

**“TRANSFIX ME WITH LOVE”:
JOY HARJO’S DISCOURSE OF MEMORY AND
RECONCILIATION
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1. Introduction: revolt and forgiveness

Can a politically engaged poet like Joy Harjo forgive the European American enemy without subverting the very reason and substance of her work? Similarly to Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and other contemporary indigenous poets, Harjo seeks historical responsibility for the expropriation, removal, genocide and cultural annihilation of the Native Americans. However, unlikely her literary peers, this author seems ready and eager to forgive five hundred years of atrocities perpetrated by the colonizers. Could it be the warrior shows a sign of fatigue? Or is it an intelligent use of the power and moral superiority involved in the act of forgiving?

Harjo once told me that “real power is in compassion”. By praising the virtues of reconciliation, the Muskogee poet migrates to fresher themes and clears the path for a new generation of writers who understand remission as a sharp arrow shot against the tribes’ oldest enemy: hate fossilized in History.

There are two recurring themes in the poetry of Joy Harjo, particularly in the book *In Mad Love and War* (1990). On one hand there is *revolt* against the process of colonisation; on the other hand there is the need to *forgive* those barbarities, with a view to inaugurating a new chapter in the history of the multicultural nation.

My objective is to demonstrate that there is an intimate link between earth, revolt and forgiveness. Because the colonial process was an offence to the earth and its sons, *revolt*, in the poetry of Harjo, is associated with wintry landscapes and infertility. Contrarily, *reconciliation* emerges in the springtime or in the summer and gives rise to all sorts of positive states of spirit, from euphoria to peace.

In order to do so, I analyze several of Harjo’s poems — especially from *She Had Some Horses* (1983) and *In Mad Love and War* (1990) —, I resort to the opinion of several essayists, and to an unpublished interview Harjo granted me in June 2001.

2. Frustration, injustice and fear

All violence stems from frustration, injustice or fear. Harjo's poetry portrays individuals who refused or could not adapt to a society that is dominated by the WASP. Some of them were simply alienated, as is the case of the grandmother who vegetates in a park in Anchorage (Harjo, 1997:14); or the Vietnam war veteran who looks to drugs to escape the ghosts of war (Harjo, 1996:24); or the writer herself, who, when she remembers the past of the American Indians, admits feeling empty and alone (Harjo, 2000:91).

While some people are alienated, like those mentioned, others turned on themselves aggressively — alcoholism, suicide and crime are recurrent, especially in the cities. As the journalist and sociologist Phillip Wearne explains:

“Without family or traditional indigenous structures to fall back on, many who move to the cities slump into a cultural abyss. Loss of self-esteem, meaning and a sense of belonging manifests itself in drug or alcohol abuse or despair, perpetuating the stereotype of the drunken, down-and-out Indian visible in so many of the continent's city centers” (Wearne, 1996:146)

In her poems, Harjo treats the downtrodden and the victims of self-destruction as martyrs. She introduces the reader to a gallery of memorable characters: the woman hanging from the thirteenth floor balcony, who hesitates between life and suicide, and creates in the reader the sensation of being in suspense too (Harjo, 1997:22); the American Indian who searches for the whereabouts of a *Kamikaze* warrior (Harjo, 1990:14); or Noni Daylight, who drives through the streets of the city at night with her finger on the trigger of a gun (Harjo, 1997:37).

The poem “Night Out” illustrates and summarises the state of the spirit of any of the individuals I have referred to:

“You have paid the cover charge
thousands of times over
with your lives
and now you are afraid
you can never get out”
(Harjo, 1997:21).

In these five lines, revolt is seen as a vicious circle that is impossible to escape. However, in *In Mad Love and War*, Harjo shows there is a possibility of fleeing from this routine of hatred. It is the transforming

reconciliation of which the writer so often speaks in her poetry and endorses in interviews:

“I’m aware of being involved with transformation in my work. [...] because I have seen a lot of destruction and many of the effects of that destruction — the alcohol, the government programs and so on — I know that I want to work with all that and encourage the incredible live spirit in my people. [...] Maybe that’s being too idealistic; but I *know* that language is alive and living, so I hope that in some small way my poems can transform hatred into love” (Moyers, 1996:43-44).

To transform fear into love and hatred into reconciliation is an ambitious project, particularly in the shadow of a history of horrors. Nevertheless, that enduring predominance of violence (religious, economic, cultural) does not alter Harjo’s project of reconciliation as the only means to a reunion of the *I* with the Native American community, and of the Native American community with the nation.

But how can Harjo transform into forgiveness what was four centuries of humiliations and assaults on identity? In my opinion, change can be operated through *poetry*, the force that brings about the reconstruction of memory.

3. A time to change, a time to heal

According to Geoffrey Bennington, “The history of the United States of America is a narrative. [...] we undoubtedly find narration at the centre of the nation: stories of national origins, myths of founding fathers, genealogies of heroes. At the origin of the nation, we find a story of the nation’s origin” (Bennington, 1990:121).

Naturally that history/memory is made of *ellipses* — of the exclusion of the Indian genocide; of the most dramatic episodes of slavery; of the role of women in society; or of the importance of minorities for the syntax of the nation, for example. At the same time, that constructed memory exaggerates and creates myths in order to transmit a positive image of those in power (Bhabha, 1990:2). Since Harjo’s very earliest work, her poetry reveals what the European American historians were hiding, and denounces distortions of the narrative of the nation.

If historians omit, select and manipulate facts, could it be that poets, in particular, and writers, in general, present the reader with a more faithful version of reality? As a consequence, is it possible that fiction is closer to the truth than History? I argue that, to a certain extent, characters made of ink and paper can indeed be *more real* than existent people. For instances, Harjo’s most celebrated fictional character, Noni Daylight, embodies and

condenses many of the attributes associated with contemporary, urban, Native American women: a fragmented identity; a disenchantment and lack of hope in the future; the sense of living in an invaded country, etc.

In this context, the paramount mission of writers becomes lucid: to fill in the gaps left by historians, to *rememorize*, and to celebrate the margins that make the difference. It is in this sense that Harjo claims that “the word *poet* is synonymous with truth teller” (Wilson, 2000:109).

More importantly still, the work of the Harjo leads to love: “Ultimately a poem has an electrical force field which *is* love. [...] A poem may be about death or destruction or anything else terrible, but I somehow want it to resolve, and in some manner I want the resolution of that poem to *be* love” (Moyers, 1996:47).

The process of the metamorphosis of hatred into love — a form of spiritual healing — appears in “Transformations”, one of the last texts of *In Mad Love and War*, first published in Harper's *Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*. The first line is subtly intertwined with poem 441 by Emily Dickinson, “This is my letter to the world”. The text is indeed like a letter, creating an immediate and very special complicity with the reader. It's a message of reconciliation that Harjo sends not to a single person but to the entire world, and ultimately to herself. It serves as a manifesto for Harjo's poetics of transformation, an attempt to restore the integrity and the ethics of language (Pettit, 1998:38).

This transformation is a strenuous process, made of advances and retractions, as Harjo explains in *In Mad Love and War*. The very title of the book and the way that it is structured work together to make the reader feel a gradual change, operated as much in the poetic subject as in the figures that crop up throughout the text.

The first section, unnamed, consists of a single poem — “Grace” — that would condense the spirit of the book. The author begins by propounding a series of dissatisfactory memories:

“We still talk about that winter, how the cold froze imaginary buffalo on the stuffed horizon of snow banks. The haunting voices of the starved and mutilated broke fences, crashed out our thermostat dreams, and we couldn't stand it one more time” (Harjo, 1990:1).

The earth, the landscape and the time of the year echo and corroborate such feelings as anguish, despair and fear. This latter peeks into every verse, marked in expressions like “haunting voices”, “fields of ghosts” or, obviously, “terror” (Harjo, 1990:1). In these words I read the signs of an oppressive past that can be as much that of the two women as, largely speaking, that of the American Indians themselves, where reflected

in the sentence: “I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people” (Harjo, 1990:1).

Perhaps it is this trace of hope that justifies Harjo’s “epic search for grace” (Harjo, 1990:1), a pursuit that that will take place throughout her work and which consists not only of a search for the *I*, but above all a *search for the meaning of us* —not too far removed from the nostalgia of a paradise before the arrival of Columbus’ flotilla.

How is the earth related with this process of the transformation of revolt into reconciliation? There is abundant evidence, in various poems from *In Mad Love and War*, that both feelings are spread over nature: hatred turns up as always connected with the winter, with the removal of the tribes, and with infertility. In “Grace”, it is the rigorous cold that freezes the buffalo (Harjo, 1990:1): in “Deer Dancer”, “the coldest night of the year” (Harjo, 1990:7); in “Nine Below”, the “polar ice” (Harjo, 1990:61).

While hatred corresponds to the sterile earth and to the winter, forgiveness occurs in the warmer and more fertile seasons, especially the spring. Among the American Indians, this is considered to be the season of the renovation of the world *par excellence*. A little before the beginning of the summer the most important traditional Indian festival takes place, the Sun Dance, lasting four days and celebrating the powers that created the tribe and the universe. In the various ceremonies, the moon and the sun are drawn to represent the circle of time (Zimmerman, 1997:112-113). Rituals were also celebrated at sewing time, when the corn became green and at harvest time — three moments of the agricultural calendar that corresponded to birth, growth and death (Salisbury, 1984:35).

The poetry of Harjo reflects the association between the spring/summer with life and reconciliation. In “Autobiography”, Summer is described as the “Muscogee season of forgiveness, time of new corn, the spiralling dance” (Harjo, 1990:15); in “Mercy”, the advent of the Spring is evoked by the hot sands of Jamaica (Harjo, 1990:20); in “Nine Below”, it is the passage of a freezing to a lukewarm temperature that marks the beginnings of the truces is given:

“When they arrived in your heart’s atmosphere it was
an easy sixty degrees. The war was over; it had never

begun. And you were alive and laughing, standing beneath
a fat sun, calling me home”
(Harjo, 1990:61).

In Harjo’s most recent books — *A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales* (2000) and *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems*

(2002) —, the topics of war and forgiveness are not entirely absent. In the latter, the reader will find a few poems (“In Praise of Earth”, “Equinox” or “When the World as we knew ended”, about September 11) which resurrect Harjo’s oldest fears and devils. However, the poetic persona doesn’t direct her fury against the colonizer but against evil itself, in general. As if, having found her own voice, mission and internal balance, Harjo does no longer spend her energies in hating — but in *fighting*.

4. On nature and forgiveness: an unpublished interview with Joy Harjo

In June 2001, after several contacts with Harjo, the writer allowed me an interview about her work. Here is a passage in which she explains the importance of nature and of forgiveness.

João de Mancelos: Many of your poems deal with the past and present oppression suffered by Native Americans, and some of them express very strong points of view. At the same time, there is a call for love and reconciliation. If ‘the real revolution is love’, to what extent can poetry encourage a better understanding between Native Americans and European Americans, and help to end what you call ‘the huge monster of violence’?

Joy Harjo: First of all, I don’t use the term ‘Native Americans’. The term is so academic. It is a term born in the university. We don’t call ourselves Native Americans when we are at home. There is no such thing as a Native American. We all belong to tribal nations and call ourselves by those names. Most of us still prefer ‘Indians’ for a generic term. That term has its limitations. I prefer the ‘First Nations’ used by Canadian natives, or indigenous nations...

A poet, whether the poet resides in Europe, India, North America, wherever, is a poet. We write or sing about what is utterly human, and travel into the dense areas of consciousness to see what quivers there, to see where we’ve been and where we are going. A poet works from the mythic stuff that gives structure to the surface of life, and then history, and then the highways of movement made by singing and thinking, and so on.

If I open my eyes at the beginning of this century I see destruction and violence. I see that native peoples were one hundred percent of the population of this country and now we are one-half of one percent of the population. Those figures reveal a terrible story. Consider all of the current population of Portugal being killed and replaced by invaders so that one-half of one percent of the original population remains. The monster of violence would be fat, greedy for more and would not be content to stop. (That is happening here, still in the western hemisphere - oil companies and other multinational corporations are stealing, finding any means to take what they

want - and what they want is usually on and under indigenous lands). The survivors would still be trying to figure out a way to keep moving through this world with dignity. That's where poetry comes in — to enter into the stream of poetry is to enter into love.

Love is a force that's been downplayed, relegated to romance. By love I mean compassion, a compassion that makes a story that is able to continue with dignity, despite shame, despite all attempts to thwart it. Compassion enables a people to see beyond the senses, beyond the mind, to the level of god in which all life is connected. We acknowledge our enemies, those who have tested us, those who hate us, but retain a dignity and keep singing. It is easier to pick up a gun or a bomb and kill those who have killed you. That is called 'power' in this postcolonial world. Real power is in compassion. Poetry has taught me this.

JM: I noticed that in many of your poems, the winter is associated with hate while spring or summer times are associated with forgiveness. How, do you think, can nature inspire or teach us forgiveness?

JH: We are nature, all of us, whether we are of the Mvskoke nation and live in Dustin, Oklahoma, or are Italian living in Pisa. We are nourished by the sun, influenced by the moon; [we] are creatures of this earth. We have learned how to dream and move about with a particularly complex volition — over other animals, but all is an equal part of creation. There is no supernatural world. It is all natural. Humans are obviously forgiven much by the natural world as we still have a presence here and we have not given much back in return.

4. Conclusion: Reconciliation is an unbending power

Throughout Harjo's literary work there's a strenuous attempt to transform in love the hatred the author feels towards the European American colonizer. Otherwise, the heaviness of History would continue traumatizing Native Americans and frustrating their hopes for a better future, leading to a futile aggressiveness.

Harjo's poetry and poetic prose are haunted by those who are corroded by fear and revulsion: drunken tramps, suicidal women, annihilated old men — victims not only of colonialism but also of self-pity. To Harjo, only the positive values of dialogue and inter-ethnic reconciliation can heal both the Indians and the aggressor. Therefore, the poet constantly appeals to love:

“If these words can do anything
I say bless this house

with stars.
Transfix us with love”
(Harjo, 1996:3).

This love presents several facets: self-respect; erotic passion (proving that in a relationship between two people we already find the same challenges and difficulties that emerge in an inter-ethnic society); compassion towards the Other (which originates in the family and in the community and is then spread to all who face discrimination); finally, the most demanding type of love: the one given to the enemy.

Reconciliation implies a Whitmanian communion with everyone and with nature itself; forgiving but not forgetting; understanding History, but not letting the past monopolize the present or weaken the faith in a better future. Harjo opens a path that, if not that of real salvation, is at least a possible way far from revolt and hatred — and closer to her world of spirits, miracles and harmony.

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COSMOPOLIS AND URBAN LIFE

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Although Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) appears to be a novel about an April day in 2000 in the life of 28-year-old assets manager Eric Packer, it actually deals with a broad range of aspects of urban life in the city that we readily accept as a symbol of urbanism and modern civilization. What we witness in the novel is not only an account of a bizarre lifestyle and the decline of a mega-rich assets manager, but rather the demise of a modern civilization represented by its most urban city, New York. The novel revolves around two missions that Packer wants to fulfill: to earn more money on the global currency market and to get a haircut across town. As he engages in a motorized odyssey in his state-of-the-art limousine-cum-office traveling through New York, he encounters a number of individuals from different walks of life, which might remind us of a modern version of *Canterbury Tales* that introduces us to the world of our near future on the verge of inevitable collapse. However, the main protagonist of the novel might not be Eric Packer, but rather the city that stands both for our civilization and our time. Even though *Cosmopolis* is a somewhat futuristic novel, it can be interpreted from the point of view of urban sociology because it follows certain patterns that have been foreseen almost a century ago. If we consider a cosmopolis to be an internationally important city inhabited by many people reflecting a great variety of cultures, attitudes, etc., then we should also be able to understand that cities are more than simple assemblages of their physical features, more than a place where people, goods, information and money flow. Therefore, we realize that:

“The city...is something more than a congeries of individual men [sic] and of social conveniences-streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones, etc; something more, also, than a mere constellations of institutions and administrative devices – courts, hospitals, schools, police and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is, rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature”. (Park 1)

The city cannot be defined exclusively by its physical form, it has more to do with its social interactions. It does not express itself in the

streets, buildings, squares and institutions that seem to define it, but in the ways in which its inhabitants live, work, behave etc. What is important about cities is that they bring people together in such a way that this makes a difference to what goes on between them.

It appears that characters of *Cosmopolis* are forced to behave in urban ways as their interaction with the city itself creates a “rat race,” in work and life, or both, as in the case of Eric Packer, whose downfall from the position of “master of the stock market” happens within a single day. The person who seems to be the world’s greatest expert on hard currency yen is quickly stripped of all material gains, left waiting for the shot to sound. Or to put it in the words of the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert “a rat became the unit of currency”. Packer seems to be interested in poetry, which he reads on sleepless nights. While reading a poem he comes across a line that draws his attention. He states, “There’s a poem I read in which the rat becomes the unit of currency” (*Cosmopolis* 26). Once we complete reading the novel we realize why this line from Herbert’s poem “Report From the Besieged City” opens the novel. Already the very opening line announces the spectacular fall of the main character whose billions-worth assets are reduced to the worth of a single rat, that is to say – nothing. For those who have missed the initial omen, Don DeLillo introduces another prediction of the future of Eric Packer, a “haircut,” a slang term for a major financial loss. With this in mind, it is easy to predict what Packer is about to experience.

The downfall of Eric Packer is at the same time a symbolic downfall of his civilization, similar to the symbolic downfall of our civilization that was represented by 9/11 events in which the two towers, symbols of our civilization’s progress and wealth, collapsed within minutes of each other, thus proving that there is no power that cannot be destroyed. Similarly, the 28-year-old is stripped of his personal wealth as he waits to be executed by Benno Levin, aka Richard Sheets, a crazed ex-employee.

There is something distinctive about the speed and intensity of social interactions in *Cosmopolis*. The main protagonist meets a large number of people on his way west to the barbershop. The way people interact in the novel deserves a closer look because it represents a key to understanding our cities and time. Urban sociologist Louis Wirth gave his own definition of the city: “For sociological purposes a city may be defined as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals...” (Wirth, 1938:190).

In other words, Wirth puts emphasis on three features that are vital for the existence of a city: large numbers of people, a density of settlement and a heterogeneity of both individuals and group life. Each of these issues can be

dealt with in a number of ways. The large numbers of people living and working in the city contribute to the wide range of variations among them. In *Cosmopolis* the author took an effort to introduce us to a myriad of characters who not only come from different walks of life, but also have diverse professions, ethnic and social backgrounds. We first meet Torval, the chief of security, followed by Shiner, his chief of technology. While driving they came across Eric's wife of twenty-two days, Elise Shifrin who is a representative of old American tradition and wealth, whose only occupation is writing poetry. She was soon replaced by Michael Chin, his currency analyst of Asian descent. After a briefing that took place in his stretch limo, he went on to visit his blonde lover named Didi Fancher and after a brief sexual encounter he found himself talking business, this time with his chief of finance, Jane Melman. The list goes on, but what surprises us most is the speed and superficiality of his social interactions within a very short period of time.

Wirth (1938) offers a solution to this problem explaining that people in cities have more opportunities to form new kinds of social interactions, forming bonds that are based on interests of various kinds, rather than on kinship ties, neighborliness, communal sentiments, tradition and folk attitudes:

“The contacts of the city may indeed be face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental. The reserve, the indifference, and the blasé outlook which urbanites manifest in their relationships may thus be regarded as devices for immunizing themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others.” (Wirth, 1938:192)

Wirth apparently considers city-dwellers to be reserved, indifferent and blasé and they have a good reason to behave in such a manner. According to Wirth, part of the reason for such a behavior is the number of people that city-dwellers interact on a daily basis: it is not possible to know everyone in the city and it is not possible to be compassionate about the problems that one witnesses in everyday life within the city. Another famous sociologist, Georg Simmel, dealt with this problem even earlier realizing that: “The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli”(Simmel, 1903/1971:1).

In other words, there is so much going on in the city that one could constantly be emotionally engaged. That could, however, harm one's mental health, given the number of situations that require full mental attendance.

Therefore, according to Simmel, city-dwellers develop so-called “blasé outlook” in order to protect their mental health.

“There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which is so unconditionally reserved to the city as the blasé outlook. It is at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts and from which it seems to use the intensification of metropolitan intellectuality seems to be derived. On that account it is not likely that stupid persons who have been hitherto intellectually dead will be blasé. Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserve of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form.” (Simmel, 1903/1971:6)

It is this emotional and physical engagement that is omnipresent in the novel that causes Packer to frantically fulfill an array of activities en route to the barbershop. This relatively short drive is so saturated with activities that it is almost impossible to believe that the novel spans couple of hours only. The enormity of meetings, sexual intercourses and medical check-ups are staged mostly within Packer’s limousine that easily transforms itself into an office on wheels with all possible gadgets that enable constant communication and flow of information from all over the world. Another aspect of urban life in *Cosmopolis* that deserves our attention is the superficiality of contacts. Due to a large number of social interactions we realize that these contacts can only be superficial and based on indifference as well as utilitarianism in which everyone is out for their own interests.

An additional issue in *Cosmopolis* is the density of the city. Throughout the novel we are informed of the traffic jams caused by various events: the president’s visit to the city, a rap star’s funeral, political demonstrations. The prevailing atmosphere is the one of the masses of cars and people finding their way through Manhattan. At moments it seems so saturated with crowds that you can almost feel the physical contact among the participants of this motorized crusade.

Wirth provides another explanation for the density of the city that we could use to define the influence of density of settlement on people’s way of life. He states that

“...the close physical contact of numerous individuals which necessarily produces a shift in the medium through which we orient ourselves to the urban milieu ... our physical contacts are close but our social contacts are distant ... We tend to

acquire and develop sensitivity to a world of artifacts and become progressively further removed from the world of nature.” (Wirth, 1938:192)

This produces another urban paradox: people live in close proximity to others, yet they do not care about them; city-dwellers develop an insensitivity to others, yet they are highly sensitive to the value of artifacts. Wirth mentions another negative consequence of the density: the greater the number of social interactions, the greater the possibility that they will interfere or conflict with one another. That is why, he states, we need to regulate our everyday life, using various forms of control – the most prominent ones being the clock and the traffic signal. They both control the ebb and flow of urban life. The urban life of *Cosmopolis* appears to be even faster than any other place on earth and since, according to both Simmel and Wirth, the city intertwines and amasses people, we need to have a larger level of organization and co-ordination.

Furthermore, Wirth argues that the heterogeneity of urban populations causes old rigidities of identity – for example, those formed around class – to break down. It is not that differences disappear, they seem to become much more nuanced and at the same time much more mixed up. Consequently, the social stratification of cities becomes even more difficult to establish, as people continually tend to cross social boundaries, change their status and even their own identity over time. This is why we constantly observe instability and insecurity in urban identities. Therefore, Wirth believes that urbanites exhibit a greater sophistication and cosmopolitanism since they belong neither to a single group nor to a single social status. Moreover, urban individuals tend to affiliate, associate and identify with various groups, organizations and institutions. At the same time urban spaces are also very likely to be fluid, unstable and to support individuals with affiliations to multiple groups. Because of this we can argue that the city does not have a fixed pattern of differences, but rather the differences are likely to transform and consequently to reinvent themselves. By describing the cities as heterogeneous, Wirth proves that social differences are not the result of people’s fixed and unchanging personalities, but they seem to be formed through relationships to other people. One may conclude that heterogeneity breaks down stable identities due to numerous opportunities for city-dwellers to form relationships with other people, which eventually lead to their personal change. This leads us to another characteristic of such urban life where brief and superficial social encounters seem to be the rule. It is also obvious that the language of the novel is deprived of anything that is not a pure information, an essential language unit that conveys a bare information, as reduced as possible.

“We’re buffered from attack.”

“Everywhere.”

“Yes.”

“Including the car.”

“Including, absolutely, yes.”

“My car. This car.”

“Eric, yes, please.”(Cosmopolis 13)

DeLillo’s style is condensed, cynical and playful at the same time, suggesting an accumulation of information expected to be seen on a computer screen and not to be shared by people engaged in a conversation. Since time is too precious for Packer in his world where millions of yens are to be made and lost within minutes, he sparsely uses the words to convey the bare necessity.

It is the multitude of interactions combined with a sense of personal dissatisfaction and insufficiency that transforms the capable Packer into a person who does do much to escape from the deranged Levin.

“He’d always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void.” (236)

Reassessing his life he comes to realize that his death was a part of a larger, long-conceived plan.

“There was something else to consider, that he’d married when he’d married in order to have a widow to leave behind. He imagined his wife, his widow, shaving her head, perhaps, in response to his death, and choosing to wear black for a year, and watching the burial in isolated dessert terrain, from a distance, with her mother and the media.” (238-239)

Having acquired all material gains there are in the world, Packer has no further material goal to achieve. He has bought everything that could possibly be bought which has not made him feel any better. Eric Packer embodies capitalism itself. This can also be read as DeLillo’s criticism of capitalism as a system based on accumulation of wealth and pure profit. For DeLillo, there must obviously be something beyond that. Unfortunately, Packer does not seem to understand what that something could be. He considers himself a real pharaoh of capitalism who deserves a pharaoh-like burial of his time.

“He wanted to be buried in his nuclear bomber, his Blackjack A. Not buried but cremated, conflagrated, but buried as well. He wanted to be solarized. He wanted the plane flown by remote control with his embalmed body aboard, suit, tie and

turban, and the bodies of his dead dogs, his tall silky Russian wolfhounds, reaching maximum altitude and leveling at supersonic dash speed and then sent plunging into the sand, fireballed one and all, leaving a work of land art, scorched earth art that would interact with the desert and be held in perpetual trust under the auspices of his dealer and executor, Didi Fancher, and longtime lover, for the respectful contemplation of preapproved groups and enlightened individuals under exempt-status section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.” (239)

Packer has everything but respect; he wants to gain the respect of the generations to come and to be remembered as someone who has achieved something of great importance. He needs to be made immortal, and yet he knows the wealth itself might not be enough. In the world where material gains dominate the life, and yet perish overnight, he understands the importance of memory, the importance of being recognized and remembered. It is the very same feeling of the longing for the past that has made him cross the town, against all odds, to reach the small barbershop. Although he could have had his hair cut at a number of barbershops on his way across Manhattan, it is not the haircut that he desperately needs. What he really needs can be found only within this particular small seedy barbershop.

“He looked at the middle building in a line of five and felt a lonely chill, fourth floor, windows dark and fire escape bare of plants. The building was grim. It was a grim street but people used to live here in loud close company, in railroad flats, and as happy as anywhere, he thought, and still did, and still were.” (181)

It is this feeling of communion, of belonging to a group of people living in close community that Eric wants. He could have had his hair cut anywhere else in the city, but nowhere else could he obtain this feeling of belonging, the feeling of togetherness that was long lost for him and he needs it badly. This can be read as the author’s criticism of new urban worlds where human relations are not as close as before and where services like hair-cutting are not just services, but social events at the same time which contribute to our feelings of togetherness, unity and belonging. Moreover, they also reminded Eric of his late father.

“His father had grown up here. There were times when Eric was compelled to come and let the street breathe on him. He wanted to feel it, every rueful nuance of longing. ... He was feeling what his father would feel, standing in this place.” (181-182)

Coming to this barbershop is also a predictable thing as Eric knows what the barber is going to say to him. He knows that he would be offered food and small talk, that here he can be himself and not what other people

expect him to be. The anticipated easiness brings him comfort and provides security.

“The barbershop was closed. He knew it would be closed at this hour. He went to the door and saw that the back room was lighted. It had to be lighted, whatever the hour. He knocked and waited and the old man came moving through the dimness, Anthony Adubato, in his working outfit, a striped white tunic, short sleeved, with baggy pants and running shoes.” (182)

Although Eric knows the story of his late father by heart, he still wants to hear it as if to reassure himself he got it right the first time he had heard it. The barber also reminds Packer of his poor childhood as if to recollect the previous life of the now rich asset manager that was long lost.

“His father grew up with four brothers and sisters. They lived right across the street there. The five kids, the mother, the father, the grandfather, all in one apartment... Eight people, four rooms, two windows, one toilet. I can hear his father’s voice. Four rooms, two with windows. It was a statement he liked to make.” (189)

The barbershop relaxed Packer so much that, in spite of the threat, he managed to fall asleep on the barber chair, although he was sleepless for nights in his forty-eight-room luxury mansion.

“He almost asked how long he’d been asleep. But people always ask how long they’ve been asleep. Instead he told them about the credible threat. He confided in them. It felt good to trust someone. It felt right to expose the matter in this particular place, where elapsed time hangs in the air, suffusing solid objects and men’s faces. This is where he felt safe.” (190)

Packer is certain of his imminent death; he even thinks it should have already happened. Having visited his barber and recollected his final memory of the past times he readily awaits the death that means nothing to him since he had already carried out his plans. The only thing that bothers him is the fact that the threat would not be realized at all. Not to stand in the death’s way, he even got rid of his gun, for he no longer cares for his personal safety.

“They talked to him. They barred their teeth and ate. They insisted that he take the gun. He wasn’t sure it mattered much. He was afraid the night was over. The threat should have taken material form soon after Torval went down but it hadn’t, from that point to this, and he began to think it never would. This was the coldest possible prospect, that no one was out there. It left him in a suspended state, all that was worldly and consequential in blurry ruin behind him but no culminating moment ahead. The only thing left was the haircut.” (192-193)

When they left the barbershop with Packer's incomplete haircut, they moved on to the eleventh avenue where the intimacy of the secure barbershop was replaced by the frantic movements of people on the street where Packer expected to meet his threat. As they continued to Hell's Kitchen, Packer dismissed his driver not to subject him to anything that was to follow. Standing in an empty parking lot he realized the absurdity of his own existence, the meaninglessness of life that he was leading, the lack of desire to continue living like this.

"He hadn't realized this could happen to him. The moment was empty of urgency and purpose. He hadn't planned on this. Where was the life he'd always led? There was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting. How could he take a step in any direction if all directions were the same?" (206)

While he approaches his assassin, the ex-employee that he does not recognize, he wants to know why the man desires to kill him. Unfortunately he fails to recognize that they both have something in common – the same goal. They both want to achieve something they will be remembered for. Since Packer had already achieved everything that he wanted, he feels trapped within his own life, his only desire being the departure from this world in a spectacular manner. Contrary to him, Benno Levin, the former employee who he had fired, did not manage to be successful professionally and therefore the only possible fame he sees for himself is the murder of Eric Packer. Levin claims "I want to kill you in order to count for something in my own life. See how easy?"(213).

Unable to understand Packer's self-destruction Levin states "Your whole waking life is a self-contradiction. That's why you are engineering your own downfall" (216). It is their further conversation that reveals the superficial reason for Packer's downfall

"The yen. I couldn't figure the yen.
The yen.
I couldn't chart the yen.
So you brought everything down.
The yen eluded me. This had never happened. I became halfhearted. (217)

As far as Levin is concerned, Packer has to die for a number of reasons.

"You have to die for how you think and act. For your apartment and what you paid for it. For your daily medical checkups. This alone. Medical checkups every day. For how much you had and how much you lost, equally. No less for losing it than making it. For the limousine that displaces the air that people need to breathe in Bangladesh. This alone." (231)

Levin's verdict may as well be understood as DeLillo's criticism of our present civilization as well as the one awaiting us in the near future. That is why "DeLillo's novels are of enormous importance not only as exemplary literary artifacts in their own right but also as delineating human existence and consciousness within the recognizably American semiotic space of twentieth century civilization." (Grgas, 2000:245). Because of this it is important to understand the metropolis as it could help us understand our time and civilization. Assessing Packer's personal wealth and lifestyle it is easy to believe that somewhere in highly urban centers of our world there are already individuals whose pace of life and everyday habits might be reminiscent or similar to Packer's. It is therefore comprehensible that in the near future we would be able to witness similar situations in large urban centers. Because of that we find it easy to believe that whatever is of any importance has to happen in a city as Oswald Spengler claimed long time ago, predicting that the longing for a city would replace any other nostalgia. The novel represents at the same time DeLillo's criticism of our consumer society where gaining material riches represents the only thing that counts in the society where social encounters become yet another thing to consume rapidly.

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**SOME ASPECTS OF THE DOUBLE IN CHARLES
BROCKDEN BROWN'S *WIELAND***

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Charles Brockden Brown's novel – *Wieland or, the Transformation. An American Tale* (1798) – is a very early representation of split consciousness, where the explanations for the horrific events are sought for in the characters' psyche. My aim is to focus on how the *double* is present and what aspects of duplication can be found in such an early American writing, which preceded the birth of numerous narratives dealing with double consciousness.

The motif of the *doppelgänger* has been a recurrent theme since the beginning of literature. The Latin *alter ego*, the *doppelgänger* born in the German Romanticism, the English *double*, and the French *sosie* and *ménechme* all refer to a second self, to a kind of soul or mate who follows man like his/her shadow (Bravo, 1992:343). Although already from the ancient times a lot has been dealt with the double nature of each and every human being the motif flourished in the nineteenth century when people became extremely interested in the dark side of human nature. Darwin's theory on the evolution further triggered the idea of finding the beast within the human. This century gave birth to monsters like Dracula, Dr. Frankenstein's miserable creature, or the young and beautiful but devilish Dorian Gray. What is more, this was the age of Edgar Allan Poe, who became famous for his split characters such as William Wilson, or the narrator of *The Black Cat*. (For further details on the origins of double characters and their representations in literary works see *The Double* (Rank, 1971) and Ralph Tymms: *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (Tymms, 1949)).

A special type of doubling takes place in the case of ventriloquism: it seems as if someone else were speaking from the ventriloquist's belly, as if (at least) two people found harbor in the same body. Ventriloquism for a long time had been regarded as a means of spirits – either good or evil – communicating with human beings. Joseph Glanvill was confirmed of the supernatural origin of such voices coming from the belly of the person obsessed. He argued that these people were possessed by the devil so they became his mouthpiece (Glanvill, 1681:64). Thomas Blount described the ventriloquist in his *Glossographia* (1656):

“one that has an evil spirit speaking in his belly, or one that by use and practice can speake as it were out of his belly, not moving his lips” (Schmidt, 1998).

Only by the late eighteenth century did ventriloquism lose its entirely demonic approach and more rational explanations were given for voices of unknown origin. It was Joannes Baptista de La Chapelle who finally made the decisive turn toward the Enlightenment construction of ventriloquism in 1772 (Schmidt, 1998). In his works he gave rational interpretation to such occurrences which had been considered as being related to divine, supernatural forces: “vocal deceptions”, “revelatory voices”, and “mediumistic phenomena”. La Chapelle concluded that ventriloquism was a ‘mere’ art,

“a practiced technique of modulation, misdirection, and muscular control, which required neither supernatural assistance nor any special endowments of nature” (Schmidt, 1998).

Therefore, the art of ventriloquism was simultaneously responsible for establishing and destroying superstition.

La Chapelle’s work was one of the main bases for Brockden Brown’s novel. In the case of *Wieland* and *Carwin*, the reader is provided with a clear view of the clash of two opposing attitudes towards ‘divine’ voices. Superstition and the fanatic belief in being able to communicate with the other world collide with rational thinking and rational solutions for the mysterious voices void of any supernatural attribute.

Wieland is an interesting combination of the doppelgänger motif and ventriloquism. Although Edgar Allan Poe is known as the master of appalling narratives with characters who suddenly turn into maniac murderers, Brockden Brown was the first American writer to deal with psychological themes using characters with split consciousness. *Wieland*, the protagonist, or rather the antagonist of the story goes through a radical transformation: although known as a normal, intelligent, nice man, he in the end kills his whole family including his wife and four children. The motivations for this horrible act become clear after having read his own journal. He is absolutely lack of bad conscience, he feels himself completely justified because the voice which called on him was of divine origin. At least this is what he is confirmed of.

Theodore *Wieland*’s transformation beyond doubt has a religious origin. The religious history of the family goes back to the father, who finds a Calvinist Book – a book of the Camisards -, which becomes his Bible and upon which he establishes his own faith. Although he tends to be a melancholic character, the way he becomes more and more depressed

waiting for something terrible to happen disturbs his whole family. Finally, Theodore's father dies in a mysterious and terrible way, as he had expected. He is burnt in his temple, and the real cause of his death is never revealed. The probability or possibility of supernatural intervention casts a shadow upon the consequent happenings, which might as well be brought about by simple human agency. Carwin, a friend of a friend of the family turns out to be a ventriloquist who sometimes uses his special capability in order to protect himself, but he simultaneously deceives the others. They think that some supernatural forces communicate with them. Whether Wieland was motivated by Carwin is a question which is deliberately left open by the author. The novel is a typical case of the hesitation between the uncanny and the marvelous – applying Todorov's terms. In the case of the *uncanny* the "laws of nature remain intact": this is the supernatural explained by rational, realistic facts. In the case of the *marvelous*, however, "new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena" (Todorov, 1989: 176): this is the supernatural unexplained; with a bit of generalization: the world of fairy tales. In *Wieland* most of the fantastic events gain natural explanation by the end thus belonging to the realm of the *uncanny*. Others, however, are left to the reader's judgment to decide upon their natural or supernatural origin.

Reason and superstition, rational explanations versus the belief in the supernatural are also present in Helen Sutherland's article 'Wide Webs of Fear: American Gothic Fiction and Its British Counterparts' (2004). She first of all reflects on the uniqueness of Brown's novel in comparison with the traditional – British - Gothic due to the *Americanness* of the story. Its subtitle already emphasizes its American origin: *An American Tale*. The old Wieland comes from Europe, and he is the one who represents a gloomy "guilt-ridden" religiosity. His children, however, are already born on the new American soil. The temple, which had been built by the father in order to execute his religious rituals there, becomes a place of education. The bust of Cicero, which is placed in the temple by the younger generation, is an obvious token of the superiority of reason over spirituality.

"The rationality of the Enlightenment thus replaces a religious faith which was essentially beyond or outwith the realm of reason." (Sutherland 2004)

The spontaneous combustion of the old Wieland therefore symbolizes the burning of the past and its replacement with a new beginning, with new values to rely on. Although the father and with him his religious fanaticism seems to have disappeared, the shadow of his mysterious death keeps on lingering above the family; as Sutherland explains it:

“the excessive religious temperament of the father remains on the margins of Brown’s story to return in the non-rational acts of the son.” (Sutherland, 2004)

At this point of Sutherland’s argumentation I would go further. Wieland, losing his father, necessarily goes through the process of mourning. Applying Freud’s theories on mourning and melancholia, the son incorporates, introjects the lost love object into himself in an act of refusing its disappearance from his world. Melancholia is usually accompanied by self-accusations, sometimes very serious self-deprecation. This loss in the ego can be connected to the loss of an object, which is what happens in the case of mourning (Freud, 1984:256). The old Wieland frequently talked about his inability of carrying out something; he more and more often accused himself of not being to live up to some – for the others unknown – expectations. Therefore, not only Theodore but the old Wieland too might have gone through either mourning or melancholia or both. This fact though gains more significance if we apply Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s theory on *endocryptic identification* (Abraham and Torok, 1994). Their starting point is Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, but they go further than that: the person who is mourning over the loss of the beloved person creates a kind of crypt within him/herself preserving the deceased person. The extreme case of such mourning brings about the so-called *phantom effect*: the secret contents of the ancestor’s unconscious finds its way into the unconscious of the descendant: this way repressed substances of one’s mind might wander from generation to generation.

The basis of this idea comes from a situation when a child happens to have parents who hide some secrets: this unrecognized knowledge will enter the child’s unconscious – it becomes repressed before recognition. This repressed secret material creates a gap in the child’s unconscious: it is a burial place hiding an unknown phantom, which will return from the unconscious in order to haunt the host who consequently will suffer from phobias, madness, or obsessions (Abraham and Torok, 1994:140).

The unknown cause of the old Wieland’s death and his prediction of its coming is a mystery which is mentioned repeatedly. Clara, his daughter – and the narrator of the happenings – is only aware of his father’s fear of not being able to complete his mission. This task might have moved into his son: this way the statement that the father’s excessive temperament returns in the non-rational acts of the son gains a new meaning. The son feels himself strong enough to execute what the “divine” voices are compelling him to do and what his father had not been able to complete. The idea that the son incorporates the father with his duty might be further supported by examining the son’s name: Theodore, which refers both to God (*Theo*), and

the loving of God (*adore*). The son carries within himself his father's religious fanaticism.

The most interesting point, however, of such an extreme mourning is the way the object of mourning uses (and abuses) its host in order to reach his/her own goals: to find solutions for things that remained unsolved, to cure traumas which still haunt him/her. Abraham and Torok state just the opposite of Freud's theory that in the case of mourning the ego carries the object within him/herself: they argue that

“the ‘object,’ in its turn, carries the ego as its mask, that is, either the ego itself or some other façade” (Abraham and Torok, 1994:141).

This idea is further explained in ‘Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology’. They claim that the dead who were either shamed during their life time or who “took some unspeakable secrets to the grave” are destined to haunt. However, “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others”: gaps which were produced by “the concealment of some part of a love object's life” (Abraham and Torok, 1994:171). The *phantom* originates from the others' unconscious: it is repressed much earlier than getting into the unconscious of the descendant; it is such a construction of the unconscious that has never been part of the victim's conscious. And here comes the point that undeniably connects this theory to Wieland's madness: the *phantom*

“works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography” (Abraham and Torok, 1994:173).

Some of the voices Wieland and his company hear belong to Carwin the ventriloquist, and we cannot be sure of the origin of the voices giving the fatal instructions. The secret material repressed – the *phantom* -, which has been inherited from the father, haunts Wieland in the form of strange voices. These voices are attributed to the ventriloquist and consequently work in a similarly way the *phantom* haunts Wieland (as explained above). Therefore, the *phantom* that is hiding in the person's unconscious thus causing lunacy, and the ventriloquist who is like a stranger that speaks instead of the person are connected in Carwin's person.

Madness is a way of losing one's self; it is a means of glancing into the world of deities. Applying Abraham's theory of the *phantom effect* working within Wieland who thus plays the role of his father, we can say that he loses his own self in order to succumb to his father's will. Selflessness is a recurring theme in the psychology of religion. Hood for example distinguishes two kinds of selves: the “reflexive self”, which is a

social construction identified by various attributes, and the so-called “transcendent self”, which implies a unity with God, the Absolute, a self devoid of attributes (Hood, 2001:4). In another article written by Roy F. Baumeister and Julie J. Exline (Baumeister and Exline, 2001) self loss is described as a reduction of self-awareness. The self – through the unification with some upper, divine forces by meditation, or mystical spirituality – loses its motivational aspect (not the cognitive one) (Baumeister and Exline, 2001:17). Moreover, madness does not only imply the loss of one’s self: over centuries it had always been regarded either as a diabolical invasion attacking the patient from the outside, or a mental disorder coming from the interior (Neill 1998:183). Such a two-folded explanation is again related to the collision of the realistic view and the faith in divine, supernatural forces: Wieland is either influenced by external forces or the evil comes from within due to a split in his consciousness.

This clash between the past and the new values is also present in Clara too who is willing to accept rational explanations for everything; yet, she has prophetic dreams and she gets involved in the fantastic events surrounding her. In one of the scenes she sets off while asleep, which almost leads to her death. Dreaming and especially sleep-walking leads us to the notion of the *double* since it is another case when a split takes place within the human consciousness. According to several primitive peoples, our soul starts wandering while asleep: taking up our appearance it really goes to those places which we are dreaming of (Frazer 1987:361.). The sleep-walking scene thus reflects on the contradictive attitudes Clara represents: she too hides the old beliefs and the new tradition with reason in its center simultaneously.

In Wieland’s case the *doppelgänger* motif occurs in a special way since his double cannot be seen – even by Wieland himself – only heard. In contrast with the “more developed” doubles, this one is not incorporated, does not have a bodily manifestation: it is present only in the consequences of its devilish imperatives. This kind of doubling, however, has its prototype in much earlier literature. The archetypal myth for creating double is the tale of Narcissus and Echo from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. (The comparison might be enhanced already by the similarity between the titles of the two pieces of work: *Metamorphoses* – *Transformation*.) Narcissus, who falls in love with his own reflection on the water, is the object of Echo’s desires: Echo, however, is not able to express her own feelings – the only thing she is capable of is repeating the other’s utterances. She is an audio version of the double: she duplicates what the other has said. She is only heard but never seen similarly to the voices that make Wieland execute his family. Yet, not only the disturbed half of Wieland’s mind is present as a voice: Carwin is

also a figure of voices: somebody, who can imitate a sound belonging to anybody or anything this way playing a role similar to that of Echo. He is also an audio double, only he is an active agent, he is in control of his utterances, he is the “author” of his speeches in contrast to Echo, who is a passive channel of words already uttered. However, if we regard Carwin as a mere channel through which the *phantom* communicates his thoughts to Theodore, he too is only a passive voice repeating someone else’s words.

Apart from Carwin and the mysterious voice heard by Wieland, we have got the voice of the narrator, who is Clara, Wieland’s sister. Clara – standing for clarity – is the advocate of reason, of the urge to give a natural, scientific explanation for the mysterious events. She blames Carwin for the calamities – Carwin is a kind of dark other into whom all possible evil intentions are projected. He seems to be a black magician with special power over everyday people. Although ventriloquism does not belong to the realm of the supernatural, it was regarded as a phenomenon rather beyond comprehension in Brockden Brown’s time. A ventriloquist is capable of endowing a mute object with voice; this act is very similar to creation since giving voice - the ability to speak – is like giving life to a lifeless object. Carwin uses and abuses this ability: he acts God, becomes the secret author of the events, the engine of the happenings. This is a typical phenomenon in the case of double characters. Having an alter-ego, a double provides one with the possibility of eternal life: if your soul – which keeps on living even after the death of the body – is incorporated -, it is probable that you will gain immortality. Furthermore, the double is often the projection of bad, wicked intentions, which are impossible to accept as an organic part of one’s self: to have them separated makes the “original” person irresponsible of anything evil. Therefore, s/he can afford whatever s/he wants to do, commit, or execute. This kind of omnipotence leads to the idea of acting God. Such a divine role is taken up by Wieland too when he becomes the master of life and death believing himself to carry out divine, superior orders among people who belong only to a lower sphere. This question of authorship connects Clara, the narrator, again to the two men mentioned above – she is the one who relates the events, who also becomes an author, the writer of the mysterious story of her family. An interesting scene in connection with the relationship between mastering life and death and directing the narrative is when Wieland escapes from the prison and attempts to kill his sister. Clara’s only weapon is her pen-knife, which finally becomes the tool of Wieland’s suicide. Writing the end in terms of narrative and life is thus strongly attached. The three authors – Clara, Carwin and Wieland – thus might be regarded as one another’s doubles representing the opposing traditions and their collision.

Although Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1989) is not listed among the most noteworthy examples of the *doubles*, it is obvious that the narrative contains several duplications, doublings on different levels. The whole story is built on the contradiction of two opposing ages with their contrasting value systems, and these oppositions control the characters together with the narrator. *Wieland* becomes the main battle field of the fighting values: he is the victim of the *phantom* inherited from his father, who is a typical representative of the old age with its religious fanaticism. Although the moral of Brockden Brown's novel is that no one should believe so fanatically in anything, religiosity has remained a strong motivating force in the birth of double characters. A long chain of such figures leads up to one of the most famous doppelgängers of today's literature. When the narrator in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, whose alter-ego is called Tyler Durden, says "In Tyler we trust", what else could it mean than that these people are still seeking for God, or a god within themselves.

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