they were perpetrating was for the good of their nation; in other words, evil had become banal in the sense that it was justified by a greater good. Guillermo, the Guatemalan death squad commander who “presumed to decimate the intellectual class of a country for the country’s sake while managing to murder villagefulls of peasants in the bargain” (234), also thought he was doing good, not considering his victims as human beings either.

The ex-*Times* guy perpetrates evil actions intentionally, choosing these two stories among many others because he thinks people should be punished for their

crimes in such a “God-inspired civilization.” When he chooses to punish those men for their evil actions, he is also perpetrating evil actions and his motivation is similar to those of his victims. In his opinion, he is doing good by punishing them. He hides himself, runs away to escape identification and interrogation, as he knows that, if discovered, he is going to be punished. He is also an evil doer who justifies his actions saying they are for the better, as Schmitz and Guillermo, who are responsible for killing thousands of people, did.

Several evil acts must be taken into consideration here: the two murders perpetrated by the ex-*Times* guy; the dehumanization of the Jews in the Kovno ghetto by the Nazis, especially S.S. Schmitz; and the killing of peasants in Guatemala, guided by Guillermo. These actions are both normalized and banalized. These three men know that what they are doing is evil but they do it in the name of a greater good. Schmitz’s and Guillermo’s evil actions will be considered here only as a motivation for the ex-*Times* guy to kill them. The actions can be considered evil because there are perpetrators who intend to act exactly the way they did. There are victims who are dehumanized, suffering the destitution of themselves as persons, and a moral reality that would go against the perpetration of such actions. Thus, the actions are evil.

The reader is aware of S.S. Schmitz’s story because Sarah’s father reports his life in the ghetto. The reader is told how he used to act, how he used to see the Jews under his command. He would kill anyone he thought was necessary without hesitation. He perpetrated several evil acts in Kovno that are considered here as a major evil action: the execution of Jews. The Guatemalan colonel story comes to the reader by the ex-reporter. In both stories, the officers do not apparently feel guilty because they do what they have to do. However, one cannot say they are evil people

considering only their evil actions. The ex-reporter victims may have thought of their actions as evil but they justify them stating that they had to do evil things for their countries' causes. There is no evidence in the text that Schmitz took any pleasure in doing evil. The victims may have perceived their past actions as evil, but had to do them no matter what.

In both assassinations, the ex-*Times* guy had the intention to do evil, even if he claimed he was punishing these men. Accidentally or not, he causes the two deaths. Riding the bike and spitting are not done with the intention of killing the men, but whether the ex-reporter intended to kill the victims with such acts, killing them was his purpose to begin with. He dehumanizes them when he decides he can dispose of their lives as he pleases. In spite of intentionally good, he recognizes that his actions do not respect the principle of morality, because the group he lives in considers murder a crime. He also disrespects the two men's principle of self-love from the moment he does not let them search for their happiness. He is led by his own principle of self-love; "he is feeling bold, suicidal" (235), alive, and *happy* in the new task he had proposed himself.

From a Kantian perspective, the protagonist perpetrates evil; he knows he has disrespected these two principles but he believes he is doing something good for the world. Therefore, he justifies his own evil actions and becomes equal to the men he has murdered. However, from a Nietzschean perspective, the three men could not be considered evil because they were killing those people – they believed they had to kill them. They were obeying their strong nature, using their power; therefore, they cannot be thought of as evil.

None of the three perpetrators in question lacks the perception of the moral reality, or the "reason-giving force," as Garrard calls it. They know exactly what they

did, they know what the group's perceptions of their actions are, and they just think it is right to act that way. However, they are not good or evil persons. They had done evil in certain circumstances and may have done good in others. They banalize their evil actions as they justify them by saying they do it for a good purpose.

There is also normalization of the evil actions but not by the victims or perpetrators. Schmitz does not even have the time to know he is going to be killed. Guillermo tries to react and does not really expect the "avenging angel" to kill him. Evil becomes normal when the paper publishes the assassinations as just two other stories. Our real world is translated into the media world. The ex-*Times* guy, who is fresh out of the mediated reality, who started to have access to the life of the world, ends up reading his evil actions and knowing how they were actually evil through "the simulacrum of the unmediated life." He could only know what he had really done because someone published it. The act of publishing it turns it into something normal.

The media, in this case the newspaper, publishes a story taken from the real world. When the readers have access to the story it has become part of the simulacrum of real life, and it seems normal because they read stories like those everyday. Somehow, people have accepted evil and evil stories have become part of their lives and do not shock them anymore. The stories do not even deserve a special place in the newspaper. In spite of interpreting murder as evil and a crime according to its moral reality, the group seems to have become numb; it acts as if "what was happening was routine" (79). The group normalizes crime and, consequently, evil becomes transparent, invisible.

4.3. The Perpetrators in the City of Men

The two evil actions described in this chapter show perpetrators who could choose which way to act and chose evil because they had a greater good in mind. However, it is not possible to say whether they took any pleasure in doing so. They perpetrated evil actions that were normalized either by their victims, as in the Second World War account, or by the media, as in the ex-*Times* guy story. In addition, these two accounts are cases in which the evil actions perpetrated are banalized by their perpetrators.

As Augustine states, men choose their path regardless, and they choose to perpetrate evil because they do not want to do what is good or what is good is not attractive enough. In the ex-reporter's case, good did not seem attractive, he needed something more from life and decided to play God and punish those who needed to be punished in a "God inspired civilization"; this is men using God's name to perpetrate evil, as Pem says in his wedding speech. In the colonels' case, they perpetrated evil with the conviction they were doing something necessary and good for their nations – God is not mentioned – there is no evidence, however, of their taking pleasure in killing all those people; they were obeying orders from above, not from God, though.

The three of them, even though they believed they would achieve a greater good, acted against the rules of God and of the City of Men, which, in spite of serving evil and the demons, created rules of its own in which murder is not permitted. Although they are aware of that, they do not refrain from perpetrating evil, they not only disrespect the earthly city's rules but also live their lives according to their own will and that, according to Augustine, is sinful.

5. The City of God and the City of Men

This chapter will contrast the two different lines of thought present in the novel, Everett's – the skeptical one – and Pem's – the religious one – in order to show how the City of Men described by Doctorow relates to Augustine's City of God; how these two characters are representatives of the two cities; and how evil is not only present in the City of Men but also how it is a constitutive part which is normalized by its inhabitants.

5.1. Everett and the City of God

Everett knows that people have accepted evil in such a way that it has become normalized but disagrees with this acceptance and presents a critique about the wars and about evil in the section entitled "Author's Bio" which is supposedly his autobiography. He says very little about himself and very much about his father's and brother's experiences in the First and Second World Wars, respectively. Everett describes what his father told him about the war, but there are no descriptions of evil actions the way they are conceived here. There are no presentations of actions with perpetrators, victims, and intentions objectively signaled. There is not a concrete action in this account, and yet it is an account about evil. Although Everett does not name an action, he discusses evil and evil actions, their consequences, and their being normalized.

Everett starts the section not with his birth, but with his appearance "as a small boy child" (126) in a hospital in the Bronx, New York City. He describes how his father met his mother, how they lived in New York in the year of the Great

Depression, how they had two children “when not many children could be afforded” (127). All this information of time and place are mentioned only to indicate “the slender authority / I have for speaking of this century, / An observer obscurely situated / Apart from all the huge historical terrors” (128). That is, he wants the readers to know the facts of his birth and life so they know that he inhabits this world and is aware of all the historical terrors about to be presented. It is important for the readers to place the narrator as someone like themselves, who did not have an active role in any of these horrors, but acknowledge they happened and understand their seriousness.

The section is divided into two parts, the first one is on First World War, in which his father Ben is a “naval observer of ground-war communications” (130); and the second one, on Second World War, in which his brother Ronald served as a radioman. His family had always been in the communication business, first his grandfather, who “came to America in 1887 and took up the printer’s trade” (130), then his father, brother, and himself once he is a writer. The wars have also been part of his family’s story; he is the only one who did not have to join the army and fight a war. Everett considers the First World War the Great War, as if it were the starting point for something, for his family perhaps, once his parents get married after the war. It is also considered the Great War in Europe, which suffered the destruction that follows a war and took many years to be rebuilt. This war is a starting point for all the historical terrors that took place in the twentieth century.

The First World War is “impressed in the continent’s tectonic plates / under the weight of the bones buried over them” (135); it is impossible to forget and yet it does not help avoid any subsequent terror. On the contrary, men do not seem to have learned anything from that.

Ben returns home to marry Ruth, Everett's mother, having "configured [America] as the promise of the new world, / and supersedent of the historical disaster / that was Europe" (138). America is the new world, an escape from Europe, which had seen so many disasters. After surviving World War I, the world turned its eyes to somewhere else where people could have the hope of starting something new and different from the old world. What could not have been foreseen was all the following tragedies, "all the torturers of the banana republics, island tyrants of the Caribbean and Pacific seas, tribal thugs of Africa" (268), and the Holocaust.

Everett does not give many details about World War I, only talks about his father's functions, how he saved himself "by shouting out orders in Yiddish" (167), the number of soldiers who died during the war and, as in the Vietnam War account, describes some of the horrible things that happened during the war.

Years later, his brother Ronald fights in World War II, while Ben listens to the radio for news about the war, hoping his son will come back home safe. Everett uses the same kind of narrative as used in the World War I account. He says what his brother once told him, including a love affair he had during the war. Ronald also sees and lives many terrible things during Second World War, and almost dies when his plane crashes.

After the plane crashes, Ronald "arrived in a field of the war before, / reopened by an errant shell of this war" (182) and finds bones and skulls there. He is the only one of the crew to survive and is found and taken care of by a French peasant. This is when Everett decides to end his account leaving Ronald "in the war after the war . . . before the war" (183). This is where humans are now, disguising everyday war against poverty, against exploitation, the peace after the previous war waiting for the next one as the world ends day by day, repeatedly.

Ben once tells Everett that “war was the emergent property of human thought, / As stolidity is the emergent property of molecules of oak” (131), that is, war is just as part of human nature as stolidity, strength is a part of the great and solid oak tree; evil is just as part of human nature as good. Europe is the setting chosen to see and outlive all these wars and evils that are printed in its history and land as a tattoo is printed in human skin, never to be erased. One war buries the previous one as if nothing had happened but they are unforgettable the same as they cannot be justified, because once the world saw one first disaster a second could be avoided, but that does not seem to be the logic, and next, Europe becomes a “historical disaster” (138).

A disaster is what happened to all those who died because they were in the wrong place in the wrong time “as some thirty million were in World War Two, / each a packet of terminal agony / for at least one unendurable moment/ and all the loving structures of consciousness / satanically compressed as the world/ came to an end” (178-9). The world ended – First World War – and was rebuilt only so that it could end again – Second World War. There will always be perpetrators and victims, the former ones obeying their principle of self-love regardless of anything or anyone else; the latter ones suffering the violation of their humanity, not being able to act according to their private happiness and watching the moral reality – which would balance the principles of morality and of self-love – be disrespected, regardless. The world has become a historical disaster, not only Europe, because evil is perpetrated repeatedly and nothing ever changes. One war buries the other and that is where humans stand, waiting for the next one, pretending evil does not happen in times of peace; pretending times of peace are not only a break between wars when anything can be an excuse to restart a new war that is nothing but the continuation of the

previous ones when victims fight and die so that the perpetrators can achieve their goals, their private happiness.

Everett is talking about the Jews in the Kovno ghetto, about the ex-*Times* guy trying to make justice with his own hands, about the soldiers in Vietnam who did not really understand what they were doing there, about the wife and the husband who are imprisoned and manipulated by the lover, about perpetrators and victims, about evil and its normalization. Evil is still perpetrated because it is in human nature. Perpetrators will always dehumanize their victims if they are acting according to their principle of self-love; the victims may react, they may realize that what they are suffering is evil. Yet, it may become so habitual and common that reaction is not possible because evil is not even recognized as such, or if it is, it does not shock or cause aversion anymore. Evil is, then, normalized and humankind is as if waiting for the next disaster.

This is Everett with his rational and secular voice about the City of Men, where he was born and raised. He sees evil happening everyday, all the time and it seems uncontrollable, as if nothing could stop it from happening, as if human kind were lost, without any guidance or expectation of something different. His view seems a bit pessimistic, he does not expect men to react, he thinks the world will keep on ending and will never really end. There seems to be no end to all evil and destruction that can be perpetrated by humanity. And for him, that should be unacceptable, but it is quite the opposite: it is not only accepted by people, but also they do not seem to notice it.

This picture of the City of Men somehow reflects Augustine's earthly city, which is the city of evil. He says, "[W]e may speak of two cities, or communities, one consisting of the good, angels as well as men, and the other of the evil" (*City of*

God 12.1). The City of Men is then a place where one is to find evil and evil actions perpetrated by men. However, men do not have evil in their nature, for God created them. He is the Supreme Existence, and everything He creates is good. It is men's will that leads men into evil and sin either because they do not want to do what is right and good or because they do not think it is attractive enough. Augustine believes men tend to sin because of human pride, which is behind all transgressions. Men are too proud to obey and respect God. They were presented with free will and have used it according to their proud will. Men's imperfections and sin do not come from their nature but from their wills and desires, which are sinful.

According to Augustine pride is the beginning of all sin and men need "enlightenment and healing because of Adam's sin" (Schwarz 118). Since then, humanity has been divided into the two communities the Bishop of Hippo talks about and these communities are mixed in the world but they will be separated when the end comes. And although the earthly city is a city of evil, it cannot be left aside because it is necessary for the mortal life, as the heavenly city "leads what we may call a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land" (*City of God* 19.17). In other words, the City of God needs the City of Men because the latter provides humans with material life. The former, however, obeys the laws of God and is grounded on belief and this is what helps maintain men's mortal life in the earthly city, which is a city of the Devil because men do not live their lives based on faith in God.

Augustine states that the City of Men has evil not because of men's nature to do evil. This notion is opposed to all the other ideas so far discussed here; even Everett's statements in relation to men's nature oppose it. Everett believes human beings have evil in their nature and they perpetrate it because it is only natural to

them, which does not mean evil should be perpetrated as it is in the world because, even though it is considered natural, it should be constrained. This is the role of reason, to constrain impulses and instincts so that life in society is made possible. The principle of morality is there to control the human principle of self-love, which should not lead human actions alone. The Bishop also believe men's existing end is to find happiness, but he thinks "there is only one Good which will bring happiness to a rational or intellectual creature; and that Good is God" (12.1). He also states that "the natures which have been perverted as a result of the initiative of an evil choice, are evil in so far as they are vitiated, but not in so far as they are natures, they are good" (12.4). That is, those who do not look for happiness in God, or who do not believe in such happiness would then be considered evil, because they are proud, because they chose not to believe, and not because their natures are evil.

Everett does not believe any of this, he does not believe in the existence of God nor does he think humans are all made good, as Augustine states. But the explanations he finds to the existence of the world, to evil, evil actions and their normalization do not satisfy him. Some men perpetrate evil and some men do not, but why would that be once, from a secular point of view, evil is in the nature of both the men who choose evil and the men who choose good? The answer would be in the question: because they choose to do so. Men perpetrate evil or good because they choose and being natural or not does not interfere in men's choice because if one considers men have a good nature, they have wills and desires that can be perverted. As Augustine believes, "the things he [God] made are good because they were made by him; but they are subject to change, because they were not made out of his being but out of nothing" (12.1). Moreover, if one considers men have evil in their nature, then it is only natural that they choose to perpetrate evil actions because if men act in

the pursuit of happiness and happiness is to perpetrate evil. That is what they will do, regardless.

Augustine recognizes the City of Men and claims it is “necessary for the material aspect of our humanness” (Schwarz 141), but he does not agree with men’s behavior in this city. He believes in a moment of eternal felicity, when there will be no evil, when there will be true glory, a moment that will be given to the worthy and denied to the unworthy (22.30). This is the reason men should “be perfect during their pilgrimage on earth” (15.26) so that they can reach the Kingdom of God, “for what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?” (22.30). There will be an end without end when all will be good, all men will be good, and felicity is to be found. But Everett cannot believe this. He does not think there will be such a moment and he does not believe that all men are good; he believes they can be good and evil, and in spite of not being satisfied with his secular and rational explanations to evil, to human nature, he cannot believe in a religious one either.

5.2. Pem and the City of God

Pem in his wedding speech presents a religious and still hopeful picture of the City of Men defending the possibility of a City of God. In the end of the novel, he converts to Judaism, marries Sarah Blumenthal, and at their wedding party gives a speech. He starts his speech talking about his conversion and marriage and about the events that allowed him to marry Sarah. He decides to say what he calls his prayer or petition as the last one as a Christian and a Christian priest.

The prayer is addressed to the Lord and is about the “monstrously evil mortifiers of humanity in the historic generations of every adult in this room, in our own lives and the lives of our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers . .

." (266) and how God has placed himself before all these "evil debasers" and genocides and historical terrors and the thousands of murdered people who, as he says, are not resurrectable. At the same time, Pem says he is not going to discuss the issue of how God, the Supreme Existence, being omniscient as He is, could allow all this evil to happen. As he mentions that, however, he is already questioning it, especially because he describes how these horrors have brought God "into disrepute, and the uninhibited degradation of the idea of life has thrown some of us into the despair of cursing Your name and impugning Your existence." As Pem refuses to discuss how God permits evil to exist, he is in fact discussing this matter and describing its consequence, which is that men have allowed themselves to curse and disbelieve a god who does not seem to be taking care of his own creation.

As men look for God's love, there is also some kind of doubt if that is the God they are looking for, they have always worshipped and even if there is any God at all. Another reason for this doubt is that men can use His name for whichever purpose they want. God is available to justify whichever evil act men want or feel the need to perpetrate; they "use You at will for their most hideous purposes" (266) and God does not seem to resist. God should be available to anyone for He is the Supreme Existence, but not for hideous, evil purposes, Pem complains.

Although unwilling to discuss the existence of evil in a world created by God, who is all good, Pem asks Him

> Do you not find this a grave challenge to your existence, Lord, that we do these things to one another? [. . .] Do you not find it an unforgivable lapse of Yours that after these thousands of years we can no more explain ourselves than we can explain You? (267)

He discusses exactly what he refused to. In his opinion, no evil should be happening in a God-created world. It seems God has abandoned men and at the same time has allowed men to do whatever they want in His name and this is not the traditional image men have of God.

The reverend states that if God gave any evidence of the existence of hell such as it is imagined by people, with Satan embracing all those who need to be punished for being evil, roaring "his sickening excoriating breath into their faces" and vomiting "his foul waste alive with squirmy larvae" (268), then he would have hope for Him and for His world as traditionally conceived. But as it does not happen, as there is no hell with Satan waiting for the cruelest men who are capable of the most unimaginable cruelties and horrors, it is not possible to believe in this God, the God as He is known and has been worshipped for thousands of years.

It is impossible for Pem to be the priest of such a god, "as it is, I think we must remake You" (268), that is, men need to reconstruct God in the sense that they need to change the image they have of God. God created humans who are free to act as they please and they need to take responsibility for their own acts. They must stop blaming God for allowing them to perpetrate evil and stop acting in His name. In Augustine's words,

> The contrasted aims of the good and evil angels did not arise from any difference in nature or origin. It would be utterly wrong to have any doubt about that, since God created both, and he is good in his creation and fashioning of all substances. We must believe that the difference had its origin in their wills and desires. (12.1)

The angels' nature is only different from men's because they were created in an immortal condition that men will only achieve in the City of God. God is not

responsible for men's choices, for He created them all in good, not in evil, once evil does not even exist as nature. Evil is the deviance of the will and the only source of it is men's own wills and desires.

Pem thinks men need to hold on to something, because they are weak and need "a place to stand" (268). Therefore, they need to believe in God for He is the source of all good and they can only find happiness in Him. The reverend believes there is God and that he is all good and, like Augustine, he thinks the only possibility of peace, love, and happiness is in Him. Pem, however, does not talk about a City of God as Augustine does, but one can say that if there is God and happiness can only be achieved through Him, then, there is such a place as the City of God, where everything is good and happiness is to be found.

5.3. Everett, Pem, and the City of God

Everett cannot seem to find any explanation for the world, for evil, for existence in science, in *logos*, but at the same time, refuses to believe in any other metaphysical solution to the mystery of the universe (Jeha, "*Logos* e *Mythos*"). On the other hand, Pem does not believe that there is any explanation to this mystery if not metaphysical. God is necessary to justify "our consciousness and" keep "us from plunging out of the universe" (268). Pem needs *mythos* as his place to stand because he can only find his felicity in God.

These two characters in a way represent the discussion developed throughout the novel and the dialogue between Doctorow's *City of God* and Augustine's. Everett, as Doctorow's voice, contemporary, rational, secular trying to find the answers in science, philosophy and other skeptical theories, representing the City of Men with all the other characters who do not hesitate to perpetrate any evil action,

such as the lover in the B-movie script; S.S. Schmitz, Guillermo and the ex-*Times* guy in the ex-reporter's story; the Nazis, in the report of Sarah's father; the soldiers in the Vietnam War account. The narrator describes the City of Men as he sees it and as it is portrayed to him. Although he sees all this and describes it to his readers, he does not seem satisfied. In the end of the novel, as he is talking about the modern and big cities of our world with their several hospitals, buildings, churches, parks and slums, he wonders how much of that was God's creation once they were "built from the disparate intentions of generations of men" (271).

He starts a movie from this in which the city becomes bigger and bigger with more and more people, with insufficient economic resources, where there are not enough jobs or food, and the rising global temperature causes more and more natural tragedies, crimes increase, water lacks. Then, when there is almost no hope for life to continue, God is reborn, people restart talking about evil and how "the wrath of God has come down on the city of unnatural pride, the earthly city" (271), as if all that had not been a consequence of men's bad behavior toward themselves and the planet, as if men did not create that situation themselves. Everett thinks men are to blame for what happened to their earthly city not because God is punishing them, but because it is a consequence of men's irresponsible behavior.

He ends his narration and this short movie saying that when men think there could be no salvation, they are introduced to "the hero and heroine of the movie, a vitally religious couple who run a small progressive synagogue on the Upper West Side" (272). There is still salvation for the world and it comes in the form of a religious couple, that is, even if there is no God, salvation depends on faith. The religious couple, of course, are Sarah and Pem, those who thought of remaking God – perhaps they have an answer or perhaps they will show the way to the City of God

in which Pem believes. Men could see that no happiness can come from a world without God; therefore, they need to look for God and have faith in Him.

Everett shows a world where evil and evil actions do not only exist but are also normalized by its inhabitants, who do not hesitate in perpetrating any evil act. He shows the City of Men and he thinks that, although evil should not be normalized, it exists and is part of human nature, as one can see in his description of the earthly city. However, Everett also thinks there must be a better solution to the world as it is shown to us; he also thinks there must be a way to save this City of Men, and, as he ends his narration, he turns himself to faith, to God.

Pem, in spite of recognizing the existence of evil and its normalization, does not think it is normal or should be part of the world, he still thinks it is possible to achieve the City of God. Men need to remake their idea of God, they need to understand that they make choices that are sometimes evil and that do not bring them true happiness. For the philosophers discussed, and they agree with Augustine, happiness is men's exiting end, the notion of which is this end and how it can be achieved differ, in spite of leading to the same result: good. The philosophers think the pursuit of happiness should be restrained by the others' happiness: in Augustine's theology, this pursuit must be controlled by faith in God and respect and obedience of His laws.

Everett describes the City of Men and Pem, the City of God. Both are looking for answers to the problem of evil, which according to religious traditions is non-existent but which makes itself more patent and common each day. There is evil in the City of Men and the problem of this is that evil has become so normal, so acceptable, so present in people's daily life they do not even notice it anymore. People have become numb and do not react to it anymore. This lack of reaction feeds

evil because if there is no one to stop perpetrators, they will continue perpetrating their deeds. Everett wonders how many times the world needs to end so that it definitely ends, as if there were no hope for the City of Men. In spite of that, he leaves the readers wondering about the religious couple, the hero and the heroin, who could be the city's salvation.

6. Conclusion

The B-movie and the Vietnam War accounts show evil actions that the characters perceive as such, even if this perception occurs in different moments from when the actions are perpetrated. In the B-movie, the lover knows his actions are evil and doing them makes him happy. His evil doing obeys his principle of self-love, although it disrespects the victims' humanity and principle of morality. He does not normalize his own actions, for they are his final purpose. The Vietnam War veteran, on the other hand, does not perpetrate evil in the war because of his private happiness, but because of his instinct of survival, and he only notices that what he does is evil years after the war. The soldiers, including the veteran, are victims because they are manipulated to fight for a cause they only think is theirs. The soldiers' private happiness and humanity are violated, as is the group's moral reality, but this time with the government's consent. This is institutionalized evil.

In the World War II account, Sarah's father understands what happens as evil but he does not react to it; in fact, he recognizes that "what was happening was routine, [. . .] normal" (79). This time the perpetrators' motivations cannot be discussed because they are not present in the literary text. The ex-*Times* guy story presents actions in which the victims, Schmitz and Guillermo, were once perpetrators who did evil because of a greater good, which is the same reason the ex-reporter seeks and kills them. These two last actions are both normalized and banalized, as their perpetrators were doing evil to improve the world. Or so they claimed.

The actions presented differ in purpose and interpretation, but they are evil and have been normalized. Evil is so present in the victims' daily life, who are so constantly exposed to it, that they fail to notice and interpret it as evil.

Dehumanization becomes part of their lives as does having their principle of self-love violated and seeing the group's principle of morality disrespected. Another reason is the impossibility of reacting to this evil because, once people are unable to react, to avoid suffering, they start considering it normal. A force against which they cannot fight becomes part of their lives; they just have to get used to it, as one gets used to one's routine.

Even if the victims can no longer identify an action as evil, it can still be considered as such if it presents the necessary elements: the perpetrator, a dehumanized victim, an evil intention, and a moral reality that is violated and is common to the victim and the perpetrator. The normalization happens when the victim lacks the perception of the evil done to him. Sometimes there is a total normalization of an evil action, for instance the Vietnam War account, the World War II account, and the ex-*Times* guy story, in which the victims and the group to which they belong fail to interpret the actions as evil. In the war cases, evil is normalized and institutionalized, because it is accepted and at times requested by the ones in control of the group. In the ex-*Times* guy case, the newspaper, respected by the people in the group, naturalizes evil. The B-movie case is different because of the means of communication. However, it is taken from "given life," which means it is influenced, if not inspired, by real life, and it can influence people in the group.

From a Nietzschean perspective, perpetrators are strong, victims are weak, and they are obeying their nature. However, it is impossible to agree with this; it is impossible to say evil is not perpetrated and it is unreasonable to consider that the Nazis, for instance, were only following their nature, their instinct; because once one believes this, one acknowledges that perpetrators are not to blame, that they are not important, only their deeds are. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that man has

no reason to constrain his instinct. But man is a rational being and this is what makes him different from the animals, and what makes life in society possible. Therefore, the Nietzschean perspective does not answer, justify, or explain Nazism and evil, nor is it enough to help understand evil and its normalization in the novel.

People are able to do good and evil; they choose which way to act according to their principle of self-love. Some of them are bound to respect the other's private happiness and moral reality; others do anything to fulfill their private happiness, even at the cost of dehumanizing other people. Some others do anything to dehumanize other people, which is the purpose of their actions, how they achieve their private happiness.

Evil is in everyday life and a part of the world. However, if it is so much part of the world that it would explain why people fail to see it as dehumanizing and interpret it as normal, if it is in fact natural and normal, then, evil is not normalized – it is essentially normal. The answer to this is that, even though evil is part of human nature, it is not to be accepted because it disturbs other people's humanity. Evil is then a contradictory concept and the explanation for the reason evil actions have become normalized is based on this contradiction. Evil actions are inherent to human societies as evil is inherent to human nature. Nonetheless, as humans live in groups, they must learn to restrain the impulses to commit evil, and they must learn to act against this evil in order to avoid catastrophes such as the 20th century has seen.

Augustine describes the City of God as the perfect world. Doctorow, on the other hand, by showing 20th century events, describes the City of Men, and in this city, evil is a constant and necessary presence to the existence of good. There would be no good without evil; the human world is made of these binary oppositions and contradictions for which a balance is always searched and never found. In

Doctorow's *City of God*, evil is not only existent but also constitutive and the heavenly city is put into question, whereas in Augustine's work evil is non-existent and true happiness will only be found in the heavenly city.

Throughout the novel, Everett criticizes wars, evil, and the idea of a City of God through his characters' voices and his own. After surviving the Great War, the world turned its eyes elsewhere in search for hope of starting something new. America is the new world, an escape from Europe, which had seen so many disasters. What could not have been foreseen were the subsequent terrifying events.

Pem, on the other hand, defends the City of God. He truly believes in God and in His heavenly city as the last dwelling but he thinks that men need to change their idea of God. They need to accept their own flaws and their own choices so that they can start taking responsibilities for their own actions and so that they can change the City of Men and be as perfect as they were when created by God "on their pilgrimage on earth" (*City of God*. 15.26).

Everett and Pem appear as representatives of the City of Men and the City of God, respectively. Everett presenting a skeptical and rational explanation and trying to find a solution for evil; and Pem with his religious but also rational discussion on God and on how men have blamed God for their evil choices. These two characters develop the discussion on the City of God and the City of Men and both find an optimistic view of the world. They face the worst scenarios in which evil is not only created but also normalized, and both place the possibility of changes in faith: Pem, because he believes in God and in His City of God; and Everett, because he cannot find answers anywhere else, he turns his eyes to faith, even not believing, he does not discard it for he does not seem to find any better solution than that.

The City of Men is the setting of these wars and evil, which are printed in its history and land. One war, one evil action buries the previous one as if nothing has happened. However, they are unforgettable and cannot be justified, because once the world saw one first disaster, a second one could be avoided. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the logic. As Sarah's father says, the indifference and the calmness with which people deal with not only all historical disasters, but also with all evil actions, show how these barbarities, disasters, and actions are routine, how they have become normal. And it seems that the world will have to end several times before it actually comes to an end.

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