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E.L. Doctorow as Historical Novelist:
A Lukácsian Perspective

Elsa Carmen Abelleira

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
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ABSTRACT

E.L. Doctorow as Historical Novelist: A Lukácsian Perspective

Elsa Carmen Abelleira

The present study concerns itself with E.L. Doctorow's view of American society as rendered in Welcome to Hard Times, The Book of Daniel, Ragtime and Loon Lake, and will argue that these works belong in the tradition of the historical novel.

The enquiry will begin with a description of Georg Lukács' model, which will serve to organize our discussion of Doctorow as an historical novelist. Within this framework, I shall deal extensively with Daniel so as to demonstrate how Doctorow manages to capture the inescapable interrelatedness of individual identity and the density of historical processes. Emphasis will be placed on the appropriateness of creating a convoluted and fragmented narrative as an inner requirement of the material on hand. I shall then go back in time to point out the fledgling elements in Hard Times which explode in the expansion of historical consciousness achieved in Daniel. I shall finally attempt to demonstrate that

Doctorow's grasp of the historical novel weakens in Ragtime and Loon Lake and shall explore the implications of my contention, locating as well the causes that seem to have eroded Doctorow's power as an historical novelist.

Al Sur, que también existe

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Search for Historical Totality.....	31
Chapter Two: Meaningful Totality Through Fragmented Form.....	81
Chapter Three: Intimations and Attenuations of His- torical Consciousness.....	139
Conclusion.....	192
Notes.....	197
Works Consulted.....	210

Introduction

Contemporary literary criticism makes much of the fact that the prevalence of phenomenology and relativism in modern thought has been progressively shifting the balance from "empirical" to "fictional" modes of narrative.¹ Although the so-called "non-fiction novel" does not go unacknowledged as an experimental form, the bulk of criticism concerns itself with theorizing about such phenomena as fabulation, metafiction, nouveau roman and surfiction. Any enquiry into the nature of these developments will ultimately have to focus on the essential question of the writer's perception of reality and outlook on life.

The present study deals with E.L. Doctorow's view of American society as rendered in Welcome to Hard Times,² The Book of Daniel,³ Ragtime⁴ and Look Lake,⁵ and will argue that these works belong in the tradition of the historical novel by approaching them as a single narrative unit which portrays the totality of American social development from a specific historical perspective. The consideration of the four novels as a unit will involve rearranging chronology. On the one hand, alteration of the composition and publication sequences will occur to adjust it to historical

succession: Doctorow's "U.S.A." starts out with the settling of the West in Hard Times, moves to the days of America's rapid industrialization and emergence as a world power in Ragtime, and describes the great Depression in Loon Lake, to follow, finally, the intricacies of the Cold War and the events of the sixties in Daniel. On the other hand, historical and literary reasons will determine the order and depth of treatment of the four novels. I propose to concentrate on Daniel in order to explore the modes of awareness (ways of knowing contingent reality and the reality of the self) and the fictional strategies and devices through which Doctorow articulates his vision of history (first and second chapters). I shall later indicate those aspects in the other novels that foreshadow, qualify, extend and/or contradict the socio-political and aesthetic animus behind this major work (third chapter). This variation in the methodological perspective--dictated by both my own critical interests and the nature of the novels--will lead us to examine the relation between history and fiction, exposing, in the case of Ragtime and Loon Lake, what I sense to be crucial blindspots in the narratives, springing from a contradiction on the part of Doctorow in the handling and transformation of historical material.

The striking thing about the term "historical novel" is that, except for a few cases that prove the rule, it is bestowed injudiciously on any narrative about the past that happens to incorporate actual historical personages into its cast of characters. It follows therefore that a clarification of what is meant by "historical novel" will be required before exploring Doctorow's work.

My perspective and methodology will be derived from the first systematic and foremost theoretician of the historical novel, the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács (1885-1971). Although the classic formulation of his theory appears in The Historical Novel, first published in Russian (1937) and translated into English from the German in 1962, I shall also draw upon other works by Lukács in expounding his main premises.

Lukács' theoretical framework represents a dialectical synthesis of Hegelian idealism and the materialistic interpretation of history. More explicitly, Lukács provides a Marxist-Leninist grounding (mental products are the reflection in consciousness of socio-economic formations) for some of Hegel's aesthetic ideas ("totality," "the concrete universal," "the world-historical individual," etc.), which he applies to the

study of literature.

In his essay "Art and Objective Truth," Lukács briefly defines the epistemological foundations of his thought:

The basis for any correct cognition of reality, whether of nature or society, is the recognition of the objectivity of the external world, that is, its existence independent of human consciousness. Any apprehension of the external world is nothing more than a reflection [Widerspiegelung] in consciousness of the world that exists independently of consciousness. This basic fact of the relationship of consciousness to being also serves, of course, for the artistic reflection of reality. 6

This premise governs all of the general and specific aesthetic principles that I shall attempt to bring into focus in the discussion that follows.

If the purpose of literature is to furnish an artistic representation of the laws of objective reality, the writer's ability lies in grasping the objective necessity and potential of the historical process as well as their correspondence with the inner requirements of aesthetic forms. As it is impossible to render individual and social life in all its intricacies and infinity, the writer has to convey an "absolute appearance of the relative image of life." 7 This means that what art lacks in completeness it makes up for in concreteness, vividness and concentration.

Lukács' concern in The Historical Novel is to fashion a Marxist theory of genres which, as might be expected, does not rest on purely formal categories. Drama and the epic, the two genres Lukács singles out, share the same representational aim:

Both drama and large epic, to give a faithful image of human life, must reflect correctly the dialectics of freedom and necessity. Both, therefore, must present man and his actions as bound by the circumstances of his activity, by the social-historical basis of his deeds. At the same time, however, both must portray the role of human initiative, of the individual human deed within the course of social events. (p. 172)

But the dramatic and epic representations of socio-historical forces in the interplay of contending "concrete human beings and concrete human destinies" (p. 126) differ in their relation to history and their compositional requirements. Whereas tragedy tends to reflect "the totality of movements" of life itself, the contradictoriness of social development by structuring all manifestations round the tragic collision and subordinating all social, human and moral movements to this vital core, epic reflects the "totality of objects," "the totality of a stage of historical development" (p. 106) in society by portraying that stage in all its breadth and depth, laying the emphasis on those institutions and customs that "mediate" the

relations between individuals in social life." (p. 163)

Another formulation of these differences between tragedy and epic would be to say that the former expresses the general historicity of the central collision, whereas the latter reflects "the concrete historicism of all the details." (p. 178)

As demonstrated in most of his criticism, Lukács stresses that the reflection theory (that is, the presence in a work of art of the external or socio-historical and the internal or subjective-psychological realities of a particular stage of development) should not be mistaken for a mechanistic, simplified sociology. Even if artistic forms originate in social tendencies, they have their own inner dynamics. An example will make this concept clear. The "world-historical individual" objectively stands for a person who consciously grasps the dialectical contradictions of a given epoch and acts upon his awareness, moving a step forward or backwards, thus enacting the uneven nature of progress. Drama as the genre portraying individual and social antagonisms at the moment of collision requires that the "world-historical individual" be the protagonist; the epic as the genre that "presents the growth of events, the gradual change or gradual revelation of the people taking part in them" (p. 144),

places ordinary persons at the centre and treats the "world-historical individual" as a minor character that appears only to fulfill his historical mission. Were King Lear,⁹ which reflects the moral movements stemming from the dissolution of the feudal family, to be transformed into a novel, Edgar would become the central figure and the genesis and evolution of the social and individual trends would take centre stage, the collision being shown as the climax to this development.

As genres, drama and the epic also differ in their evolution. Because of the natural facts of life it reflects, drama has proved to be a much more enduring form than the epic; yet, the development of tragedy has been punctuated by peaks and troughs, by short periods of excellence followed by long barren periods. And again the causes of these phenomena are to be found in socio-economic factors. Although certain facts are always present in social reality, they have to occur in the specific manner that requires a dramatic representation. To make his point, Lukács singles out "the calling to account" theme and its treatment in Everyman. This medieval play has the outward trappings of drama (scenic presentation, dialogue) but lacks its true elements (individualized characters, portrayal of the collision). That is, although the play deals with a fact of life

susceptible of dramatic treatment, the historical moment was not propitious for it, since it was written in the death throes of feudalism when class antagonisms had diminished in intensity, Lukács explains.

By contrast, the change of the old epic into the "great epic" (novel, and Novelle in the German sense) was very marked. The birth of the novel, Lukács states, issues from the socio-economic developments brought about by capitalism. The novel is the bourgeois genre par excellence, a conclusion most Anglo-American readers are familiar with from Ian Watt's classic The Rise of the Novel (1957). It should be stressed however that, although key notions such as realism, historicism, capitalism, middle-class, division of labour, etc., appear in the works of both Lukács and Watt, the premises underlying them provide divergent meanings and valuations of the concepts described.

As England was the first country to experience a bourgeois revolution (1688), the prehistory of the historical novel, asserts Lukács, may be traced to the social novels of eighteenth-century England. Swift, Fielding and Smollett contributed a realistic representation of their milieux and a sharp portrayal of contemporary mores and characters, but lacked a clear conscious perception of history as a process marked by

antagonistic contradictions.

The social base for the rise of the historical novel is to be found in the first great bourgeois revolution of 1789 in France. This popular uprising triggered off a series of momentous events (overthrow of the old regime, seizure of political power by the bourgeoisie, The Terror, rise and fall of Napoleon, revolutionary wars), which created the objective conditions for the growth of historicism. A clear understanding of what Lukács means by this concept is of the utmost importance for his analysis of the nature and development of the historical novel:

...we are concerned not with an internal affair of history qua science..., but with the mass experience of history itself, with an experience shared by the widest circles of bourgeois society... In the same way the awakening of a more conscious sense of history had influenced the experience and ideas of the broadest masses without their necessarily knowing that their new feeling for the historical connexions of life had produced a Thierry in historical science and a Hegel in philosophy etc. (p. 204)

Historicism entails then the consciousness that the three dimensions of time form a continuous process and that events taking place thousands of miles apart may be interrelated. For the first time across the European continent, the mass of the population in each country participated in the wars of liberation and

became aware of the major influence of past developments in the construction of the present, as well as of the role of men as protagonists of their own history and builders of their own countries. On another, yet not unconnected level, the fact that the spread of the Napoleonic empire wiped out the last vestiges of feudalism showed the interaction between political and socio-economic conditions.

According to Lukács, it was Sir Walter Scott's great achievement to have artistically rendered the historicity of social life for the first time. His best historical novels uncover the totality of the social determinants underlying the great crises of English history. Scott (1771-1832) acknowledges the tragic necessity of the decline of "gentile" societies (Scottish clans) in the name of progress and sees the process of English history as a middle ground force that asserts itself between two extremes, the best-known pattern being the compromise between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie achieved by the "glorious revolution" of 1688.

Scott's contributions as a novelist ensue from this perception of the laws of objective reality. Thus the need to represent the two contending factions led him to create a very special kind of protagonist, which

11

Lukács calls the "middle-of-the-road" hero. Because this young man does not have very strong political preferences, he can interact and share values with both parties. Scott's handling of historical figures also merits Lukács' praise. As explained earlier, the representational aim of the novel rules out the possibility of "the-world-historical individual" being the focal point of the novel. Through an intuitive grasp of the Hegelian concept of "world-historical individual" as the epitome of his age, Scott avoided the pitfall of hero-worship on the level of ideas and, compositionally, made the great figures of history secondary characters, who briefly appear on the scene at climactic moments, meant to foreground their objective historical missions (i.e., to give consciousness to popular demands for some historical change and translate them into deeds). Scott also extended the meaning of "world-historical individual" to apply to "semi-historical or entirely non-historical persons" (p. 39), such as Robin Hood in Ivanhoe and Vich Ian Vohr in Waverley.

Lukács acknowledges James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) to be the true heir of Scott in the English language, while Pushkin (1799-1837), Gogol (1809-1852) and Manzoni (1785-1873) carried on with the tradition in Russia and Italy. In the second half of the century,

Tolstoy (1828-1910) developed a form of the classical historical novel rooted in the dynamics of Russian society with no direct influence of Scott.

The bourgeois social novel represents the second great phase of development of the historical novel. The fact that the bourgeoisie objectively stood for all the democratic forces bent on doing away with the remnants of feudalism created the material base for the writer's close kinship with popular life and a strong sense of the past as the shaping force of the present. By keeping alive Scott's historical spirit, Balzac (1799-1850) transformed the historical novel into a dialectical portrayal of contemporary life. His novels reflect the contradictions of the French bourgeois society of his time, and the people are shown to be the real agents of progress. Balzac surpasses Scott in the psychological depth of his characters, as well as in the concreteness and unity of his portrayal of history, achieved through the conception of the Comédie humaine as a cycle of novels.

The pattern of Tolstoy's career, exemplified in the shift from War and Peace (a classical type of historical novel) to Anna Karenina ("the artistic history of contemporary bourgeois society"), parallels Balzac's development:

War and Peace, by broadly depicting the economic and moral life of the people, raised the great Tolstoyan problem of the peasantry and how different classes, strata and individuals were related to it. Anna Karenina presents the same problem after the emancipation of the peasants when antagonisms have sharpened still further: the present is made so historically concrete that the novel surpasses all previous Russian literature in the same way as Balzac's picture of French capitalism surpassed its predecessors. (p. 100)

The time lag separating Tolstoy's achievements from those of Balzac stems from the fact that Russia was a backward country in every sense; hence the necessary conditions for the emergence of similar literary phenomena appeared belatedly.

Once the "historicized attitude" to life born of the French Revolution is undermined due to the outcome of the class struggles of 1848, the bourgeois social novel begins to decline. The year 1848 was a turning-point in European history, which eventuated in the triumph of bourgeois liberalism. Both objective conditions and the subjective factor worked against the chances of success of popular uprisings, and the willingness of the bourgeoisie to compromise with feudal absolutism and play off sections of the proletariat against one another turned bourgeois rule into a reactionary regime and weakened the working-class movements.

This political retreat permeated all spheres of culture and became increasingly marked as time went by. Philosophic and scientific constructs as well as literature lost the main features that pervaded the work of the best representatives of bourgeois democracy. Lukács analyses in detail the development of these tendencies in several countries and a good number of thinkers and writers. The point he stresses throughout, however, is that the novelist's estrangement from popular life and its corollaries had a strong bearing on the historical novel: whether subjectivized, modernized, made exotic or abstract, history became a background and the people and their destiny progressively disappeared from the world of the novel.

Lukács' theoretical examination of the historical novel closes with "the humanist literature of protest" represented mainly by the anti-Fascist German writers Lion Feuchtwanger (1884-1958) and Heinrich Mann (1871-1950) and "the great humanist" Romain Rolland (1866-1944). In spite of the ideological advance their historical novels represents, there are still aesthetic weaknesses to overcome: the lack of focus on the concrete social and economic roots of the developments of the time (e.g., the rise of Nazism), and the one-sided picture of historical trends seen either from

"above" (upper spheres of power) or from "below" (life of the masses).

The Historical Novel was written in the heat of the ideological battle waged against Fascism, the hegemony of which constitutes for Lukács the most barbaric form spawned by capitalism in its imperialist phase. Lukács' hatred of Nazism, combined with contemporary events such as the struggle for a new democracy in Germany, the triumph of the Popular Front in France and the heroic resistance of the Spanish people in the Civil War, led him to miscalculate the outcome of historical events. In the preface to the English edition written in 1960, however, Lukács acknowledges this mistake but concludes that both his critical-positive and critical-negative theoretical conclusions have stood the test of time:

Thus, although my political perspective of the time proved too optimistic, this in no way alters the significance of the theoretical questions raised and the direction in which their solution is to be sought. (p. 10)

* * * * *

Both as a supplement to and a summary of what has been said so far, some of the major concepts that inform The Historical Novel and Lukács' other writings on

literature require a more theoretical formulation, to which I now turn.

Lukács' aesthetics rests on certain major ideas that have to be understood as categories in a dialectical-materialist sense: categories are concepts that reflect the general characteristics of objective reality conceived as a process of formation, development and resolution of antagonisms. Since Lukács' aesthetics constitutes a closely-knit system, isolating categories with a view to explaining them is a highly artificial procedure. It must be borne in mind, therefore, that categories define one another in their interaction.

It should be recalled that Marxism-Leninism explains thought and knowledge according to the reflection theory, art being a particular mode of reflection. In order that the complex dynamism of social reality may be faithfully reflected, asserts Lukács, literary works must be anthropomorphic (in the sense of being concerned with human interaction in this world, as opposed to a transcendental world), must appeal to the inner being of man by evoking emotions as well as a sensuous and realistic portrayal of the here and now of the milieu, and must bring self-knowledge or self-awareness which, as man is a social being, necessarily implies knowledge of the world.

Totality is not only the true category of reality, but also an essential characteristic of great art. According to Lukács, totality stands for the rich historical complex of determinations and relations of the social process, as well as for the whole, integrated human being, conceived in Marxist terms:

The materialist-dialectical conception of totality means first of all the concrete unity of interacting contradictions...; secondly, the systematic relativity of all totality both upwards and downwards (which means that all totality is made of totalities subordinated to it, and also that the totality in question is, at the same time, overdetermined by totalities of a higher complexity...) and thirdly, the historical relativity of all totality, namely that the totality-character of all totality is changing, disintegrating, confined to a determinate, concrete historical period." 10

As pointed out earlier, the actual determinations and interactions are infinite in number, and their artistic reflection demands the selection of the essential and the significant over the accidental and the irrelevant. Again, these concepts are not static and absolute as shown, for instance, in the difference between "the intensive totality" (historical concentration of social antagonisms) of tragedy and "the extensive totality" (gradual rise, development and resolution of social contradictions) of the epic.

The representation of totality in art is achieved

through speciality, a category which stands at the centre of Lukács' aesthetics and is concretized through the typical (the type, the specific) in the literary work. Since art is social and develops historically, it must of necessity reflect the human essence (the universal) not as abstractions but mediated through the social relations men enter into in the process of living. Now for this portrayal of the totality of social life to attain to the status of the distinctive form of consciousness that art is for Lukács, the writer has to select from the myriad of personal variations (the individual) the most important and characteristic attitudes in order to create fully realized personalities in the here and now of a definite historical period (the typical, the type, the specific). In Lukács' view, art aims at rendering totality through typicality in a sensuous tangible fashion that mobilizes the reader's emotional and intellectual resources. By demonstrating through the creation of concrete personalities and destinies¹¹ that the "innermost conflicts" of his characters grow out of "real historical conditions" (p. 269) at a particular time, in a particular place and within specific social contexts, the writer gives evidence of the objective working of socio-historical forces by means of the heightened and

highly complex mediation of art.

To recapitulate, the foregoing may be rephrased in the idiom of philosophy and aesthetics. Lukács claims that antinomies such as abstraction and factuality, and the general and the privately accidental, should be resolved through a dialectical process of transcendence, through the reconciliation of antinomial opposites (Aufhebung). Thus, totality through typicality describes the synthetic resolution of the universal and individual moments of the dialectics. Formulated this way, the work of art sublates the universal (Allgemeinheit) and the individual (Einzelheit) into the specific (Besonderheit). It is a question not of the unity of opposites, as Hegel noted, but rather of "an identity of identity and non-identity." That is, the contradictory and incomplete aspects of the two moments are cancelled but the true ones are preserved and interpenetrate, thereby becoming a higher, richer unity, a concrete totality.

* * * * *

I have purposely delayed addressing Lukács' views on realism and modernism, two questions capable of ruffling the composure of the most phlegmatic critics of his aesthetic system. Having explored the Marxist-

Leninist roots of Lukács' theory, we are now in a better position to understand his defence of realism and his rejection of modernism.

The scope of the concept of realism goes well beyond questions of technique or style. Actually, realism in its broadest sense is synonymous with the conception of artistic reflection:

The Marxist conception of realism is realism in which the essence of reality is exposed perceptually and artistically. This represents the dialectical application of the theory of reflection to the field of aesthetics. 12

It also transcends the boundaries of genres, since Lukács' pantheon of great realists is inhabited not only by the nineteenth-century writers so often mentioned in The Historical Novel, but also by Homer (fl. 850? B.C.), Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), Sophocles (496?-406 B.C.), Dante (1265-1321), Cervantes (1547-1616), Shakespeare (1564-1616), and Molière (1622-1673). The faithful representation of socio-historical trends does not involve a photographic reproduction of details or the supposedly exact rendering of actual events and average individual (i.e., naturalism), neither does it preclude the free play of the imagination:

...the Marxist conception of realism is not to be confused with any photographic reproduction of daily life. Marxist aesthetics simply asks that the writer

represent the reality he has captured not abstractly but as the reality of the pulsating life of phenomena of which it forms an organic part and out of whose particular experiences it evolves. But in our opinion it is not necessary that the phenomena delineated be derived from daily life or even from life at all. That is, free play of the creative imagination and unrestrained fantasy are compatible with the Marxist conception of realism. 13

Lukács cites the windmill episode in Don Quixote as "among the most successful and typical [scenes] ever created, though scarcely imaginable in ordinary life." 14

Since Lukács' aesthetic premises are an integral part of the materialist interpretation of history, perspective, that is, what points to the sublation (Aufhebung) of social contradictions, occupies a crucial position in the artistic configuration of a work:

...in any work of art, perspective is of overriding importance. It determines the course and content; it draws together the threads of the narration; it enables the artist to choose between the important and the superficial, the crucial and the episodic. The direction in which characters develop is determined by perspective, only those features being described which are material to their development. 15

The possibility of realism...is bound up with that minimal hope of a change for the better offered by bourgeois society. 16

At this point, it is relevant to stress what Engels called "the triumph of realism" in Balzac. When it comes to reflecting the dialectical syntheses of

social life, artistic perception takes precedence over ideological interpretations of historical facts. Although Balzac's views on French society were reactionary, the writer seldom erred in his artistic rendering of the objective historical trends in the period 1789-1848. On the other hand, the possession of an enlightened outlook on the world does not necessarily imply the artistic capacity to uncover the objective driving forces of history. Political consciousness therefore plays a lesser role than artistic perception in reflecting the totality of life.

Two bêtes noires inhabit Lukács' aesthetic universe: the so-called proletkult and modernism.¹⁷ No matter how strongly one may oppose his arguments, the case Lukács makes against modernism cannot be easily dismissed. Lukács shows that avant-gardism arose out of the ideological position of the dominant class at a particular stage in its development.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, bourgeois society increasingly loses its progressive character, and its period of decay sets in with the failure of the 1848 revolutions in most European countries. These socio-political factors translate in literature into the gradual disintegration of critical realism into successive "isms" (naturalism,

impressionism, symbolism, expressionism, surrealism, modernism), which Lukács often calls avant-gardism. By turning away from critical realism, these tendencies unintentionally depart from the de-reifying and humanizing functions of literature and foster political and social quietism. (

Lukács' objections to avant-gardism stem from ontological and aesthetic premises. "Philosophy," says Lukács, "distinguishes between abstract and concrete (in Hegel, 'real') ¹⁸ potentiality ... Seen abstractly and subjectively," potentiality affords an infinite number of possibilities, but what defines man historically is the limited number of possibilities that human beings actualize by interacting in specific social contexts. The Aristotelian zoom politikon (social animal) becomes in Lukács a "responding being." Confronted with choices, man turns abstract potentialities into concrete ones, his being emerging thus as a complex tissue of subjective and objective components: "Abstract potentiality belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity; whereas concrete potentiality is concerned with the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity ¹⁹ and objective reality."

To different degrees and in diverse ways, avant-garde writers focus their attention on symptoms. That

is, instead of penetrating to the socio-economic determinants of the dehumanizing effects that obtain in capitalist society, they remain on the level of appearances and raise them to the category of metaphysical essences. In this way, man's alienation is made into the static, unalterable condition humaine, and human agency is reduced to meaninglessness and impotence. This ahistorical vision manifests itself in art as abstract objectivity, abstract subjectivity and all the gradations in between:

But inasmuch as abstract objectivity is counterposed to an equally abstract subjectivity, the result is the same, merely with the signs changed. Whether it is a question of the fetishized powers of external life, or exclusively of the spirit, in both cases the conflicts of real human life are eliminated from the literary work. 20

While traditional critical realism transforms the positive and negative elements of bourgeois life into 'typical' situations and reveals them for what they are, modernism exalts bourgeois life's baseness and emptiness with its aesthetic devices. This tendency began with Naturalism, and has since become widespread, both as regards progressive reduction of content and increasing technical refinement. 21

"The dissolution of personality," "the negation or attenuation of reality," "the disintegration of the world of man," "the liquidation of history," "the unknowability of external reality," "the reduction of time to a subjective category," "the petrification of

forms," are some of the eloquent phrases Lukács uses to describe the major ontological and epistemological assumptions informing most of contemporary bourgeois literature.

Thus in Lukács' judgement "the ideology of modernism" has had a devastating effect on great or critical realism; it may be noted in fact that avant-gardism consists in the negation of realism. For Lukács the aim of art is to grasp the reality of class antagonisms and the contradictory nature of progress, as well as to enlarge the historical horizon by pointing towards future popular developments; and realism is the "structure of consciousness"²² capable of disclosing the socio-economic roots of the essence/phenomena dialectics and simultaneously portraying typical destinies and their organic link with the problems of the people. From this totalizing perspective then, it does not seem so difficult to understand why Lukács accuses modernists of offending against historical and artistic truth.

Fully aware that Lukács' premises draw strength from their manifold aesthetic and philosophical connections, I should like, nonetheless, to disagree on two issues concerning which his thinking evinces a negation of the dialectics of historical development.

There seems to be a split between Lukács' correct

theoretical formulation of the evolution of genres and lucid analyses of the effects of the division of labour and the ensuing alienation in advanced industrial societies on the one hand, and the demands he places upon contemporary writers on the other. In so far as literature is socially determined, it reflects the patterns of behaviour and the structure of feeling of specific groups in a particular historical situation from which new possibilities and means of expression may arise. Conversely, a writer's experience grows out of the occurrences that correspond to his time and social conditions. So how can those writers see through the appearances of historical processes, when the overall thrust of the culture is towards phenomenology, itself a manifestation of the alienation that affects the consciousness of all members of society? How can those writers maintain close links with the life of the people (a slippery concept in the context of late capitalism), when their very location in the class structure involves an obscuring of social connections? How can those writers make progressive popular movements the focal point of their novels, when proletarian class consciousness is at a low ebb owing to complex factors, such as "the integrating power of advanced capitalism"²³ and the displacement of the class struggle

from organized labour to militant minorities in industrialized countries and to "the external²⁴ proletariat" in the satellite countries of the capitalist metropolises? In asking contemporary writers to conform to the perception of the world and literary practices of critical realists, Lukács ignores what in theory he formulates so lucidly when he describes "the historical relativity of all totality," i.e., the fact that "the totality-character of all totality is changing, disintegrating, confined to a determinate, concrete historical period" (see note 7). And in pronouncing avant-garde literature decadent, Lukács surrenders historical and categorical complexities to "a particular image of the desirable."²⁵ It is instructive at this point to quote Bertolt Brecht, a Marxist theoretician and writer who strongly opposed Lukács' condemnation of modernism:

It would be sheer nonsense to say that no weight should be attached to form and to the development of form in art. Without introducing innovations of a formal kind, literature cannot bring new subjects or new points of view before the new strata of the public. We build our houses differently from the Elizabethans, and we build our plays differently. If we wanted to persist in Shakespeare's method of building, we should, for instance, have to ascribe the causes of the First World War to the desire of an individual (Kaiser Wilhelm) to assert himself, and that desire itself to one of his arms being shorter than the other. Yet that would be absurd. In fact that would be

formalism: we should be refusing to adopt a new point of view in a changed world merely in order to maintain a particular manner of building. That being so, it is as formalistic to force old forms on a new subject as new ones...It is clear that spurious innovations must be resisted at a time when the most important thing is that humanity should rub out of its eyes the dust that is being thrown into them. It is equally clear that we cannot return to things of the past but must advance towards true innovations. 26

It will be noted that, although open to formal experimentation, Brecht suggests that the value of technical innovations depends on the way they are used; a caution most relevant to my criticism of Loon Lake.

The question of perspective also becomes problematic when one is confronted with the actual function of literature in advanced capitalism. Rather than depreciate and dismiss the lack of a forward-looking stance, as Lukács does, criticism should acknowledge that whereas some writings may help to change reality, others deny such possibility.

For the purpose of this study then I shall be appropriating Lukács' model with these provisos. First, formal innovations departing from the techniques ordinarily associated with realism in its narrow sense will not be discarded off hand on the wrong assumption that they necessarily divert attention from or blur the focus of the historical novel. Hence the emphasis on

Daniel as a postmodernist work. Second, historicism defined as the portrayal of popular movements will be analysed in the light of the objective trends of the period under consideration. I shall otherwise retain the Lukácsian categories examined in this section.

Several specific reasons account for the importance I have ascribed to the theoretical frame of reference utilized in this study. Lukács is a highly controversial thinker and, not infrequently, the polemics surrounding his work arise out of misunderstandings and distortions of his ideas. If reflection and perspective, for instance, are often simplified in a mechanistic direction, realism and the typical are handled in such a way as to ignore the significantly different meanings Lukács attaches to them. Not that I consider Lukács' constructs without blemish. I simply oppose the tendency to wrench categories from a complex system in order to pull them to pieces, when one lacks a thorough knowledge of the totality (Marxist-Leninist philosophy of history, which Lukács would prefer to call Marxist ontology). On the other hand, given the profusion of "marxisms" that have issued in the twentieth century, I have taken pains to follow Lukács' own arguments in explaining his general

aesthetic principles.

Regarding the central topic of this study, I have observed that, although Doctorow's works--particularly Ragtime--are dealt with as historical novels, not a single critic defines his terms.²⁷ In this light, I thought it crucial to establish a solid theoretical foundation; I believe I have found in Lukács' model a valuable working perspective from which to survey the four Doctorow novels that will engage our attention in the following chapters.

Chapter One: The Search for Historical Totality

Several reasons justify calling Daniel a central novel. It represents Doctorow's most comprehensive and successful attempt to formulate his vision of America, a vision which also informs his subsequent writings. Even if Ragtime and Loon Lake are later novels, Daniel addresses the period that is most recent in time. And as an historical novelist Doctorow is concerned with the past as the prehistory of the present, that is, he is interested in the network of forces that over the years has shaped the history of his country and has determined the particular features of contemporary American reality. In this sense, the events narrated in Daniel necessarily result from the historical tendencies manifested in the novels that cover previous periods.

From a narrower standpoint, Daniel operates as a counter-model to traditional historiographical trends. Information overload and under-explaining of hidden connections are criticisms frequently levelled at American historical scholarship.²⁸ This attitude springs from an inability to ground abstractions, from an incapacity to see social phenomena as constructions historically produced through human activity. Daniel addresses these criticisms quite openly. To analyse and

explain, to establish connections are paramount concerns of the narrator, who is significantly a doctoral student. Daniel's "dissertation" practises what it preaches by stressing that ideas, far from being divorced from events, have a concrete socio-historical substratum. Daniel also challenges the relativism and subjectivism permeating American historical thought. Despite the strong emotional resonance the past holds for him, Daniel tries to be objective in reconstructing it. He examines various sources (books, defence files, interviews, his own personal experiences and memories, and talks with various people involved in the trial of his parents) and carefully weighs opinions and facts. Finally, if the available evidence does not unambiguously make the case for his parents' innocence, one incontestable fact remains: the Isaacsons (Rosenbergs), Communists and Jews, were tried and found guilty on slim evidence at a time when the WASP Establishment sought to convince public opinion of the reality of the "Red menace" in order to engage in full-scale militarization as a persuasive foundation for its economic, political and ideological expansionism.

• Before examining Daniel in the light of Lukács' model; a few general remarks on my interpretation of the novel and some of its formal complexity, to be

developed in detail later, are required as a frame of reference.

Daniel resembles a verbal collage composed of poignant and cruel memories, awful visions and nightmares, bitter invectives and sardonic observations. The juxtaposition, overlapping and embedding of these elements mimic the complex functioning of an individual's mind intent upon apprehending the interaction of historical determinants (necessity) and human purpose (freedom).

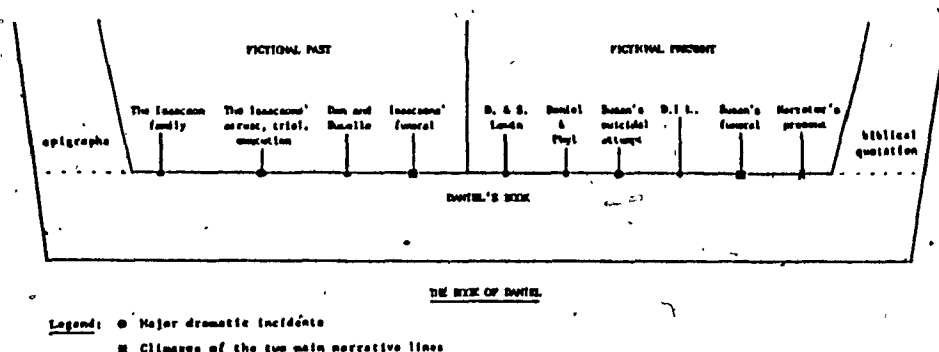
In order to engage the reader's attention and persuade him to share the interpretation of experience portrayed in the novel, Doctorow uses seemingly unpatterned verbal arrangements which place the reader in a position quite similar to that of Daniel. If the act of telling the story requires Daniel to establish connections, to analyse and interpret, the same faculties are called for in the reading process. Whereas Daniel has to grapple with the elusiveness, the ambiguity and terrors surrounding his past and present, the reader must put together the fictional fragments, must identify the shifting narrative focus, and sequentially organize the different temporal planes on which the narrative operates. In other words, the verbal arrangements function as a structure of perception, and

the word "perception" intimates some of the most important motifs of the book. Observing, establishing connections enable Daniel and the reader to analyse, interpret and draw conclusions. In turn these processes yield perceptions and visions which, once recorded, become Daniel's Book for the narrator and Daniel for Doctorow and the reader.

Much of the experiential and historical richness of the novel emanates from a subtle and complex handling of point of view. Metaphorically we can actually speak of two authors: Daniel Isaacson Lewin and E.L. Doctorow. Daniel's Book is embedded in Daniel, which overlaps the former and provides it with a symmetrical beginning and closure that unambiguously state Doctorow's views. Daniel's Book is complete in itself, but the syntactic difference between the two titles (use of inflected and non-inflected genitives) and the fact that the beginning and the end of Daniel are set off from Daniel's Book (the beginning as epigraphs; the end by the use of italics) formally signal the contrast and thematically reinforce the historical dimension of the novel within the novel. I'd rather be repetitive than obscure. Daniel is made up of four books, which I have chosen to call Daniel's Book. These four books are preceded by three epigraphs and followed by an italicized quotation, drawn

from three different sources but thematically related.

A brief commentary on the main strands of the plot will serve to clarify the time scheme which is purposely jumbled. This can be illustrated as follows:



The different narrative strands centre upon the relationship between certain characters and their interaction with the milieu. The story lines intersect continually, enriching and counterpointing one another according to the dictates of Daniel's consciousness. This narrative strategy along with the sustained dialogue between the two sides of the protagonist, "Daniel Agonistes and the narrating Daniel,"²⁹ impart such immediacy to the novel that it creates the illusion of temporal simultaneity and the sense that the memories are being acted out in the present.

Since Susan's attempt at suicide sets the plot in

motion, it will be considered as the pivot or point of reference for the fictive present, which comprises those events taking place either immediately before or after the suicide attempt. Chronologically the fictive present covers the period between Memorial Day and Christmas (1967), as well as those flashbacks recounting incidents that have happened a few years earlier. The fictive past spans almost five decades and encompasses events that constitute distinct narrative units. The importance of the crucial facts taking place in both temporal dimensions should be noted (●■).

* * * * *

Let us turn now to the major socio-economic assumptions and the conception of history that inform Doctorow's novels generally and Daniel in particular.

Lukács explains the mediocre, easygoing, rather phlegmatic nature of the Scott hero as embodying the "steadfastness of English development amidst the most terrible crises" (p. 37). American history can hardly be described in those terms. It is true that there have been social upheavals and armed conflicts, and millions of Americans have died as a result of them. Nevertheless measured against Europe -- scourged more than once by the Four Horsemen, more recently in the form of

concentration and death camps and the bombing of heavily populated cities and industrial facilities -- the American experience appears as a chronicle devoid of massive wartime deaths, especially among civilians. Only the Civil War, perhaps, comes near to the scale of European suffering.

The socio-political circumstances surrounding the foundation of the colonies account not only for the relatively undramatic character of American history, but also for the rapid growth of the country. The bulk of the European colonizers came from Great Britain, where capitalism, the economic system in the ascendent, had reached its most advanced stage of development. Because of its primitive character, the indigenous form of production encountered by the settlers in the New World was doomed to be destroyed by the system brought over from Europe. Unhindered by the absence of competing organizations of the productive forces and aided by the richness of natural resources, the availability of fertile land and the abundance of manpower and capital, first the colonies and then the nation entered into successive phases of unprecedented economic expansion which, despite periodic recessions and depressions, have extended to this very decade.

In short: unlike Europe, where behind the rise of

capitalism lay millenia in which different antagonistic socio-economic formations contested with each other, American history started under the aegis of the most progressive economic system then known to man. The forces that dictated the development of the United States have undergone marked changes -- from the laissez-faire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to finance capitalism and neo-capitalism in the twentieth. These changes, however, have been effected within the basic pattern of liberalism, broadly understood as the socio-political worldview sustained by the class which owned and has continued to own the means of production and exchange.

Against this background, it is easy to understand Lukács' assessment of James Fenimore Cooper. It was Cooper who, in the Leather-Stocking tales, powerfully captured the contradictions of human progress reflected in the annihilation of the less complex Indian communal organizations at the hands of a colonizing power that, along with a higher civilization, also brought corruption in its wake and caused the moral and human disintegration of the Delawares. This "world-historical tragedy" is heightened, Lukács remarks, by Cooper's portrayal of the situation through a character who objectively belongs to the triumphing class but who,

owing to his simple, plebeian values and aspirations, spontaneously develops a strong, emotional yet contradictory bond with the "Redskins." This is Lukács on Natty Bumppo and his creator:

It is true that his moral attitude on the whole remains that of an European, but his uncurbed love of freedom, his attraction to a simple, human life bring him closer to these Indians than to the European colonizers...In this simple, popular figure who can only experience his tragedy emotionally, but not understand it, Cooper portrays the enormous historical tragedy of those early colonizers who emigrated from England in order to preserve their freedom, but who themselves destroy this freedom by their own deeds in America. (pp. 71-72)

Our historical outline also helps to clarify why socio-economic antagonisms do not form the backbone of the American novel. Rather, conflicts centre round the individuals' physical and moral struggles in pursuit of the American dream, or pit human beings against nature, religious and metaphysical values, and the demands of society. It is no accident that a good number of characters end up "lighting out for the territory" or making their "separate peace."

Because the American Constitution embodies the ideals of democratic liberalism and because the economic system regulating social relations swept forward almost unimpeded for many decades, there has been a tendency in American historiography to exalt the progressive side of

capitalism (reduction in prices due to the mechanization of production, expansion of the market, available purchasing power, rise in living standards), and the predominance of pluralism and individual freedoms. Broadly speaking, this is the vision presented by the progressive and consensus trends in American historiography. ³⁰ In the early nineteen sixties, another group of scholars, usually referred to as revisionist or New Left historians, radically shifted the focus by stressing the antagonisms inherent in the system. Without denying the benefits of capitalism, they sought to demonstrate that a system powered by competition and built on private property and free trade necessarily entails the freedom to exploit and deprive others, as well as "a strategy of empire." William Appleman Williams uses this phrase to explain that economic growth may be sustained so long as surplus production is sold abroad, a purpose that cannot be achieved without foreign markets and the penetration of weaker national economies. This in turn facilitates the use of trade and credit as instruments of political pressure and dominance.

Revisionist historians thus stress the fact that the social consequences of the economic order, such as poverty, unemployment, marginality, etc., are a function

of the economic system rather than a function of laziness or sin, and oppose the realpolitik of American foreign policy. Although often lumped together under the label of revisionism, these historians share various concerns but also have varying perspectives. It would be a mistake to consider them Marxists preaching the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by force. Rather, their impelling motives stem from a desire to see the power elite respect and implement the spirit of the American Constitution or from the realization that only structural changes can alter a system that perpetuates social injustice and divisiveness.

A similar passion seems to motivate Doctorow. Rather than address the web of historical events that has made for his country's greatness and prosperity, Doctorow dwells on those aspects of social and economic history which undermine the optimistic vision of America. He suggests that these are facts that have been ignored or distorted in prevalent historiographic accounts, which resulted in the myth of a generous, innocent, idealistic and energetic people, forging its manifest destiny in an atmosphere of freedom and tolerance.

Interestingly enough, the historian William Appleman Williams interprets "The Pit and the Pendulum"

in a manner that seems to bear out the affinity between Doctorow's vision and the revisionist assessment of the American experience. He claims that Poe's story "is perhaps the most subtle yet devastating fictional attack on *laissez faire* ever written," and adds that through his literary practice "Poe stuck pins in the utilitarians and the wild nationalistic expansionists."³¹ A similar symbolic role is assigned to Poe in Daniel. Reviewing names of Americans who have been stigmatized as traitors by historians, Daniel notices that the latter have failed

to mention the archetype traitor, the master subversive Poe, who wore a hole into the parchment and let the darkness pour through. This is how he did it: First he spilled a few drops of whiskey just below the Preamble. To this he added the blood of ...Virginia, whom he had married and who hemorrhaged from the throat. He stirred these fluids...with the extracted tooth of the dead Ligeia. Then added some raven droppings. A small powerful odor arose from the Constitution; there was a wisp of smoke which exploded and quickly turned mustard yellow in color. When Poe blew this away through the resulting aperture in the parchment the darkness of the depths rose, and rises still from that small hole all these years incessantly pouring its dark hellish gases like soot, like smog, like the poisonous effluvia of combustion engines over Thrift and Virtue and Reason and Natural Law and the Rights of Man. It's Poe, not those other guys. He and he alone. It's Poe who ruined us, that scream from the smiling face of America. (p. 177)

The association Daniel establishes between those

who dare to point to aberrant, subterranean forces and treason constitutes the core of the novel. On the other hand, the implied need to embrace the whole, to understand the parts, relates to Lukács' view that a truly creative literary work represents a recovery of the totality of being.

In Daniel, conformity and dissent, normality and madness, innocence and guilt, loyalty and treason, commitment and detachment, essence and appearance serve to delimit from various angles the arena where individuals and groups fight their battles. These issues do not take on the metaphysical connotations that they often have in American literature. Rather, they are explored through ironic argumentations firmly grounded in history as the wellspring of human motivations. This relates to Lukács' claim that the masters of the historical novel derived their gift of reflecting totality through typicality from the historicism informing their visions. In reading Daniel we are made to feel the strong link between past and present. Not only does the past appear as a force shaping the present, but the present is portrayed as history. The characters and trends depicted in the novel are shown to be socio-historically conditioned, and yet there is as much emphasis on individuals as "responding beings" with

32

"teleological projects" of their own. In the vocabulary of The Historical Novel, Daniel enacts the dialectics of necessity and freedom through socio-historical types. Thus the characters possess both specific social and personal dimensions, and their traits grow out of their concrete response to the historical and individual questions posed by the book.

In what follows, the complexity of the issues at stake in Daniel and the implication of the speculations advanced will be pursued with specific reference to the ideological horizon of capitalist society, first in the politico-military sphere (post World Wars I and II, the nineteen sixties), then in the broader field of culture (DISNEYLAND AT CHRISTMAS). The historical trends and individuals portrayed as typical by Daniel will allow us to draw certain conclusions in terms of the ethics of politics, and the transmutation of experience into the novel proper will provide the occasion to comment on the handling of the categories of the historical novel that emerge from Lukács' model of this particular type of fiction.

From the vantage point of the sixties, Daniel focuses on the period par excellence in which "the

darkness of the depths rose," as body politic and government perceived with different degrees of awareness the stresses and strains of the social structure in the period following World War II. The fear of losing post-war prosperity and the spread of international Communism loomed large in the minds of Americans. Politicians, big business, the military and the press seized on these fears and harnessed them to their own interests, which at this time happened to consist in silencing and harassing those who dissented from the increasingly right-wing militaristic policies that had been evolved to steer the course of events after Roosevelt's death. In going over the causes, means and ends involved in the creation of the paranoid atmosphere of the fifties, Daniel keeps cutting back to post World War I to underscore the typical pattern of intolerance, violence and persecution that American society develops to cope with trends that seem to challenge basic beliefs and ideological positions.

In the section AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON (pp.23-25), Daniel ironically recalls the aftermath of World War I in the arena of political, labour and social relations. To be specific: irrational partisanship combined with the rebirth of intolerance; the connivance of government and big business led to the arbitrary use

of the long arm of the law to crush fair labour demands and stifle radical political ideas and action; deprived of ordinary channels of expression and repressed by the police and the military, the social unrest surfaced in terrorist attacks (p. 24); legislation to counter espionage and sedition was passed; the press played on the public fear of alien ideologies and soon Reds became the selected scapegoats; political intolerance snowballed into racial and chauvinistic violence. The then recently formed American Legion actively entered the scene and, in the words of the narrator:

The Ku Klux Klan blossomed throughout the South and West. There were night ridings, floggings, public hangings, and burnings... New immigration laws made racial distinctions and set stringent quotas. Jews were charged with international conspiracy and Catholics with trying to bring the Pope to America... And the stage was set for the trial of two Italian-born anarchists, N. Sacco and B. Vanzetti for the alleged murder of a paymaster...(pp. 24-25)

In the wake of World War II, a more complex scenario of internal stress and external threats elicited the same pattern of response on the political and ethnic levels. The fifties witnessed the concerted and coordinated effort by the three branches of the government and some federal agencies, notably the FBI, to enforce conformity and curtail individual liberties through pressure tactics. A wave of loyalty oaths,

probes and purges swept throughout the country. The media once again abetted the public fear of Communism.

Daniel probes into the etiology of the Cold War and concludes that it exemplifies a most arbitrary, unrestrained and tragic manipulation of power. In his analysis, America was an active participant in fashioning the Cold War atmosphere. The objective conditions surrounding the United States and the U.S.S.R. towards the end of 1945 favoured the former. The losses sustained by the Soviets were staggering; Russian industries had been ravaged by the Germans and the whole economy was in a shambles. By contrast, the United States emerged from the war with its enormous productive potential undamaged and its economy strengthened by the sale of war supplies and other commodities to the devastated European countries. The fundamental point Daniel makes is that his country had the choice of standing up for humanity (peaceful coexistence) or for its own narrow economic and political interests. Both these opposed views had supporters within the government, but in the end the hardliners gained the upper hand:

As is well known the senior man in the cabinet, Henry Stimson, believed that the diplomatic use of a temporary bomb monopoly to ultimately change conditions in Soviet Russia was a terrible miscalculation that

could lead to disaster. (p. 232)

Of Stimson the suspicion leaks through that he has lost his usefulness to us. Instead of thinking of our interests he's thinking of humanity. Let him get Joe Stalin to think of humanity. (p. 234)

Daniel portrays Truman as an unsophisticated, mean-spirited man and ascribes to him the thoughts just quoted, when considering a memo sent by Stimson (1945).

He [Stimson] wants to negotiate a treaty directly with Russia whereby we would impound our bombs, cease their development provided she (and Britain too) would do the same, and that the three nations would agree not to use the bomb unless all three decided on that use. (p. 233)

But Truman turned a deaf ear to Stimson's advice and gave in to other opinions:

Diplomacy in the formulation of Truman, Byrnes and Vandenberg, is seen not as a means to create conditions of peaceful postwar détente with the Soviets, but as a means of jamming an American world down Russia's throat. (p. 234)

Despite the fact that the "Russians are portrayed as aggressive, devious, untrustworthy, and brutally single-minded" (p. 237), Daniel points out that, according to W.A. Williams, Kremlin officials were divided between those that favoured détente and those who pushed for expansionism, a power struggle that was eventually (1947) decided in favour of the latter.

This happens about the time Henry Wallace is fired from the Truman cabinet for making this

statement: "We should be prepared to judge Russia's requirements against the background of what we ourselves and the British have insisted upon as essential to our respective security." (p. 237)

Daniel presses the point that American foreign policy was based on a tragic "failure of analysis"; even worse, on an unscrupulous abuse of power aimed at manipulating American public opinion:

Secretary of State Acheson will testify some years afterward that never in the counsels of the Truman cabinet did anyone seriously regard Russia as a military threat -- even after they got their bomb. Bipartisan Senator-Statesman Vandenberg tells how the trick is done: "We've got to scare hell out of the American people," he says. (pp. 237-38)

The same newspeak rationale lies behind other postwar measures:

The Truman Doctrine will not be announced as a policy of providing military security for the foreign governments who accept our investments, but as a means of protecting freedom-loving nations from Communism. The Marshall Plan will be advertised not as a way of ensuring markets abroad for American goods but as a means of helping the countries of Europe to recover from the war. (p. 238)

In brief, the postwar world was anything but the unwanted outcome of unintended purposes; the role of the United States anything but that of a responding victim to Soviet pressure:

Russia has had the effrontery not to collapse. We are faced with an international atheistic Communist conspiracy of satanic

dimension. Which side are you on? Russia moves into Rumania, Bulgaria, East Germany. Russia rolls over Czechoslovakia. Here is NATO. Here is the Berlin Blockade. And behold, it came to pass, just the kind of world we said it was... (p. 238)

It is in this context that the Isaacsons' trial and execution are presented.

At this point reference must be made to the Rosenbergs. Probably no other political trial has engaged the intellect and passions of so many people around the world. The literature on l'affaire Rosenberg is voluminous and controversial. However, it is immaterial for my purposes whether, like the Schneirs, I deem Julius and Ethel Rosenberg innocent or, like Radosh and Milton, pronounce them guilty. This is not the issue at stake in Daniel. This study aims at elucidating Doctorow's vision of American history and, as I have argued by providing textual evidence, Daniel traces the patterns of behaviour in those periods when American society was undergoing "reconversion." The facts seem to indicate that under stress, American political and economic institutions tend to toughen and act with more ruthlessness than might be expected in a democracy. The rationalization underlying these moves consists in a Manichaen vision of a free, Adamic America pitched against the dark forces of Communism, as

if the dynamics of history could be confined within the limits of a struggle between good and evil.

On pondering over his parents' actual responsibility in the alleged spy ring, Daniel must own to being unable to decide, on the evidence gathered, whether the Isaacsons were guilty or innocent. Upon reflection, he remembers that they acted guilty, only to dispel or qualify this half-formed judgement thus:

Of course, there is a slight oddness in the way they reacted to the knock on the door--as if they knew what was coming. But they did know what was coming. And so did everyone else who lived with some awareness into that time. There were certain convictions that American democracy would no longer permit you to hold. If you were a Jewish Communist, anti-Fascist; if you cried Peace! and cheered Vito Marcantonio at the Progressive Party rally in Yankee Stadium; if you were poor; if you were all of these things, you knew what was coming. (p. 130)

The American Communist Party is certainly not cast in a good light. Daniel states that the Party left the Isaacsons to their own resources and his foster father points out that it tried to profit from the case, once public opinion had mobilized in support of the accused. The Old Left is condemned for adhering to the Stalinist dogma of the Party as a surrogate subject of the revolution. Let us recall that Marxism-Leninism accords primacy to working-class praxis; the Party provides ideological articulation for this praxis but it can

never replace it. Party members are shown to be
 dogmatic, what Doctorow calls "programmatic radicals."³³

The longest exposition by anyone of them occurs at a meeting at the Isaacsons' (pp. 85-87). An unnamed but apparently important individual lectures on the operation of the government and the deep causes of the Cold War, and Daniel, the narrating child, dislikes his "show-offiness." Interestingly enough, the substance of what the speaker says does not differ significantly from the analysis discussed above, which comes much later in the novel. It is mainly the rhetoric and self-righteous tone that jar the ear. ("It is all part of the Wall Street conspiracy, it is the reflex of capitalist imperialism trying to shore up its rotting foundations.")

Daniel also perceives the Isaacsons as dogmatic and resents the ideological training he was subjected to in his childhood. However, the sting of his criticisms and ironies is softened by the warmth and affection that joined the family together. Daniel's objective evaluation of his parents' politics appears in the following paragraph:

I remember Radio Town Meeting of the Air. He [Paul] used to turn that on at home. It would make him furious...The strong speaker was always a right-winger..."What are you eating your heart out for? Pauly. You know who owns

the stations. You know it's all rigged... Her [Rochelle's] contribution to his self-esteem was in warning him that his sensitivity could ruin his health. Who owns the airwaves? Who owns the American Press? Who rules America? Like Du Pont dealing with I.G. Farben. Evidence, there was never enough evidence. He swam in it... You ate your heart out to keep the revolutionary tension. But Rochelle didn't have to do that. She didn't have to go to the primer again and again... In her way she was the more committed radical. Because, look, the implication of all the things he used to flagellate himself was that American democracy wasn't democratic enough... Why did he expect so much of a system he knew by definition could never satisfy his standards of justice... Lots of them were like that. They were Stalinists and every instance of Capitalist America fucking up drove them wild. My country! Why aren't you what you claim to be?... And it was more than strategy, it was more than Lenin's advice to use the reactionary apparatus to defend yourself, it was passion. (pp. 39-40)

Totality through typicality also manifests itself in the immediate past, since the socially essential movements or countermovements of the sixties come alive in the intense portrayal of Sternlicht (hippiedom, drug-addicted culture), Susan (New Left) and the narrator himself.

Daniel's visit to Artie Sternlicht at his Lower East Side haunt allows us to get acquainted with a kind of radical reasoning and vocabulary (pigs, heads, spics; spin out the shit, dig, etc.) designed to foreground a life-style which differs sharply from that of the Old Left. The megalomania, buffoonery and hippie bombast

contained in the scene have a double edge. For one thing, they are typical tactics Sternlicht employs to shock listeners and, supposedly, the enemy. For another, they are meant to debunk the "new consciousness" and "Revolution" which Artie believes he incarnates. Although he reveals considerable insight into the shortcomings of "corporate capitalism," the abstract rhetoric and magic thinking governing his radical lecturing on how the system should be overthrown (the revolution is described as a happening!) ironically underscore the ideological immaturity of the movement and hence the historical feasibility of the undertaking (see STERNLICHT RAPPING, pp. 136-140). Sternlicht's iconoclastic criticism of the role of the Old Left and the American Communist Party, and, by implication, of the uselessness of the Isaacsons to the revolution--except as a source of funding--precipitates Susan's decision to kill herself (pp. 150-152).

Susan's thoughts and attitude as described in the Christmas scene (pp. 81-82) bear the imprint of the New Left, whose rhetoric and practice Daniel obviously dislikes. On this particular occasion, he judges Susan's righteousness harshly and with characteristic irony, partly because he is provoked into anger by his sister's perception of him as a coward, partly because he

associates her speech with their parents' dogmatism. He changes his mind when, after his conversation with Sternlicht, he realizes Susan has been considered as an expendable pawn in the revolutionary games of the sixties.

Daniel himself represents a bundle of contradictions arising from the conflicting versions of reality he has imbibed since childhood. He criticizes both the Isaacsons' Communism and the radicalism of the sixties; yet his perceptual disposition, as shown earlier, is undoubtedly leftist. The targets of his attacks coincide with some of the issues that unified the heterogeneous voices of the New Left (opposition to the military-industrial complex, the draft, the Vietnam war, etc.), as well as with the questions that rallied the Old Left together (economic exploitation, the arms race, the machinations of the power structure to neutralize dissent, neo-colonialism, etc.). We can go even further by pointing out those areas in which a Marxist interpretation is openly proposed by Daniel, notably his suggestion that corporal punishment is the basis of all class distinctions:

Classes are created...and maintained by corporal punishment. The authoritarian head of a society derives his power from the support not of the masses but of the upper classes or privileged bureaucracy which funds

his government and divides its rewards. By contrast the loyalty of the masses is maintained only by constant physical intimidation. As societies endure in history they symbolize complex systems of corporal punishment in economic terms. That is why Marx used the word "slavery" to define the role of the working class under capitalism. Slavery is the state of absolute submission to corporal punishment. In times of challenge, however, the ruling classes restore their literal, unsymbolized right of corporal punishment upon the lower classes, usually in the name of law and order. The crime of someone in the lower class is never against another human being but always against the order and authority of the state. (pp. 129-130)

Readers of Daniel know that the "unsymbolized right of corporal punishment" is exercised by the state in electrocuting the Isaacsons.

The ambivalence that determines Daniel's view of respectable liberals ("that sentimentality for radical action to which liberals are vulnerable--an abstract respect for the dangerous politics they themselves are incapable of practicing" p. 79) may help to adumbrate his own contradictions. Unlike most young people from affluent families and no doubt due to his lower middle class childhood, Daniel is fully aware of the advantages that money, class and Ivy League education can provide. But the strong Lewin component of his outlook cripples the radical impulse in him. Locked thus in the liberal ideal of personal fulfilment, he is unable to articulate

thought and action into the Lukácsian sense of outward destiny, understood as the integration of individual purpose and social necessity. The fact that a lucid understanding of social reality does not necessarily generate the will to transform it, is prefigured in Daniel's ironic, albeit mistaken interpretation of Marx's eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach ("The philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." p. 194). This reference occurs in the section FALLING (pp. 193-96) which describes Paul's and Rochelle's meeting and falling in love while attending C.C.N.Y. Daniel's mood is one of supercilious mockery at this couple of lower middle class romantics who naively think that their college activism is changing American reality (i.e., they are weak on interpreting the world). Whereas his parents' behaviour tips the scales in favour of action, Daniel's response represents a swing of the pendulum towards detached exegesis. I shall return to the correct interpretation of the eleventh Thesis and its relevance to our understanding of Daniel at the end of Chapter Two.

It may be argued that Daniel's record of personal tribulations as they intersect antagonistic social trends constitutes a unique indictment against the malfunctioning of the American system, more powerful and

effective than any direct political action might be. I would be the last person to deny the profoundly disturbing nature of the novel as a carrier of political and moral judgements on the quality of American life. My main objection in this respect is that the broad canvas of the book seems to be perceived only rarely. Most critical essays on Daniel usually privilege the emotional and intellectual struggles of the protagonist to come to terms with his familial past and individual identity. It is as if the historical dimension were bracketed off or, at best, considered as a static backdrop. What interpretations of Daniel as a Bildungsroman or, more specifically, as a Künstlerroman,³⁶ neglect is that the reification pervading advanced capitalist societies blocks from consciousness the perception of the stark side of American culture--fragmentation, homogenization, vicariousness.

Early in this chapter I showed that the narrator perceives with acuity how economic goals dictate politico-military moves; his discernment is no less sharp when carried over into the reified sphere of culture. Towards the end of the book, the unravelling of the plot takes Daniel to an area of the United States which, "once only orange groves" (p. 263), has turned into "the country of strontium children" (p. 264).

Beside establishing the significant fact that the Mindish family, which has cut off all ties with the past, has settled here, the setting of this portion of the novel in the heart of the military-industrial complex affords Daniel the possibility of juxtaposing its visibility ("Everything in the open in the wide spaces and bright light of California" p. 264) with another key American phenomenon, Disneyland, as conspicuous as the former as a twin symbol of the country's positive and negative accomplishments. What Daniel does in the Disneyland passage approximates to Lukács' method of cultural critique, in the sense of an attempt to examine the most mediated patterns of meaning and purpose of an entire society.

Disneyland, located "somewhere between Buchenwald and Belsen" (p. 285), is construed as the epitome of a society in which the manipulation of the consuming masses becomes the overriding concern. DISNEYLAND AT CHRISTMAS (pp. 285-291) exposes the primacy of material profit, its relation with culture, politics and consciousness, and the mechanisms employed to create the conditioned reflex (purchasing) sought by Disneyland patrons (corporations). The whole section is a ferocious diatribe against the vicarious experiencing of an abridged and distorted cultural heritage to which

visitors (customers) are subjected until "the Pavlovian process of symbolic transference to the final consumer moment may be said to be complete." (p. 289). The political implications lie in that:

What Disneyland proposes is a technique of abbreviated shorthand culture for the masses, a mindless thrill, like an electric shock, that insists at the same time on the recipient's rich psychic relation to his country's history and language and literature. In a forthcoming time of highly governed masses in an overpopulated world, this technique may be extremely useful both as a substitute for education and, eventually, as a substitute for experience. (p. 289)

Given the complexity of the issue of reification, I shall confine myself to drawing attention, as Daniel does, to the distinct aspects of American reality which facilitate the kind of political manoeuvring that has been denounced in earlier parts of the book, as well as to explaining why, within the framework of Marxism, Daniel's "individual choice" responds to his class affiliation.

Disneyland is shaped like a womb (p. 285), an ironically befitting symbol for an institution that generates synthetic cultural life twice removed from the original products--literature and history (genuine product > animated cartoon > emblematic ride). On account of their reductionism and distortion of ideas,

these increasingly spurious transformations successfully vie with the aesthetics of totalitarianism (pp. 287-88). While the accuracy and advanced technology displayed by machinery and other mechanisms take one's breath away, the flora, fauna and inorganic life pathetically betray their unreality. Nonetheless, ample evidence exists to prove that, despite these obvious aberrations, Americans--mainly affluent whites--continue to flock to the amusement park, so much so that for Daniel "its real achievement...is the handling of crowds" (p. 289). "The problems of mass ingress and egress seem to have been solved here to a degree that would light admiration in the eyes of an SS transport officer." (pp. 289-90)

Although enough has been said to deflate Americans' proverbial confidence in their freedom of choice and individuality, the pun "the collective unconsciousness of the community of the American Naïve" (p. 287) encapsulates the most caustic observation. In Jung's system the collective unconscious is the major component of the psyche, a kind of universal reservoir of the rich archetypal experiences and modes of thought handed down from generation to generation since mankind appeared on earth. The second component of the pun translates as class consciousness, a Marxist concept referring to the awareness that the proletariat has to

achieve regarding their role in the production process, in order to be able to overthrow the system of private ownership. Both analogies speak for themselves. The richness inherited, through the collective unconscious has been drastically reduced. Alienation, as a basic objective feature (cf. psychological category, existential angst) of a system based on exchange values, is so overpowering that it has precluded middle class Americans from realizing that the appearance of freedom they enjoy is strictly confined to functioning within the well-oiled grooves of a society primarily mobilized by the production and acquisition of superfluous commodities.

The social composition of the Disneyland visitors connects with Lukács' contention that a writer's portrayal of totality consists in artistically disclosing the intimate link between spontaneous popular reactions and the historical consciousness of leading personalities. The presence of the masses is nowhere to be found in Daniel. The closest it comes to showing popular movements are the Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill in the fifties and the Pentagon March in the sixties. Should Daniel be dismissed as an historical novel because the concrete mass/"world-historical individual" is lacking? The answer is provided by Lukács

himself when he identifies "historical relativity" as one of the defining characteristics of totality (see p. 17). "Relativizing" totality implies describing what the category signifies in the concrete historical moment of a specific society: the bulk of the population in the United States is middle and upper class, and it is their needs and prejudices the government caters and panders to respectively. The high standard of living has drawn part of the labour movement into the middle class. And if poverty breeds revolution, material security favours conservatism. "The other America" does exist and it numbers millions. But it is a social malaise the system and mainstream America can afford to ignore as long as this section of society remains submissive.

The two sets of connections that play such a major role in classical historical novels do exist in Daniel. The interaction of past and present appears as vividly as in Balzac or Tolstoy and is far more distinctive than in Scott or Cooper. The other set (mass/"world-historical individual") has been altered because the concrete circumstances have changed: above/below has become above/middle. This explains why the typical collective response to crises already discussed involves the middle classes. We get glimpses of the people at the bottom, especially in the

twenties. But because the novel focuses mainly on post World War II, labour unrest and racial violence are not developed. Yet the subject is touched upon here, hinted at there. Much as Paul's "lectures" may have scared or bothered Daniel, there is more than a grain of truth in them:

He told me things I could never find in my American History about Andrew Carnegie's Coal and Iron police, and Jay Gould's outrages, and John D. Rockefeller. He told me about using imported Chinese labor like cattle to build the West, and of breeding Negroes and working them to death in the South. Of their torture. Of John Brown and Nat Turner... He described to me the working conditions and wages of the steelworkers, and coal miners, in the days before the unions -- how men would be crippled for life or buried alive because the owners were so busy draining every last penny from their work that they wouldn't even put the most primitive safety measures into effect. (pp. 34-35)

Since Doctorow himself is writing about conditions non-revisionist historians seldom address in this light, I do not think he would quarrel with Paul's account.

If we look at Daniel's notes for "subjects to be taken up" (pp. 16-17), it may be observed that the third topic listed, whose treatment is interspersed throughout the first book, deals with two types of individuals who, instead of humanizing themselves by their labour, have been driven to drinking (Williams) and mental derangement (grandmother ; see BINTEL BRIEF, pp. 64-68)

through no exclusive fault of their own, but mainly due to their origin and living conditions.

Because Doctorow explores the role of political and economic interests and finds a cleavage between the facts and the rhetoric, the "world-historical individuals" cannot play the role of conscious bearers of historical progress, as they did in the classical historical novel. Let us refer to three of them. Truman and Stimson are the standard-bearers of two contradictory tendencies within their own class. The former's attitude and decisions constitute the epitome of the military-industrial complex that actually governs the country (see LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT, p. 264). The latter symbolizes the rational call of democratic humanism. And the Rosenbergs - Isaacsons, either as political and ethnic scapegoats or as victims of a flawed trial and unduly harsh punishment, spotlight an unsavory trend in American society which forms an undercurrent deeply rooted in the past.

If the purpose of studying history is to learn from past errors, Doctorow's retrospective glance at both postwar periods intimates that Americans have not been wise. They went through two Red scares and, judging from the enthusiastic response to the Reagan Administration's propensity to Manichaeism, the fears

abetted by the forces of reaction are taking root once again in the American soil. Doctorow's declarations in 1983 on what Reagan represents seem to confirm the insight dramatized in Daniel...with a twist:

The great political contests in this country since Franklin Roosevelt have been between the center and the right. So in that sense Reagan is not an aberration. On the other hand, there is something new about him: the abandonment of the liberal rhetoric by which we've always disguised our grubby actions from ourselves. This president is saying the conflict between our democratic ideals and our real political self-interest is over; that the conflict between our constitutional obligations and the expediences of economic capital reality is over; the crackling contradiction between our national ideals and our repeated historical abuse of those ideals is over. It turns out after all we were not supposed to be just a nation, but a confederacy of stupid murderous gluttons. So there's a terrible loss of the energy you get from self-contradiction, from the battle with yourself. If there was a way of taking a national EEG, you'd find that the brain waves have gone flat. That's new. The religious fundamentalist and the political right have made explosive contact, and in the light of their conjunction it says Armageddon. 35

Let us examine what has become of the protagonist of the historical novel. How does Daniel compare with the middle-of-the-road hero described by Lukács? Doctorow follows in the steps of Cooper regarding the increased tensions and contradictions that beset the central character. The changed socio-political circumstances require the creation of a many-sided

character endowed with analytic and imaginative powers enabling him to grapple with the more complex questions at issue. The typical "middling" Waverley or Ivanhoe gives way to the volatile and commanding Daniel. The function of the hero is modified accordingly. He still stands at the centre of the plot and his character and circumstances bring him in contact with the contending historical trends and individual destinies portrayed in the novel. But his is no longer a genial, pliable presence that smooths out and reconciles differences. On the contrary, Daniel addresses historical periods when the contradictions underlying the American system have sharpened and therefore have had a strong impact on the people -- if only through the shock of awareness of what lies beneath the appearance of political normalcy. It is true that in the end Daniel acquiesces, as most Americans have done so far. Nevertheless, before he returns to his political lethargy, Daniel does show a fight both on the level of ideas and as a "Pentagon Weekend" political activist. It is a measure of Doctorow's grasp of the historical horizon of the times that he does not turn Daniel into a 1960 version of the Byronic rebel; rather, he keeps his character well within la conscience possible (Lukács' concept)³⁶ of the upper middle class, that is, the class-bound limits

of the individual's social praxis.

Lukács contends that historical fidelity consists in the faithful reproduction of the objective dynamics of society and not in a rigid adherence to particular facts. This distinction allows the writer scope for "necessary anachronism," a concept first formulated by Goethe and developed by Hegel. On the whole, Doctorow alters individual facts so as to embrace the totality of social being as much as possible, as well as to enhance the ironic and dramatic quality of the novel. The material circumstances and education of Julius Rosenberg are changed (middle class standard of living, engineer), which brings Paul Isaacson closer to the bottom and poverty. The main accuser, Ethel Rosenberg's brother, is turned into a Party member, and the Communist lawyer of the Rosenbergs becomes the liberal Ascher, probably the most humane, generous character in the novel, and the main instrument for gauging the accuracy of Daniel's reconstruction of the past. And Robert and Michael Rosenberg metamorphose into Daniel and Susan. This is a crucial change from an artistic point of view and requires analysis.

The relationship between Susan and Daniel encapsulates the convergence of the personal and historical dimensions of experience. The tragedy of their

parents marked the children for life. In the dark days of their "orphan state," brother and sister sustained each other and developed a strong symbiotic bond. When they became the Lewin children, Daniel and Susan never talked about the Isaacsons, although the vacuum left by their death still haunted them. If life with their foster parents "was unbelievable good" (p. 62), it also meant adjusting to a life-style and an ideology that differed significantly from the children's way of life with the Isaacsons. Confronted with this situation, both children tried to cope with their past through similar defence mechanisms. Their feelings towards the Isaacsons came to be invested with increasing ambivalence: they loved their parents and regretted their death; but because they felt they had been abandoned, anger became an important affective component, and this feeling in turn created guilt. The ambivalence grew stronger when they were adopted by the Lewins:

Embarrassingly, Daniel and Susan adjusted to the rise in their fortunes...Their new parents never shouted, life didn't beat out that rhythm of crisis and training for crisis. There was an absence of ideology and relentless moral sentiment...There was an assumption that constantly surprised Daniel, that took getting used to: It was all right every now and then to enjoy yourself, and have a good time.

And so Susan and Daniel Lewin slipped

into the indolent rituals of the teenage middle class. In order for them to do this, there had to be a dialectic of breaking free: you asked yourself why live in faith or memorial to the people who had betrayed you. For obvious reasons this too was unspoken between them. (pp. 62-63)

But although unspoken and banished to more or less unconscious regions of their mind, Daniel and Susan could not escape their original identity:

If, in their proud, snotty, tormented adolescence he and his sister tacitly came to the conclusion that Paul and Rochelle Isaacson were not worth their loyalty, there was, however, nothing they could do to squander it. The decision was out of their hands. Whatever they did, whatever view they took, it was merely historical process operating. And even faithlessness in their hearts, real genuine bitter-brewed carelessness of spirit, could not dissolve that. Under one guise or another they were still the Isaacson kids. (p. 63)

At one point Daniel came to his senses and, realizing that his childhood was real, tried to make contact with Susan again. It was too late. Their old affective bond had been, if not weakened, distorted by the silence with which they had tried to seal their past.

Faced with the nascent civil unrest and political militancy ushered in by the sixties, brother and sister took divergent paths. Daniel entered Columbia University, got married and kept aloof from the fledgling radical movements. Susan, by contrast, joined the New

Left, persuaded that this movement provided continuity to the ideals the Isaacsons had died for. Susan's changed attitude to their original parents and the siblings' different views on the new socio-political circumstances, as well as the deterioration in their relationship sharpened by her transformation are dramatized in the Christmas scene, where the Isaacson Foundation is discussed:

"Don't worry, Daniel. You can forget the Foundation. It doesn't need you. You have all the political development of a retardate...."

"Go back to the stacks, Daniel. The world needs another graduate student."

"Well, I don't have to go out and get beat up to justify my existence."

"No, you'd rather jerk off behind a book."

"This must stop," the mother said. "You are ruining my dinner."

"Susan, I don't think you're handling this very well."

"Oh yes she is, she really is. She's a Revolutionary! She's got all the answers. She's been to the barricades!"

"Oh Jesus," Susan said, beginning to cry. "And you know I blame you," she said to Robert Lewin. "I blame you all for the piece of shit this brother of mine--"

"Susan--"

"I mean what did they do it for? What did they die for? For this piece of shit?"

"Susan--"

"Leave me alone, Daddy. You let him sit there and twist everything I say. My mother and father were murdered -- why do you let him sit here and do it again!" (pp. 81-82)

The next time brother and sister meet is in the

psychiatric hospital, after Susan's attempt at suicide.

The contrast with the scene quoted above is startling.

Not looking at him, she lifted her arm, her fingers dipping toward him, a bored, humorous gesture, one that made his heart leap; and he took the outraised hand in both his hands thinking Oh honey, oh my poor honey, and kissed the back of her hand, thinking It's her, it's still her, no matter what she does...(p.8)

Daniel must have sighed. Susan reached out and patted him gently on the back. "They're still fucking us," she said. "Good-bye, Daniel. You get the picture." (p. 9)

Although Daniel does not understand her message (I shall return later to this quotation), he experiences it as the re-establishment of communication with Susan, as a summons to stop running away from his past:

...Susan had communicated with me; just that; and if now in our lives only extreme and dangerous communication was possible, nevertheless the signal had been sent, discharged even, from the spasm of soul that was required - and that was the sense of summons I felt sneaking up over the afternoon like a blanket of burned space around my ears. Susan and I, we were the only ones left. And all my life I have been trying to escape from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another they are what you come upon around the corner....(p. 30)

On the same day, Daniel finds a letter Susan had mailed to the Lewins' address. Referring to the Christmas scene, she states:

You couldn't have come on that way unless you believe the Isaacsons are guilty. That's what I didn't want to understand at the time. You think they are guilty. It's enough to take someone's life away.

Someday, Daniel, following your pathetic demons, you are going to disappear up your own asshole. To cover the time until then, I'm writing you out of my mind. You no longer exist.

S.I. (p. 77)

Let us remember that when Daniel sees the envelope he is seized by fear. From then on, he becomes a kind of twentieth-century Orestes hounded by the Erinyes for the shedding of kindred blood. Symbolically, Daniel has not only committed matricide and patricide, but has provided part of the impetus for Susan's suicide. And his release from persecution can only come about once he has decoded ("interpreted") his sister's message (p. 153), has explored his feelings towards the Isaacsons, and has come to terms with the Isaacson side of his identity, all of this in the light of the historical forces impinging upon the characters.

In sketching out the relationship between Susan and Daniel, I have tried¹ to suggest that Susan is the keystone in generating the dynamics of the plot. In the next chapter, I shall discuss how she provides one of the main sources of structural unity. Because the writing of Daniel's Book spans the time between her

attempted suicide and her burial, we tend to perceive her as a passive character. I insist, neither the role she plays in solving the jigsaw puzzle of the novel nor her personality as evoked by Daniel justifies such a perception. Until the end of Book Three, Susan is the force behind most of Daniel's acts, as well as the person whose approval Daniel seeks to gain.

I indicated earlier that in making the younger Rosenberg a girl Doctorow had used historical anachronism to his advantage. Perhaps a brief consideration of sex will pave the way to a better understanding of the relationship between brother and sister and the unique quality their gender difference lends it.

In all Doctorow's novels sex plays a distinctive role. Daniel draws upon sex for many of his metaphors and links it with life and death, less often with power. His mind spontaneously speculates on other characters' sexuality. The Isaacsons "[made] the whole house rock... They balled all the time" (p. 42). As for the Lewins, "I have the sudden intuition that their lives have become too sorrowful for sex" (p. 217). "I am glad my wife never met Sternlicht. He is probably a champion fucker" (p. 152). While locking horns with Linda Mindish over their respective parents' participation in the spy ring

of the fifties, Daniel "imagined her in bed" (p. 275). Susan's own engagement in free sexual relations is as destructive as her experience with drugs. One outlet for Daniel's pathological traits is his sexual abuse of Phyllis. Whether healthy or unhealthy, the preceding examples are confined to sexuality as intercourse.

With regard to Susan and Daniel, we enter another dimension. The sphere of incestuous relations must be ruled out entirely. At one point in the narrative, Daniel describes their relationship in terms of Susan's "being taught and taken care of" until she reached adolescence, when:

There were certain needs and expectations for life that could not properly be filled by your brother or sister. That was normal.... That experience of total dissatisfaction with the closely related.... Except with their parents not available for that kind of self-honing, that sharpening of independence, he was the strop; the mother, the father, the brother, the family. (p. 62)

What Daniel renders through the images of "self-honing" and "strop" corresponds to what some psychoanalysts conceptualize as the second separation-individuation process.³⁷ For our purposes, it should be underlined that this process is preceded by the partial resolution of the various phases of development, the partial resolution being effected in interaction with the familial and socio-cultural environment. For the infant

to be able to establish a healthy relationship with the mother -- which will become the model for later ones -- the latter must be capable of both empathizing with the infant's needs and showing affection (emotional or libidinal support). In adolescence, the overall developmental growth climaxes in the second individuation process, which hinges on the relinquishment of family dependencies ("self-honing").

We may now turn to Daniel in order to explore the causes that led Doctorow, most probably quite intuitively, to portray the Isaacsons as brother and sister. As soon as their parents were arrested, both children manifested symptoms of emotional upheaval (Susan = enuresis; Daniel = hysterical behaviour):

What was life come to as I lay now with my leaky sister in the staleness of Aunt Frieda's bed... (p. 157)

I found that when I couldn't breathe well I became manically active. I did not speak, I screamed. I did not walk, I ran. I couldn't keep still. (p. 159)

The Isaacsons were separated from their children at a crucial moment in Susan's psychosexual development, which explains why she is the more disturbed of the two. At the shelter, for instance:

...she did not ingratiate herself. She was not cute. She was terrified. Her hair was black and dirty and her blue eyes had sunk into her cheeks. She looked like a D.P. She

bit the girls' supervisor's hand one day and was slapped. Then she kicked the supervisor. She was a problem down there. Whenever we saw each other she clung to me. (p. 164)

Being five, Susan was in the midst of the Oedipus phase, that stage of development in which gender identity is defined by bringing the father into the family constellation: the dyad (child-mother) expands into a triad (child-mother-father). With their parents absent, Daniel becomes the main vehicle for Susan's development, at a time when the focus of the child shifts, or has already shifted, from the mother to the father as the main developmental partner. A deeper reason for Susan's clinging to Daniel, therefore, stems from the libidinal attachment to the father -- father substitute in this case -- which a healthy resolution of the Oedipus complex necessitates at this age.

There are some suggestions in the text to warrant the reading that the close and tense involvement between Susan and Daniel may spring from pathological incestuous feelings. Duberstein, Susan's psychiatrist, asks Daniel: " 'Why do you resent anyone who tries to help Susan?' He looks keenly at me as befits his question" (p. 28). Daniel ironically remarks. However, this is what Daniel confesses while he watches Susan's life slowly ebbing away:

More than once I have asked myself if I'd like to screw my sister... But in our history I don't think I have ever wanted that. My involvement with Susan has to do with rage, which is easily confused with unnatural passion. (p. 208)

I think that the developmental parameters mentioned above allow us to take Daniel's words at their face value. More importantly, the historical thrust of the novel tends to emphasize the interdependence of the social and individual spheres of life. Daniel's interview with the psychologist of the Bronx Shelter (pp. 164-167) foregrounds the child's mature understanding of the social forces disrupting his and Susan's lives, in the light of which his sister's disturbed behaviour should be examined. Despite the fact that his new role burdens him with responsibility, Daniel intuitively grasps his sister's needs and does not begrudge her the deep emotional feedback she requires. Daniel teems with rage, fear, violence, guilt and anxiety; yet Daniel's rare outbursts of tenderness are in response to Susan:

When I picked her up there was no weight to her... Her arms hung down from the shoulders, her skinny legs from the knees... Her head lolled back as if her neck were broken. Susan, in her ear, Susan, whispering, Susan hugging her bones and her dry weightlessness, Susan kissing her eyes. Only the warmth of her bones told me she was not dead. (pp. 209-210)

Daniel may have been brother, father, mother and family to Susan. She is the "feminine voice" that frames "the edges of my vision" [My own emphasis] (p. 209).

The scenes at the shelter are mainly designed to make the reader feel the impact of the parents' arrest upon the children. Had the Isaacsons been two boys, like the Rosenbergs, the dramatic charge and poignancy conveyed through their seclusion would have diminished considerably. Susan's terror and tantrums take on added intensity because she is left to herself, as the rules establish that boys and girls should be in separate sections. Although Daniel's fantasy of reunion with his parents prompts him to engineer the escape from the shelter, Susan's plight finally impels him to take such a bold step.

Thinking back on the changes made by Doctorow, it may be concluded that the liberties he takes with particular details of the historical material fall within the pattern of "necessary anachronism." "The inner substance of what is represented remains the same, but the developed culture in representing and unfolding the substantial necessitates a change in the expression and form of the latter."³⁸ Whether Doctorow ever heard of Hegel's concept, or Lukács for that matter, is mere speculation. Nevertheless, the historical

operation of his consciousness seems to have responded most successfully to this particular formal requirement of the historical novel.

In this chapter I have sought to bring out the richness and complexity of Daniel as an historical novel, with the aid of the model described in the Introduction. I also indicated there my reasons for disagreeing with Lukács' prescriptive view of avant-gardism or modernism.

In the next chapter I shall focus on the operation of language in Daniel--use of narrative strategies, recurrent imagery and tropes, and point of view--in order to demonstrate how Doctorow succeeds in "[re-individualizing] the general" (The Historical Novel, p. 105) by exploiting postmodernist techniques. In other words, I shall explore the manner in which the historical concretization and typicality, and the evocation of the relative totality of the social developments analysed in this chapter are heightened by means of complex verbal configurations.

Chapter Two: Meaningful Totality Through Fragmented Form

In seeking to support with explicit internal evidence the arguments advanced in Chapter Two, I have cited those passages that articulate Danfel's vision most clearly. In the process, I may have unwittingly conveyed too uniform an impression of the artistic rendition of the raw material. I should hasten to add that Doctorow's concern with history is as vital as his interest in generating new forms. The foregrounding of language as the specific medium of literature has long been recognized as the major hallmark of modernist and postmodernist prose-writing, and textual reading has proved to be a most appropriate tool to identify and describe the wealth of narrative strategies and images with which experimental writers operate. In this chapter I shall explore the variety of technical resources Doctorow deploys to create the linguistic texture mediating the interlocking of characters and historical tendencies. The guidelines systematized by David Lodge in Language of Fiction will serve to deal with the novel "as essentially an art of language."³⁹

Lodge's method recognizes two variants -- the textural and the structural. The former concentrates on

the close analysis of one or more passages selected by the critic; the latter consists in "tracing a linguistic thread or threads -- a cluster of images, or value-words, or grammatical constructions -- through a whole novel." ⁴⁰ These "verbal arrangements" should be understood in a broad sense, encompassing the grammar of the paragraphs and the overall text as well.

An important methodological point should be made here. I shall not attempt a comprehensive study of the compendium of rhetorical devices displayed in Daniel, but concentrate on those that articulate the vision of history discussed in Chapter One. Since the first book incorporates most of these verbal arrangements, I shall undertake a textural analysis of key passages in Book One: Memorial Day. I shall subsequently trace the development of the major linguistic patterns in the remaining three books according to Lodge's procedure, leaving the questions of point of view and unity of the novel to be addressed last.

* * * * *

On opening Daniel's Book, the reader finds the following passage:

On Memorial Day in 1967
Daniel Lewin thumbed his way from New York to
Worcester, Mass., in just under five hours.

With him was his young wife, Phyllis, and their eight-month-old son, Paul, whom Daniel carried in a sling chair strapped to his shoulders like a pack. The day was hot and overcast with the threat of rain, and the early morning traffic was wondering -- I mean the early morning traffic was light, but not many drivers could pass them without wondering who they were and where they were going.

This is a Thinline felt tip marker, black. This is Composition Notebook 79C made in U.S.A. by Long Island Paper Products, Inc. This is Daniel trying one of the dark coves of the Browsing Room. Books for browsing are on the shelves. I sit at a table with a floor lamp at my shoulder. Outside this paneled room with its book-lined alcoves is the Periodical Room. The Periodical Room is filled with newspapers on sticks, magazines from round the world, and the droppings of learned societies. Down the hall is the Main Reading Room and the entrance to the stacks. On the floors above are the special collections of the various school libraries including the Library School Library. Downstairs there is even a branch of the Public Library. I feel encouraged to go on. (pp. 3-4)

The first paragraph reads as a straight third-person narrative until we get to "wondering," which of course does not make sense when applied to traffic. The unexpected word and the dash conspicuously draw attention to the shift to first-person narrative. A certain amount of information is furnished through a balanced number of coordinate and subordinate sentences, and expectations are created by the last two embedded clauses. "Hot," "overcast," and "threat of rain," components of one of the recurring semantic clusters,

start foreshadowing an oppressive atmosphere that will be associated throughout with unpleasant circumstances. Notice the lack of punctuation at the end of the paragraph.

The second passage is disconcerting, to say the least. No causal link is provided and, except for "I" and "Daniel," the reader finds no clear clue enabling him to make an unambiguous connection. For all he knows, "I" and "Daniel" may have two different referents. This disjointedness is expressed syntactically, through paratactic, independent, sentences. Significantly, the only sentences with lexical verbs have the same subject ("I"). It is as if the voice repeatedly articulating the structures "There is....," "This is..." were asserting the existence of the surrounding objects and places, as if this were a means of keeping a hold on reality. The equation Daniel = I, suggested in the first paragraph, is slightly reinforced by repeating the sequence "Daniel-I" (Daniel Lewin-I) and by the presence of the "he-I" in the same place (on the road; in the Browsing Room). A pejorative element colours the fecal metaphor "the droppings of learned societies," which together with the singsong monotony of the ritual naming of objects, conveys an ironic nuance to "I feel encouraged to go on."

The third paragraph (p. 4) relates to and continues the first one. Daniel's and Phyllis' looks are explicitly associated with two historical periods and life-styles ("A cafeteria commie," nineteen thirties; "flower girl," nineteen sixties). The detached, neutral tone of the passage, relayed in the third person, strikes a discordant note in "Let's face it." Its effect is to shorten the distance between narrator and reader; at the same time, it seems to promise information of a more subjective nature than that provided so far. Actually this is anticipated in the adjectives immediately preceding the sentence quoted ("more self-possessed and opinionated"), which in turn refers back to the last sentence of the second paragraph ("feel"). Although the objective narration of actions continues to predominate, our expectations are partially fulfilled: "As a matter of principle she liked to talk...", "he was glad he relented." "He noticed" introduces Daniel's objective perception of cars ("big and wide and soft"), and his subjective generalization regarding drivers' attitudes towards "young American kids."

The next paragraph (p. 4), short and referential, discloses the destination of Daniel and his family (Worcester State Hospital) and introduces his foster father. The transition to the first flashback although

implicit is quite clear. This retrospect (pp. 4-5) stands out for several reasons. It is the first paragraph entirely told by Daniel in the first person. The highly critical reasoning and the sardonic tone as well as Daniel's jargon are emphasized. The tone and the bizarre description of Phyllis convey a sharp, somewhat jarring picture of Daniel's psychological make-up and of his troubled relationship with both his parents and his wife.

Images characterize the next paragraph, exhaust being described imagistically:

The road was jammed in both directions, and a blue haze of exhaust drifted through the heavy air. Daniel imagined it curling around his ankles, his waist, and finally his throat...On the downhill side of the street were gas stations, dry cleaning drive-ins, car washes, package stores, pizza parlors. American flags were everywhere. (p, 5)

Fumes are to be added to the images or value-words correlated with unpleasant situations. The haze of exhaust is so dense and suffocating that Daniel invests it with a concrete corporality whose motion, progress and effect recall a snake winding up a tree (Daniel's tall body) ready to kill by choking (throat). Taken literally, the haze of exhaust describes the polluted environment of an American city. Traffic jams, gas stations, pizza parlors, etc., add to the negative urban

description, which is ironically clinched by the flags asserting nationhood. The pejorative image of the American landscape is sharply elaborated in the segment of the novel that takes place in Southern California (pp. 263-64).

The third paragraph starting on page 5 (pp. 5-6) is conveyed through one of the typical verbal strategies of the book: only at the end do we learn their destination is a mental hospital. However, after a few referential sentences, the depiction of "the weird people" works powerfully and clearly towards the climax. The parallel with a flock of pigeons brings out the helpless, mindless, frightened condition of the patients. The exclamation in capitals given a paragraph to itself ("SO THAT'S WHERE THEY WERE GOING!") reveals the importance of the destination, whereas its delayed disclosure and the euphemistic phrase "a public facility" for the mentally ill" carry an ominous overtone.

Although long, the next paragraph to be analysed must be quoted in full, because it excels in conveying the kaleidoscopic operation of Daniel's consciousness and hence the narrative texture it is capable of creating:

The way to start may be the night before, Memorial Day Eve, when the phone rang. With Daniel and his child bride at sex in their

115th Street den. The music of the Stones pounds the air like the amplified pulse of my erection. And I have finally got her on all fours, hanging there from her youth and shame...The phone is about to ring. The thing about Phyllis is that when she's stoned all her inhibitions come out. She gets all tight and vulnerable and our lovemaking degrades her. Phyllis grew up in an apartment in Brooklyn, and her flower life is adopted, it is a principle. Her love of peace is a principle, her long hair, her love for me -- all principles. Political decisions. She smokes dope on principle and that's where I have her. All her instinctive unprincipled beliefs rise to the surface and her knees lock together. She becomes a sex martyr. I think that's why I married her. So the phone is winding up to ring and here is soft Phyllis from Brooklyn suffering yet another penetration and her tormentor Daniel squeezing handfuls of soft ass while he probes her virtue, her motherhood, her vacuum, her vincibles, her vat, her butter tub, and explores the small geography of those distant island ranges, that geology of gland formations, Stalinites and Trotskyites, the Stalinites grow down from the top, the Trotskyites up from the bottom, or is it the other way around -- and when we cannot be many moments from a very cruel come that is when the phone rings. It is the phone ringing. The phone. I believe it is the phone. (p. 6)

The first sentence is uttered by a self-conscious narrator in search of an appropriate beginning for his story. The transition from Daniel to "I" via "my" confirms our surmises as to the identity of the two narrative voices. What follows serves to point forward to the way Daniel was raised (the Isaacsons also lived on principles, and the adult Daniel resents this fact); to develop the relationship between Daniel and Phyllis

as much as Daniel's contradictory feelings and tortuous mind; and to introduce the political question. Sex is depicted in terms of aggression/submission (sado-masochism) and is linked to a particular life-style (hippies) and to politics (power struggle, persecution, political murder). Daniel's diction brooks no euphemisms and his mind indulges in a rhetoric that is at once palpable ("gently squeezing handfuls of soft ass") and abstract ("her youth and shame"; "her virtue, her motherhood"). Towards the end, his language approaches the metaphysical conceit (Did Doctorow have in mind Donne's "Elegie XIX"⁴¹): lover's organs>distant island ranges>geology of gland formations>Stalinites and Trotskyites. How did Daniel get to the fourth startling comparison? Literally the description of Stalinites and Trotskyites corresponds to stalactites (phonetically very close to Stalinites) and stalagmites. Politically the geological top and bottom translate as being in power and having been removed from power. The repetitions with variations in the last sentences show the rational powers in abeyance in moments of sexual transport.

A quotation from page 7 will serve to show another facet of Daniel's verbal formulations:

The old hospital was put up around the turn

of the century. It was designed with the idea that madness might be soothed in a setting of architectural beauty. It is darkly Victorian, with arched doors of oak and mullioned windows. One other fact of considerable interest is that contrary to the popular belief this is one insane asylum that is not overcrowded. In fact it is, upon Susan's arrival, half empty. That is because modern methods of therapy, including tranquilizing drugs, do away with the necessity of incarcerating every nut who happens to live in Worcester, Mass., or environs...The theory is that the person's normal environment is therapeutic. The theory is that the person wants to go home. (p. 7)

On the surface, this reads as a denotative passage expressing general facts concerning modern psychiatric practice (fact, idea, belief, theory, methods of therapy are all impersonal subjects). Two extraneous elements, however, disrupt the dissertation-like flow of this passage ("upon Susan's arrival"; "nut"). Do these elements betray carelessness on the part of the writer? By now we should know the answer. "Upon Susan's arrival" functions as a standard method for casually introducing characters, topics and images of great import, which are to be developed and elaborated as the novel unfolds. Both elements also serve to remind the reader that the dynamics of the narrative largely relies on the sustained dialogue between the narrating Daniel and Daniel Agonistes, an exchange that involves different degrees of tension and distance. Moreover, the rapport

with the reader cannot be dismissed, given the important role he plays in "closing the circuit." Hence the deliberate selection of clues strewn along dissimilar passages meant to aid him in the reconstruction of the novel.

Let us go back to the paragraph in order to qualify the foregoing statements. Although its topic (madness) leads us back to the passage on "weird people," the verbal strategy, relying on understated irony, differs in that it does not zoom in on the inward condition of the "weird people" but focuses on society's attitude towards them. Actually, Daniel is scathingly criticizing the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients. If the asylum is half empty, it is not for lack of deranged people but because "nondangerous" patients are--to use a diction in line with "nut"--doped and dumped. And yet, despite the emphasis on the institutional, we sense that insanity troubles Daniel at a more personal level, an insight that is confirmed when he meets Susan and is overwhelmed by tenderness, dread and guilt. Later he frets and fumes over the obstacles encountered to release her from the psychiatric hospital. Irony, a speculative cast of mind, and unexpected diction--usually drawn from colloquial or vulgar language registers--have come by now to be

strongly associated with Daniel; the reader cannot fail to recognize his verbal signature. At the same time, speculation and coolness as well as attention to peripheral details (see description of the staff attendant and commentaries on Dick and Liz in the following paragraph, pp. 7-8) operate as defensive mechanisms ("In times of crisis I am always sensitive to people on the periphery," p. 148). That is, the detachment conveyed by the narrating Daniel deflects the anxiety and checks the outbursts of rage and pity that threaten to overcome Daniel Agonistes when he is faced with painful and ambivalent situations. As the following passage shows, meeting his suicidal sister in a psychiatric hospital is a disturbing experience for Daniel. This would not be in itself so remarkable, if the cool, callous, calculating side of the protagonist had not been particularly emphasized in earlier paragraphs.

For ten minutes Daniel sat next to her. He was hunched over and staring at the floor while she sat with her head back and her eyes closed, and they were like the compensating halves of a clock sculpture that would exchange positions when the chimes struck. He thought he knew what it was, that sense of being overcome. You suffocated. The calamity of it. He had had such spells...You didn't know what to do. Something was torn, there was a coming apart of intentions, a forgetting of what you could expect from being alive. You couldn't laugh. You were in

dread of yourself and it was dread so pure that one glance in the mirror scorched the heart and charred the eyes. (pp. 8-9)

Let us isolate the main elements fused in this paragraph. The image of the compensating halves of a clock sculpture with its synchronous motion dramatizes not only the emotional interdependence between brother and sister, but also the quality of their relationship: their interaction has both the solidity of a sculpture (affective links strengthened by shared traumatic experiences) and the delicacy of a clock mechanism (communication threatened by different roads taken in adolescence). By attempting suicide, Susan has acted out an impulse that Daniel recognizes as his own: his sadistic tendencies are a means of warding off the onslaughts of self-hate by directing the aggression onto others, whereas suicide represents the most extreme form of hostility against the self. The iterative imagery of fire ("scorched," "charred") is one of the many metaphors for death and suffering.

Next I would like to take a close look at the Bukharin passage. We are still at the insane asylum. Daniel and his foster father talk, while Dr. Duberstein is trying to have Susan released from the hospital. Daniel's mood has changed; he has relaxed and is enjoying the afternoon weather. I will quote the last

sentence of the paragraph preceding the one I want to examine:

The afternoon grew festive --

Bukharin was no angel, of course. In the course of his trial he spoke of condoning the murder of Whites in the heat of the revolutionary struggle. Going down before Stalin, he felt obliged to make the distinction between murder that was politically necessary and factional terrorism. In 1928, ten years before his trial, he criticized Stalin's line of forced industrialization and compared Stalin personally to Genghis Khan. In September, 1936, a meeting of the Central Committee was called to consider the expulsion from the Party of Bukharin, Tomsy and Rykov for leading a Right Wing-Trotskyite conspiracy. Bukharin said that the real conspiracy was Stalin's and that to achieve unlimited power Stalin would destroy the Bolshevik Party and that therefore he, Bukharin, and others, were to be eliminated and that was the source of the charge against him. The Central Committee accepted Bukharin's defense and voted not to expel him. The conspiracy charge was dropped. Within a year, ninety-eight members of the Central Committee were arrested and shot. (We learn this from N. Khrushchev in his address to the 20th Party Congress.) Then the charges were reinstated and Bukharin was put on trial. (p. 15)

This piece of writing might have been drawn from a history book. All grammatical links are logical, the reasoning follows a clearly chronological cause-and-effect pattern, and even an authoritative source is mentioned. No verbal irony is used (and the same language register is maintained throughout ("was no angel" would be a borderline case). How does this paragraph connect

with the corpus of the novel? Is Daniel still the narrator? I noticed earlier that Daniel's personality is a mixture of violent, tender, guilty, self-depreciating tendencies that coexist in permanent tension. I also pointed out the unusual intrusion of "Stalinites" and "Trotskyites" at a moment of intense emotional excitement. The passage on Bukharin develops the motif of political power struggle and the devious means used to wipe out dissidence. A most important idea is introduced ("murder that was politically necessary") as well as significant value-words: trial, conspiracy, conspiracy charge, defence. Besides revealing the speculative side of Daniel's mind, this passage operates on the socio-political level by recreating the climate of Stalinist persecution as a kind of analogue for the situation prevailing in the United States when the Isaacsons were tried and finally executed in 1953. Furthermore, Daniel makes an immediate connection between Susan's act and his reflections on the disposal of dissidents in the U.S.S.R.:

Actually, there are separate mysteries to be examined here. Why do the facts of Russian national torment make Americans feel smug? Why do two state cops, finding a young girl bleeding to death..., take her not to the nearest hospital, but to the nearest public insane asylum? On second thought these mysteries may not be unrelated. (pp. 15-16)

Daniel associates the tortuous Soviet political scene, American smugness, death and insanity. The unravelling of these "not unrelated mysteries" will become central concerns of the novel. It should be noted, on the other hand, that the description of the McCarthy era and the Stalin regime in psychopathological terms (mass hysteria, psychosis, paranoia, etc.) is a commonplace in the literature dealing with post World War II. "The end of ideology" in the fifties involves the repression of and the displacement into abstract moral principles of otherwise readily identifiable concrete political issues. Daniel fuses all these elements in piecing together the genesis of the Cold War and recreating the atmosphere that led to his parents' execution.

An alternative reading of the Bukharin passage might underscore contrast rather than analogy, by locating the ironic gap in the Isaacsons' opposition to the American system and their support of a totalitarian regime which exacts utter submission to the party line, or else deportation to concentration camps and death. In my view, the ironic parallel relates to the fact that, in times of crisis, the United States' exercise of power tends to deviate from the system of checks and balances of democracy and falls into a pattern of unrestraint and manipulation that differs only in degree and subtlety

from totalitarian regimes. Besides, the thrust of the criticism in the book focuses on what is wrong with Americans and American institutions, as the analyses in chapter one prove. Furthermore, confirmation comes from Doctorow himself. In 1981, he spoke before a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee about the Reagan Administration's planned budget cuts concerning the National Endowment for the Arts. His argument was that, given the government's intention of slashing social programmes, the funding of the arts was irrelevant. It is remarkable that once again, Doctorow had recourse to the same analogy he had used in *Daniel* over ten years earlier:

And so in my testimony for this small social program I am aware of the larger picture and, really, it stuns me. What I see in this picture is a kind of sovietizing of American Life, guns before butter, the plating of this nation with armaments, the sacrifice of everything in our search for ultimate security. 42 (My own emphasis)

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF GOD AS REPRESENTED IN THE BIBLE -- the last paragraph I want to discuss -- is a piece of exegesis very much in keeping with Daniel's theorizing and mode of making sense of experience. A childhood memory regarding Susan's understanding of God ("He'll get them all," that is, God shall punish those who had killed their parents), and her commitment to

radical politics in her adolescence prompt Daniel to speculate on religion:

Actually that's what God does in the Bible -- like the little girl says, he gets people. He takes care of them. He lays on this monumental justice. Oh the curses, the admonitions; the plagues, the scatterings, the ruinations, the strikings dead, the renderings unto and the tearings asunder. The floods. The fires. It is interesting to note that God as a character in the Bible seems almost always concerned with the idea of his recognition by mankind. He is constantly declaring His Authority, with rewards for those who recognize it and punishment for those who don't. He performs fancy tricks. He enlists the help of naturally righteous humans who become messengers, or carriers of his miracles, or who deliver their people. Each age has by trial to achieve its recognition of Him -- or to put it another way, every generation has to learn anew the lesson of His Existence. The drama in the Bible is always in the conflict of those who have learned with those who have not learned. Or in the testing of those who seem that they might be able to learn. (pp. 10-11)

I think that the place of this passage in the grammar of the novel, the mocking way of describing God's role and His being considered a character (i.e., fictitious) provide enough evidence to warrant a metaphorical reading.

Societies regulate collective and individual customs and behaviour by enforcing certain rules that derive their binding force either from religion or legal systems. I am arguing that Daniel places both these institutions on the same footing and views them in a

negative light. The law as applied (will be applied, in the time sequence of the novel) to the Isaacsons was as arbitrary, tricky, destructive and implacable as Daniel's description of God's "monumental justice." The biblical world is implicitly conceived of as a play whose protagonist seems bent on asserting his authority (notice the mock style used in enumerating instances of God's justice). The Isaacson trial is also considered in theatrical terms. American law and magistrates also enlist the help of righteous humans (ironically, Ascher and Lewin), and even Paul Isaacson believes "You cannot put innocent people to death in this country" (p. 249). In short, justice, here satirized as God's concern for recognition, implies conforming to American institutions and prevalent ideology. Moreover, Paul, as a member of the American Communist Party, is also manipulated and, to a certain extent, subjected to the Party's "monumental justice."

This sampling of representative rhetorical structures aims at providing concrete examples of the ways in which the data drawn from experience are transposed into literature. A reader unschooled in the

labyrinthine ways of contemporary fiction may well describe Daniel as a verbal imbroglio, breaching all the elementary rules of narrative succession and causality. This surface disorganization may be accounted for easily. Several reasons justify the sinuous character of the narrative and the creation of such a complex verbal texture. If the original situation generating Daniel's Book is considered, the most obvious explanation is that the pace and structure of the novel depend on the ebbs and flows of the narrator's consciousness. On ideological and aesthetic grounds, a straightforward traditional narrative would have been a most ineffective vehicle to convey the disturbing and contradictory aspects of American reality the novel addresses.

If we think back on the paragraphs previously analysed individually, we may note that two major narrative strategies stand out. First, a more or less arcane verbal enclave is planted in the middle of a paragraph ("Stalinites and Trotskyites" being the typical example). Secondly, a topic is introduced and treated briefly and then cut off abruptly in order to be taken up again farther on. In both cases we are dealing with a protracted unfolding of the plot, designed to "shock and seduce, or otherwise provoke the reader out of his habitual stupor", much in the same way as

Daniel's faculties have been mobilized by the events that set the novel afoot. The surface fracturing of the narrative, with deftly established connections underneath, also proves appropriate to embody the failure to apprehend the submerged links between economic interests, political moves, and middle class values and cohesion, symptomatic of American society. Needless to say, the delayed and multilayered recounting of events fulfils the standard function of creating suspense and expectations.

The application of Lodge's textural procedure has thrown into relief the diverse and disconcerting arrangements the reader is confronted with when tackling Daniel. However, conjunction has sooner or later to offset disjunction in order to avert narrative chaos. This end is partly achieved through another linguistic means, namely by lacing the text with clusters of value-words and images. Their examination will constitute the next task.

* * * * *

In this section, I shall apply Lodge's structural procedure with two ends in view: to provide a more rounded picture of the grammar of Daniel and to show how the differences of verbal emphasis complement and

clarify, each other. Our attention will focus upon the imagery that defines and carries forward the narrative climaxes (the execution of the Isaacsons and Susan's death) and the turning points in Daniel's psychological growth (the two funerals).

Images very often coalesce and interact in a marked crescendo, as much as the story lines do. I hope that my isolating and grouping them for the sake of analysis will not prove too distorting. I hope as well that the examples chosen will underscore the high degree of overlapping involved and the extent to which the impact of the book depends on recurrent imagery.

We may notice, in the first place, what Lodge calls "value-words," that is key words or leads that a writer consciously or unconsciously uses as thematic pointers. In Daniel Doctorow artfully weaves this vocabulary into the texture of the narrative and often expands it into metaphors.

Fear is the prevailing emotion in the novel; most characters are seized by dread at one point or another. It ranges from the "dread of oneself" (p. 8) quoted in the first section, through the almost permanent terrified state of Daniel and Susan as "children of trials," to their parents' horror of persecution and death:

I looked first to my mother's face, then to my father's, riding the current between them which I imagine now as blue television light, a rare element of heavy sorrow and blinding dread. [Mindish had just been arrested] (p. 103)

He [Paul] recognizes the feeling, a cavern opening inside him, a cavern of fear, and closing his eyes he sees into its darkness and it has no bottom. [Paul at the courtroom] (p. 185)

Image most often stands for the spurious nature of people and things. In this respect, it is related to the damaging image-making power of the mass media. A pseudo-revolutionary like Artie proposes to use this instrument of capitalism to overthrow the Establishment. In both cases it serves apparently opposite social purposes:

I [Daniel] worry about images. Images are what things mean. Take the word image. It connotes soft, sheer flesh shimmering on the air, like the rainbowed slick of a bubble. Image connotes images, the multiplicity being an image. Images break with a small ping, their destruction is as wonderful as their being, they are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose. (p. 71)

The media need material? Give them material...Next month we're going to Washington and exorcising the Pentagon. We're gonna levitate the Pentagon by prayer and incantation and blowing horns and throwing magic invisibilities at the Pentagon walls. We're gonna lift it up and let it down. We're gonna kill it with flowers. Be there! We'll be on television. We're gonna overthrow the United States with images! (p. 140)

An image grew of my father as a master spy...He was being transformed before my eyes and he wasn't there to stop it from happening. If he was in jail maybe he was an atomic ringleader. The operations of my mind tried to conform my life and my relationship with my father to the words of the newspaper. (pp. 160-61)

Four main uses of the semantic cluster rite-ritual-myth may be isolated, the first three bearing resemblance to the concept of image. The cluster describes a compulsive or an empty act performed for purposes alien to the act itself or for unfair purposes. From a political standpoint, rites and myths support repressive power structures--the forms of executions described in different sections of the novel are the major examples of ritual practices designed to eliminate dissension.

People were accused, investigated and fired from their jobs without knowing what the charges were, or who made them. People were blacklisted in their professions. Public confessions of error had become a national rite, just as in Russia. (p. 118)

In her mind it is a ritual defense, a ceremony. [Rockelle thinking of the trial] (p. 200)

In other contexts it signifies a fabrication spontaneously arising from a naive perception of facts:

...the immense contribution made by the American Communist Party to its own destruction within a few years after the war. They had all the haughty, shrewd instincts of a successful suicide...no wonder that a myth would spring out of their awe for someone

truly potent. It is ironic that such a myth would arise without planning or intent from their laboriously induced collective mythic self. (pp. 278-79)

The individual's impotence to shake off an identity assigned to him by force of circumstances indicates still another sense of the rite-ritual-myth cluster:

Whatever they did, whatever view they took, it was merely historical process operating...Under one guise or another they were still the Isaacson kids... They were like figures in a myth who suffer the same fate no matter what version is told...(p. 63)

Finally there is the use of the cluster which refers to an ancestral body of beliefs that fulfills genuine social and individual needs:

"Or perhaps it is that I recognized in you the strength and innocence that will reclaim us all from defeat. That will exonerate our having lived and justify our suffering."

"Now that scares me more than anything, Grandma."

"You're fuckin' right, Dan. Just remember, though, this placing of the burden on the children is a family tradition. But only your crazy grandma had the grace to make a ritual of it. Ritual being an artful transfer of knowledge." (pp. 70-71)

Heart has the usual meanings of the seat of emotions and the core, vital part of something; consequently it is connected with life, death, madness, and emotional conflicts. Since it appears in other passages, no examples are needed. See pp. 293-94 for "heart rejection, ejection and defection."

Insanity applies both to the private and public

world. Individually, mental illness has haunted Daniel since childhood; socially, it relates to suggestion as a factor in inducing mass hysteria and scapegoating:

The meaning of the picture is in the thin, diagrammatic arrow line, colored red, that runs from Grandma's breast through your mama's and into your sister's. The red line describes the progress of madness inherited through the heart. (p. 71)

My father paints a picture: our house is completely surrounded by an army of madmen. [F.B.I. Officials] (p. 109)

He [Paul] tells reporters that the charge against him is insane. (p. 121)

The value-words betrayal-treason-treachery reverberate through the novel. They apply to events ranging from individual and collective acts to the writing of the law:

You're the kind of betrayer who betrays for no reason. [Daniel talking to himself in the library] (p. 16)

He [Daniel] felt for a moment that he and Susan had been betrayed and that the great mass would flood over them and carry them away. (p. 22)

...you asked yourself why live in faith or memorial to the people who had betrayed you. [Daniel referring to the Isaacsons] (p. 63)

The treachery of that man [Mindish] will haunt him for as long as he lives. [Rochelle talking] (p. 124)

TREASON the only crime defined in the Constitution. (p. 167)

The whole paragraph beginning with the last sentence

quoted, elaborates on the constitutional formulation of treason and its political and legal implications.

I shall next mention those value-words and images that point specifically to the Isaacsons' trial and fate. It should be recalled that they were charged with conspiracy, tried for treason and electrocuted. Doctorow resorts to two main strategies -- foreshadowing and iteration.

Drawing and quartering (pp. 73-74), smoking (p. 108), knouting (pp. 128-29) and burning at the stake (p. 129), the four forms of punishment discussed by Daniel, climax in the electrocution of the Isaacsons. The first Bukharin passage (p. 15) and the beginning of the second one (pp. 52-53) constitute a different instance of prefiguring, the stress being laid on contrast, in the sense that Bukharin's defence was conducted astutely; he even tried to turn the tables on the accusers by suggesting "...that he and Russia as well were being victimized." (p. 53) The irony, and the similarity with the Isaacsons, is that he too was eventually executed.

The most concentrated example of iteration is provided below. At one of the trial sessions, Rochelle is keeping tabs on how many times the prosecuting attorney uses the cluster:

She [Rochelle] hands to Ascher a piece of

paper with some words in her own handwriting,
and behind each word vertical pencil strokes,
crossed diagonally every fifth stroke:

traitors
traitorous
treacherous
treasonous
betrayal
treachery (p. 201)

The suggestion is that, although the Isaacsons have been charged with conspiracy, the prosecution is obviously hammering into the jurors the issue of treason. As Daniel puts it, "Implications of treason are fed like cubes of sugar to the twelve-headed animal which is Justice." (p. 201)

Fire always symbolizes death either as punishment (veiled references to the persecution of Jews in Czarist Russia or Nazi Germany; three of the four forms of executions described by Daniel involve burning) or self-immolation (Buddhist monks). Draft-card burning is a means of putting pressure on the government to stop the Vietnam war, a death-generating machine.

As the novel progresses, "treason" and "electricity" become more and more frequent. The micro-text that takes the form of a riddle on electricity (pp. 225-26)* resembles the macro-text in its allusiveness, its gradual accumulation of apparently irrelevant information, as well as in its serious play with verbal forms.

Polysemy characterizes the images that crowd Daniel's head. Thus electricity is the metaphor of fire, but it also stands for sex and death:

Technology is the making of metaphors from the natural world. Flight is the metaphor of air, wheels are the metaphor of water, food is the metaphor of earth. The metaphor of fire is electricity. (p. 224)

...it is not clear if they saw each other the night before their execution although it is commonly believed they did. And possibly they did, for a dance before death, a reconciliation in heat and love and terror, while the jailers fled the corridor and the stones groaned and the bars rattled; and they rippled and spasmed and shook and trembled as if electrocution was something people did together. (p. 282)

When the current was turned off my father's rigid body suddenly slumped in the chair, and it perhaps occurred to the witnesses that what they had taken for the shuddering spasming movements of his life for God knows how many seconds was instead a portrait of electric current, normally invisible, moving through a field of resistance. (p. 298)

Olfactory, and weather and thermal images (hot/cold), create an atmosphere of impending doom or describe disagreeable, painful experiences:

Her apartment [Aunt Frieda's] had an indescribable smell. It was the smell of a withering, unloved body...It was the smell of no pleasure to be found around any corner, down any hall, in any closet. It was the smell of a stranger's drab home, where I didn't belong. (pp. 144-45)

He was frightened of the way he felt. The cold hung like ice from his heart...He

shivered and ice fell from his spine. [Daniel after his father's arrest] (p. 115)

I felt the flesh with my fingers, with the tips of my fingers down my temple and cheek and it felt like dead flesh...It was cold, like clay, which is to say not cold but without warmth. [Daniel's dream prefiguring Susan's death] (p. 209)

He [Daniel] put his arm around her [Susan's] shoulder and tried to regain his sense of direction. The heat was unbearable. (p. 21)

A hill, a long hill rises from the valley of 125th Street, in the darkening and cold compact of clouds coming in like fleets of Hindenburgs over New York, and they are war clouds drawn by the bourgeois cartoonists, clouds too heavy with rain of death and fire for the thin taut umbrella of Neville Chamberlain. (p. 193)

The numerous quotations provided above are a palpable proof that Daniel largely depends for its effects on figurative language. Here I shall confine myself to oxymorons, synecdoche, and puns, since these tropes dwell on aspects of the novel that have been foregrounded throughout.

An oxymoron yokes two incongruous words or concepts into a unit, hence its usefulness in conveying many of the motifs of the novel: psychological ambivalence and duality, ontological elusiveness, the disjunction between belief and reality, the duplicity of power, the advertised versus the actual motivations of political manoeuvres. (I have underlined oxymorons for

clarity's sake.)

In the meantime there was drama, a sweet fatality, a recharging of the weak diffused impulses of giving a shit. (p. 15)

...with her loud and intelligent and repugantly honest girlness. (p. 9)

He took a peculiar kind of bitter joy from them [capitalist perfidies]. (p. 34)

I hated his accent, and the merry death in his oyster eyes. (p. 227)

But I could not forget the calm ferocity of his decision. (p. 52)

Synecdoche proves to be a most appropriate figure of speech in a narrative that centres on feelings, on perceiving and establishing connections between the parts (individuals), the partial units (groups, institutions; present, past) and the whole (American society and history):

Daniel tried...to loosen the ring of pain [=Asher's hand] around his wrist. (p. 17)

Daniel imagined its career in Boston and Cambridge, the collegiate recklessness...A reckless car. A car in character reckless. (p. 55)

What is actually signified here is the speaker's recklessness, which will be enacted a few minutes later when Daniel drives at breakneck speed under a heavy rain without using the wipers, risking his wife's and child's lives. To say nothing of the humiliation and pain Phyllis is subjected to by her reckless husband.

A mouth smiled at nothing, and unsmiled, smiled and unsmiled. A head shook in vehement denial. (p. 5)

This is Daniel describing the "weird people" near Worcester state hospital, where Susan had been taken after her attempt at suicide. On their way to the prison where Susan and Daniel will see their parents for the first time since their separation, the children are assaulted by photographers and Daniel comments:

I am tired of describing things. We are clients of a new law firm, Voltani, Ampere, and Ohm. (p. 240)

Obviously the names stand for units used to measure the potential and resistance of an electric current, the physical phenomenon (cause) that will directly kill the Isaacsons. Actually, the sentence involves a series of synecdochic representations where: volt, ampere, ohm = electric current = electric chair = death.

Glancing at his dying grandmother, Daniel is struck by the pallor of her skin; she appears to him as "a whiteness" and this reminds him of Williams. The initial identification of a person with the colour of her body yields to the contrast of the two races:

She was very white and her hair was combed out on the pillow...Lying on the bed naked while the doctor listened to her heart. He saw it just for a second as he walked by her door into his room. A whiteness.

He thought of Williams. (pp. 89-90)

Kenneth * Burke counts synecdoche among the four master tropes and explains that "the perfect paradigm or prototype for all lesser usages," is found in metaphysical doctrines proclaiming the identity of 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm'.⁴⁴ A similar synecdochic form is present in all theories of political representation." Daniel formulates a political theory of his own in which, I think, Marx's distinction between "citizen" and "man" is given a more sinister connotation:

The final existential condition is citizenship. Every man is the enemy of his own country...Every country is the enemy of its own citizens...In war the soldier's destruction is accomplished by his own Commanders. It is his government which places a rifle in his hands, puts him up, on the front, and tells him his mission is to survive. All societies are armed societies. All citizens are soldiers. All Governments stand ready to commit their citizens to death in the interest of their government. (pp. 72-73)

The use of synecdochic layering should be noted once more.

The intellectual faculties required to understand puns are similar to those called forth in reading Daniel.

...we must say: no revolution is betrayed, only fulfilled.

Thermidor.

Daniel Thermidor found considerable play in... (p. 54)

Thermidor: name for the eleventh month of the calendar adopted by French revolutionaries. In terms of its etymology [fr. Gk therme = heat + dorom = gift], it means hot-weather period; politically, it is usually associated with the fall of the Jacobins (a betrayal of the promises of the French Revolution, according to the Marxist interpretation) in 9 Thermidor, year II (July 27, 1794). On the analogy of French history, Trotsky applied Thermidor to Stalinism, meaning the conservative phase of the October Revolution. When Daniel calls himself Thermidor, he is comparing Susan's radical commitment with his own indifference.

In September 1967 Daniel I Lewin wrote a letter to his foster father Robert Lewin... (p. 154)

Reading the novel for the first time, one would probably overlook the absence of a period after "I". And yet this omission is quite significant. First the objective/subjective attitudes conveyed through third- and first-person narrator (Daniel/I) merge here as they never did before; secondly the pun on "I./I" reveals a step forward in Daniel's conflict of identity as the son of the Isaacsons/the son of the Lewins.

The novel as private I. (p. 269)

In this case the paronomasia relies on the homophones eye/I. The pun is functional in a twofold sense, since

the novel is about Daniel's struggles and this sentence occurs at a moment when Daniel is acting like a detective in his search for Mindish; besides, Daniel's comings and goings are concerned with collecting evidence from different sources so as to establish the Isaacsons' innocence or guilt.

Why do we need it? What do you do in it?
What is it you're supposed to use it for?
What is so valuable after all? What is it
that is worth desiring?

A foundation. I desire a Foundation. (p. 171)

The capital serves to identify the Isaacson Foundation, while the small letter shifts the focus from "endowment" to Daniel's need of a firmer basis on which to build his changing identity.

Finally I want to juxtapose two sets of scenes that describe different episodes through very similar rhetoric. (The underlined phrases are my own emphasis.)

Set I

- (a) The other big smell in the Shelter was the smell of vomit...Kids were always getting sick and throwing up. The janitor came around with his cart, a big broom, a shovel, and a bucket of sawdust. He covered the vomit with sawdust...Then he'd mop around with a solution of ammonia... But for the rest of the day the area smelled faintly of vomit. In its fainter essence it was mysterious and frightening. The smell of the insides of bodies. (pp. 163-64)

- (b) The executioner threw the switch. My father smashed into his straps as if hit by a train.

He snapped back and forth, cracking like a whip. The leather straps groaned and creaked. Smoke rose from my father's head. A hideous smell compounded of burning flesh, excrement and urine filled the death chamber... A pool of urine collected on the cement floor under the chair. (pp. 297-98)

A few minutes after my father's body had been removed on a stretcher, and the floor mopped, and the organic smell of his death masked in the ammoniac scent of the cleanser, my mother was led into the chamber. (p. 298)

Set II

- (a) Somehow the young man had gotten it in his head that his sister, a patient in the sanitarium, was being considered for shock therapy. A strong electric current is applied by means of electrodes fastened to the scalp earlobes shoulders nipples bellybutton genitals asshole knees toes and soles of the feet, to the nervous system of the patient. (p. 206)
- (b) A guard came over, dipped his fingers into a jar, and with a circular motion rubbed an adhesive and conduction paste on the shaved place on my father's head, and then knelt down and did the same for the place on his calf that had been shaved. Then the electrodes were fixed in place. (p. 297)

Not only do the earlier scenes (a) foreshadow the later ones (b), they also heighten both the emotional charge and the dramatic intensity of the latter. The overall emphasis is on loss -- temporary (children at the shelter separated from their parents; Susan's starfish silence) or irretrievable (father's death).

Lodge's structural procedure has allowed us to

analyse another facet of Doctorow's verbal resources. Recurrent semantic clusters, images and phrases not only develop the major themes, but also provide structural unity to a text in which narration seldom flows smoothly from one incident or event to another.

* * * * *

The examination of point of view will serve as a transition between the discussion of rhetorical devices and the unity of the novel touched upon earlier. I would like to take up the distinction I proposed in Chapter Two between two authors (Daniel, Doctorow), so as to expatiate upon the handling of point of view. From this perspective, Doctorow is the prime mover whose "second self" writes Daniel and creates the dramatized narrator through whom Daniel's Book is presented.⁴⁵ This method allows both authors to enter into intricate relationships with each other, the characters and the reader, as well as to subtly control the latter's response (sympathy, judgement) through the varying degrees of irony, tension and distancing employed throughout.

In Daniel's Book we are faced with a dramatized narrator who, as "implied author," exhibits omniscience to the extent that he is privy to the other characters'.

thoughts, feelings and motives, roams freely in time and place, and switches unexpectedly from "I," to "he" to "you." Furthermore, the dramatized narrator of Daniel is the teller of the story (narrating Daniel) and the main character (Daniel Agonistes). The events are sometimes filtered through the child's consciousness (Danny), most often, relayed by the twenty-five-year old writing his dissertation. The branching out of the narrative consciousness does not stop here. There is an added preoccupation in Daniel's mind, which he explores in his capacity as self-conscious narrator, commenting on the technical difficulties posed by the very composition of the book.

The protean quality of the point of view is reinforced by the fact that the narrator is not consistently reliable. For one thing, the perspectives of the child and the young man not only do not always mesh, but they often coalesce in the same paragraph. For another, the agonist in Daniel is torn apart by the struggle within him between his ambivalent feelings and his rational resolve to interpret and analyse correctly. Finally, Daniel now and then indulges in histrionics, which reveals a more playfully wicked side of the multifarious narrator.

The elaborate structure emerging from the handling

of point of view and the many masks Daniel wears, notwithstanding, the voice is recognizably his, because of the consistent patterns of thoughts and diction which govern his changing moods. In addition, the initial situation of Daniel writing his thesis in the library is constantly brought to the reader's attention. Whether Daniel is "showing" or "telling" about other characters, or enacting the tense relation between himself as the writer of the thesis and himself as a participant in the drama, or engaging the reader's attention, no mistake is possible about the author of Daniel's Book.

How is the reader expected to react in his encounter with the novel? Contrary to what propounders of the reader-response trends in contemporary criticism would identify as the "indeterminacies" of the text, I believe that, despite frequent references to elusiveness and conflicting interpretations, both authors, Daniel and Doctorow, invest their work with certain objectivity. In his attempt to integrate the contradictory sides of his identity and recover the repressed or hidden social identity of his country, Daniel sets out in a quest which first appears to be doomed to failure. Early on his journey he declares: "Of one thing we are sure. Everything is elusive. God is elusive. Revolutionary morality is elusive. Justice is

elusive. Human character." (p. 42) However, in his remembrance and reconstruction of things past, he will be guided by his highly developed faculties of perception ("But this describes just a moment's oversensitive perception by the little criminal [i.e., Daniel] of perception." p. 34) and analysis, by his power to establish connections between heaps of "broken images." For Doctorow, like the Eliot of The Waste Land, thinks that images are the data writers work with. Discussing authors' strategies to set standards of beliefs and judgement designed to elicit the expected response from the reader, Wayne C. Booth comments on a "particular device of objectivity" used in Light in August:

This novel shows Faulkner as a master of the conjectural description which is really not conjectural at all. He is always saying that nobody could tell whether it was this or that, whether the motive was such-and-such or so-and-so, but both of the alternatives he suggests convey the evaluation he intends: they establish a broad band of possibilities within which the truth must lie...But morally the effect is still a rigorous control over the reader's own range of judgment. 46

In Daniel's Book, this rigorous moral control is achieved through narrative perspective and understatement, with irony often being a major component in both cases. Since this study abounds in examples that may easily be reread in this light, a few outstanding

cases will suffice here. The reader may wonder if Daniel is not being fallible in interpreting the domestic socio-political atmosphere of the Cold War in terms of America's monopoly of the atom bomb; or in assuming that the pervasive paranoia of the early fifties called for the compulsive search of scapegoats (i.e., Reds); or in asserting that the trial of the Isaacsons was unfairly conducted, mainly on account of the breach of the Fifth and the Eighth Amendments. Because of Daniel's deep emotional involvement, the reader is certainly entitled to entertain doubts about the narrator's accounts. What might appear as Daniel's "conjectures" are confirmed, however, by characters such as Ascher and Lewin, whose reliability is above suspicion (see Ascher's letter to Robert Lewin, pp. 204-205, and the passage on excessive bail on p. 120, as well as Lewin's comments on p. 222 and his assertion that the death sentence itself was used as an investigative procedure, p. 223).⁴⁷

The example of understatement I have selected reveals a masterful touch in the use of this trope, combined with irony and narrative voice. As shown in the section on textural analysis, Book One: Memorial Day, carefully lays down the groundwork for the closely entwined developments of the historical and individual dimensions of human existence. The book closes with

Daniel trying to decide "what other David Copperfield kind of crap" (p. 95) to recount. He settles for his memories of the war years: what he did, what he saw, what impressed him. These memories, introduced casually, are preceded by a piece of absurdity: "We moved there in 1945 when I was four years old. Or may be in 1944 when I was five years old." (p. 95). Then a series of "remembered details, seemingly selected at random, follows: things a child might be interested in, of little consequence or irrelevantly connected, or not thoroughly understood by a boy of four or five. For instance, on 6 August 1945 (the date, of course, is not provided in the novel):

It was a warm afternoon and I had scraped my knee on the sidewalk. My mother came out to tell me that an atom bomb had been dropped on Japan. I looked up in the sky over the schoolyard, but the sky was clear. I listened for the sound of the bomb, but the sky was quiet. (p. 96)

The horror of the event comes home to the reader precisely because conveyed through the naive perception of Danny and its contrast with our own adult knowledge. Now these are the closing lines of a paragraph that has been carefully constructed. Let us examine the writer at work: "I remember In Seventy-Six the Sky Was Red, The Bombs Were Bursting Overhead, and Old King George Couldn't Sleep in His Bed, and on That Stormy Morn - Old Uncle Sam Was Born." (p. 95) The ironic implications and

associations of this ballad cannot be lost on the reader, even if he ignores that the quatrain belongs to the then popular "Ballad for Americans." The perceiving consciousness has shifted from Danny to Daniel. We are obliquely told through the ballad that in 1776 a new country, celebrated in "The Star-Spangled Banner," was born and the loss of part of England's overseas possessions robbed the king of his sleep. The quatrain carries an irreverent undertone in the echoes from the national anthem ("And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in the air," fifth line, first stanza) and the equation Old King George = Old Uncle Sam. A few lines further and just before the first passage cited, Daniel remembers

the Red Army Chorus singing Meadowland, a virile hypnotic song simulating the canter of horses. I remember studying the picture of the Red Army Chorus on the 78-rpm album, the smiling, deep-throated soldiers of a valiant ally. I remember the horses coming out of the distance bolder and bolder in a rising crescendo of militant brotherhood, storming my heart with their cantering nobility. I remember standing on the porch of our house on Weeks Avenue. (p. 96)

The last sentence leads straight into the atom bomb passage. There is a sharp contrast in tone and feeling with respect to "The Ballad for Americans." We are back within Danny's consciousness. The fallible narrator is most probably parroting his father's "lectures" in

assessing the Red Army's heroic qualities, although nobody familiar with Russian singing would question his judgement on the excellence of the musical rendition. Be that as it may, the Red Army chorus passage links up Uncle Sam and the atom bomb, the binding elements being music, militancy, bombs. The suggestion is that, whereas in 1776 the colonies "used bombs to win independence, the dropping of the atom bomb represents a rising crescendo of militant destructiveness: the sole possessor of the "deadly secret" (along with Britain) in 1945, Uncle Sam was born as the superpower unquestionably capable of dictating to weaker nations in the world how to conduct their affairs. Vis-à-vis the U.S.S.R., Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent the point of no return in the arms race.

Epigraphs have long been recognized by critics and used by writers as means to encapsulate the central meaning of a piece of writing and direct the reader's moral response. As I remarked earlier, Doctorow's "other self" composes the portion of the novel that lies outside the boundaries of Daniel's Book, that is, the epigraphs and the biblical quotation at the end.

In the Book of Daniel -- the biblical source of the first epigraph -- the symbols appearing in the dreams and visions (animals, objects) are emblematic of

kingdoms or kings that will rise and fall until the time when a "Son of Man" will establish an everlasting kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has had a golden statue erected as an object of worship. This god is in keeping with Babylon's reputation for materialism. I am suggesting that in the novel the golden image stands for what lies at the basis of America's supremacy, her economic strength, and hence for the United States itself as a neo-colonialist power that keeps many nations and languages under its sway. Daniel himself develops this interpretation, ironically juxtaposing the following passage with an allusion to Churchill's "iron curtain" speech:

A MESSAGE OF CONSOLATION TO GREEK BROTHERS
IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS, AND TO MY HAITIAN
BROTHERS AND NICARAGUAN BROTHERS AND
DOMINICAN BROTHERS AND SOUTH AFRICAN BROTHERS
AND SPANISH BROTHERS AND TO MY BROTHERS IN
SOUTH VIETNAM, ALL IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS: YOU
ARE IN THE FREE WORLD! (pp. 236-237)

The suggestion becomes more and more explicit as we go from the first to the last epigraph. The lines quoted from section 18 of "Song of Myself" strike an optimistic note as Whitman, in the true spirit of democracy, attempts to embrace the whole man and the totality of American reality -- the smiling surface and the darkness beneath. A century later, Ginsberg's lines reveal how

much disappointment, guilt, anger and fear the path taken by their country stirs in some Americans. Both Doctorow and Daniel seem to identify themselves with Ginsberg's feelings as well as with his view of America...and his language register.

To conclude, then, the three epigraphs and the quotation from the Bible at the end provide the novel with formal symmetry and underline the fact that there is no ironic gap between the two authors' historical vision of their country. In this way, Doctorow succeeds in making his views (Daniel) an extension of the narrator's assessment of the insanity of contemporary history and, specifically, of the pattern of deterioration of American life, as well as of the failure of dissenting ideologies to provide realistic and well-structured alternatives to improve and humanize the American system. Doctorow's pessimistic perspective on the future is conveyed through the biblical quotation drawn from Daniel 12: 1-4, 9-10. This section, called The Time of the End, anticipates destruction and death caused by countries at war. But whereas chariots, cavalry and a large fleet wreak havoc in the world of prophecy, the A-bomb, the H-bomb, the neutron bomb, nuclear missiles, or any other sinister weapon that the superpowers may develop in their frantic race for

supremacy, hang over humankind like the sword of Damocles.

Now that the harmonious integration of vision and form between Daniel and Daniel's Book has been established, let us take up again the question of unity in the latter. I have already pointed out some of the binding elements, but have also emphasized dislocation, heterogeneity and fragmentation. Do changing styles and narrative foci, abrupt transitions and the blending of past and present into one experience endanger the cohesion of the book? If not, what are the magnetic forces that bring the fragments together?

First and foremost, history is the cement that binds all the disparate elements into a totality. And this holds true in a double sense: if the nature and significance of individual and collective destinies are explained in relation to history, it is not less true that the characters and narrative sequences adumbrate the historical process. The major characters' identities appear deeply imbricated with the socio-political movements, and others would be irrelevant as portrayed (William, Grandmother, Sternlicht), should the historical matrix not be central. Likewise, the segments of the plot shot through with socio-political passages

and allusions would lose functionality were the novel to be primarily considered as a Bildungsroman centring on the inward learning process of the protagonist. It is well to stress that Daniel defines himself in antithesis to the past and the present, perceived as historicized dimensions of American reality.

It has been mentioned earlier that the dynamics of the action rests to a certain extent on a puzzle-solving strategy mainly generated by Susan, to which Daniel has to find the solutions. The question-and-answer configuration functions as a means of providing structural unity as well.

Let us examine the first puzzle. Susan says: "They're still fucking us...Goodbye, Daniel. You get the picture." (p. 9) The unknowns here are "they" and "picture." A few pages later, among "subjects to be taken up," Daniel writes:

Remember it wasn't until you got into Susan's car that it really hit you. They're still fucking us. You get the picture. Good boy, Daniel.

5. Just as long as you don't begin to think you're doing something that has to be done. (p. 16)

Daniel has decided that Susan meant "good boy" instead of "good-bye." Whereas Daniel has made some progress in his research, the reader is not allowed into the thinking process; therefore he learns of Daniel's

conclusions but not of the causal links through which he arrives at them. Without mentioning any of the puzzle words, the paragraph quoted below centres on the urgency of solving the riddle to put an end to Daniel's struggles, as well as on his need of Susan's approval. The split narrative voice (speaker-listener) brings into focus the tension between the agonist and the narrating Daniel. Addressing the latter as "you," the former takes Daniel to task for using the tragedy in his life to shun responsibilities:

There is no cheap use to which you would not put your patrimony. You're the kind of betrayer who betrays for no reason. Who would sit here and write all this, playing with yourself instead of doing your work -- what do you think, Professor Sukenick will come to see if you're really working? Do you think it matters to him? Or are you just looking for another father. How many fathers does one boy need? Why don't you go out and get a job? Why don't you drop something heavy? Why not something too heavy? Why not something to show Susan how it's done. [My emphasis] (p. 16)

Susan's act functions as a catalyst to make Daniel aware that his "planned recovery from the life of" Daniel Isaacson (p. 275) cannot work because he is "as locked into [his] family truths" (p. 275) as Susan is. His sister has had the courage to understand that the past, either in its individual or social dimension, is the prehistory of the present, a force

that determines the present, a force that has to be reckoned with. Susan is crushed, partly because of her integrity:

If Susan had only had a small portion [of willingness "to use our sad lives"]! But nothing Susan did ever lacked innocence: no matter how loud, how demanding, how foolish, how self-destructive, nothing Susan did lacked innocence. (p. 275)

Also because she, like Paul, fails to make the proper connections between her ideals and the socio-political reality. Susan dies that Daniel may live, that the "young man trying to interpret and analyze the awful visions of his head," (p. 205) may exercise his intellectual acumen so as to probe his familial afflictions in terms of the clashes of historical forces.

The next reference to the picture - fucking puzzle further entangles the problem:

Oh, baby, you know it now. We done played enough games for you, ain't we. You a smart lil fucker. You know where it's at now, don' you big daddy. You got the picture. This the story of a fucking, right? You pullin' out yo lit-er-ary map, mutha? You know where we goin', right muthafuck? (pp. 22-23)

The position of this paragraph in the grammar of the book sheds light on its meaning. It comes right after the account of the demonstration asking for the release of the Isaacsons, to which Ascher takes Susan and

Daniel. This scene clearly establishes the identity between the children's parents and the historical event Daniel is portraying ("he and Susan were transfixed by the...oversized pictures of their mother and father everywhere above the crowd," p. 22). Moreover, the children live the experience as a kind of betrayal (fucking) and feel terrified. The diction of the paragraph just quoted imitates a black using "dirty" language, and, through the double meaning of fucking, serves to introduce a member of the minority traditionally exploited, persecuted and denied the elementary human rights in American society. This association links up the paragraph with the AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON section (pp. 23-25) in which the socio-political circumstances surrounding the Isaacsons' destiny is suggested (see pp. 45-6 in this study).

All of the following citations include the signifier "picture" but the signifieds are not identical:

On the other side of this wall, Susan had opened her veins and stood over the toilet until she fainted. He tried to get the picture [= mental image of an event]. (p. 28).

Daniel walked between the rows of parked cars. He found the Volvo...Through the window he saw on the seat...the celluloid and cardboard wrapping for a pack of Gillette Super Stainless blades. This describes the

picture [=scene being depicted]...before Daniel got the picture [=poster of Paul and Rochelle Susan intended to give Sternlicht].
(p. 29)

The successive displacement of referents leads to the FIRE SALE! EVERYTHING MUST GO! Section (pp. 30-43) in which, via a bitterly ironic consideration of the poster itself, Daniel starts exploring his life with the Isaacsos.

The Christmas scene and Susan's letter to Daniel pound the guilt motif into Daniel's mind ("his loss to the cause"; symbolic executor of his parents and Susan)?

As a response to Susan's summons, Daniel not only starts his search for the solution to the riddle, but sets out to do "what has to be done." Needless to say, both lines of action overlap. Daniel refers ironically to "what has to be done," signifying Susan's, and implicitly the radical movement's, expectations concerning his political commitment. It should be added that it also reflects a personal need to prove to Susan he is not a coward, as well as a necessary hurdle he has to leap over--if only to decide that activism is not for him. It is also a way of atoning for his guilt-provoking political lethargy. His decision to become Susan's guardian, to devote the Trust money to the Paul and Rochelle Isaacson Foundation for Revolution, to change his appearance and behaviour ("the beard, the climbing

downward of my hair, the newest recklessness of attitude" p. 219), to participate in the March on the Pentagon, should all be seen in this light. One single act Daniel performs betrays his emotional involvement in "what has to be done": he tapes up a poster of himself on the wall facing Susan's bed in the sanitarium.

The poster is a ... photograph of a grainy Daniel looking scruffy and militant. Looking bearded, looking clear-eyed. His hand is raised, his fingers make the sign of peace. It is a posed photo blown up at a cost of four ninety-five. (p. 211)

The visit to Sternlicht enables Daniel to decipher the first puzzle:

THEY'RE STILL FUCKING US. She didn't mean Paul and Rochelle. That's what I would have meant. What she meant was first everyone else and now the Left. The Isaacsons are nothing to the New Left. And if they can't make it with them who else is there? YOU GET THE PICTURE. GOODBYE, DANIEL. (p. 153)

"Picture" here means what is actually taking place, the socio-political reality. Susan's message, then, directs Daniel first to her car, where he finds the Isaacsons' poster, and later to Sternlicht's house, since his name was written in the poster's container. Daniel's contact with Sternlicht serves also as a structural link between "what has to be done" (WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? p. 154) and Susan's remark in her letter about Daniel's guilt. All these motifs come together in the Pentagon Week-end

scene.

Others in the crowd are invited to add their own [draft] cards. Many do. I make my way through the crowd, and drop my card into the pouch, and say my name into the microphone. Daniel Isaacson, although the card is in the name of Daniel Lewin. My ears glow from an inner surge of righteousness and fear. What a put-on. But I have come here to do whatever is being done. (p. 252)

On the second day, "Daniel drank his own blood... He swallowed bits of his teeth... and he was busted on Pentagon Saturday Night." (p. 256) But he hardly shares in the heroism and communal feeling that other participants may experience. Susan and their parents' past are in his mind:

And I will tell now how one boy in the big cell in the grand community of brotherhood bust; how this one boy is unable to share the bruised cheery fellowship of his companions...; but sits in the corner, unable to stretch out full length, a spasm of wariness bowing his spine, knotting his fingers to his palms, his knees to his chest... He cannot enjoy such places. They are too familiar. He knows how far they are from home. He cannot survive such places in careless courage... He sweats in a chill of possibilities knowing now what it means to do what is being done, and sweats every minute of just one night... a twenty-five-dollar ten-day suspended trip INNOCENT, I'M INNOCENT I TELL YA, eyesight skating up and down the walls like flies, interpreting the space between the bars, and Daniel discusses the endless reverberations of each moment of this time, doing this time in discrete instants, and discussing each instant its theme, structure, diction and metaphor with her, with Starfish, my silent Starfish girl. (pp. 256-57)

The heading THREE ENDINGS might mislead us into believing that they represent three alternatives. Rather, the three actions described structurally blend past present and the perspective on the future and, psychologically mark the necessary stages in Daniel's mourning process. He has to acknowledge that the house where he shared the happiest moments of his life with his family is no longer his house:

For reasons Daniel cannot explain, a week after he's back in New York he returns to the old neighborhood in the Bronx... Behind me, across the street, is my house... I would like to turn and ask the woman if I can come in the house and look around. But the children gather up their cards and go inside and their mother shuts the door. I will do nothing. It's their house now. (p. 299)

The merging of the Isaacsons' and Susan's funerals simultaneously brings to a close the main story lines occurring in the fictional past and the fictional present which revolve around the losses Daniel has gradually come to accept. The cinematic technique of fading in and out faithfully reflects the coexistence of both events in the timeless dimension of the psyche. Symbolically, the funerals also merge in the world of outer reality when Daniel asks the prayermakers to pray not only for Susan but for his parents as well. Surrounded by dozens of old Jews wrapped up in "their singsong rituals" (p. 302), Daniel is seized with a kind

of manic impulse that makes him "encourage" the prayermakers, and when one is through I tell him again, this time for my mother and father. Isaacson. Pinchas. Rachele. Susele. For all of them." (p. 302) After this exorcizing "ritual," Daniel winds down and: "I hold my wife's hand. And I think I am going to be able to cry." (p. 302) This beautiful, understated sentence indicates that the mourning of his parents' and sister's loss, even his grandmother's, is the prelude to a significant psychological change. Holding Phyllis' hand is the first loving gesture he has made towards his wife.

The third ending openly discloses what had kept Daniel busy in the library and puns on the word "liberate." The catharsis produced by the writing of the dissertation (Daniel's Book) has freed Daniel from his individual emotional burdens. To conclude the study of the novel, I shall turn now to the political connotation of the Marcusian term "liberated."

Having suggested in Chapter One that Daniel (and Doctorow, I would add without hesitation) misinterprets Marx, I should like to make a few observations about the much-maligned eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. Daniel suggests that his parents engaged in unthinking activism, supposedly as preached by Marx. All too often people collapse the eleventh Thesis into a call to

revolutionary action, without understanding the internal logic of Marx's formulation. To grasp it correctly the dialectical perspective has to be restored. In this light, Marx advocates a nonantinomial kind of reflection which aims at the transcendence (Aufhebung) of individual conceptualizing and individual activity by raising them both to the higher level of praxis. This concept signifies the interrelatedness of collective self-understanding and the class-conscious implementation of that understanding in the social world of institutions.

Although Daniel lucidly exposes the entrapment of human beings in the reified relations prevailing in advanced industrial societies (see discussion on Disneyland), Daniel remains locked in a more sophisticated, less visible form of alienation, namely "the speculative world of the actually isolated individual,"⁴⁸ thus maintaining the distance that separates man from community under capitalism. The realization of the total human being "necessarily implies the reintegration of individuality and sociality in the tangible human reality of the social individual."⁴⁹ And this integration cannot be effected within a system that thrives on fragmentation and separation: of man from nature, from his labour, from other men. These considerations allow us to conclude that the ethics of politics enacted in the resolution of

the novel points to contradictions in Doctorow's socio-political thinking. For, although highly aware and critical of the gap between the ideals of bourgeois democracy and the facts of capitalist socio-economic and cultural life, and faced with an explosive social situation, Daniel is made to choose withdrawal into the private sphere. This point bears emphasis not in order to disparage Doctorow's historical vision, but so as to establish where it stands: well within the spectrum of the non-Marxist American left.

From a literary point of view what really matters is that Doctorow has managed to create a splendid historical novel utilizing modernist techniques to convey the complexity of the significant questions it raises concerning the interaction of objective necessity and individual purpose.

The extensive generic and verbal analyses of Daniel have underscored its status as an "archetypal" historical novel. Having established the validity of the model set up in the Introduction, I shall now attempt to identify in the rest of Doctorow's "U.S.A." those aspects that either foreshadow the integration of vision and form achieved in Daniel or fail to convey the concomitance or political discourse and artistic resolutions, thus marring the concrete and typical reflection of the individual and social dimensions of human development.

Chapter Three: Intimations and Attenuations of Historical Consciousness.

All societies indoctrinate their children. The marvelous Mrs. Goldstein in total innocence taught us the glorious history of our brave westward expansion: our taming of the barbaric Indians, our brave stand at the Alamo, the mighty railroads winning the plains. Thus I must understand the nature of the conspiracy against me: it is mounted in full faith and righteousness by the students of Mrs. Goldstein. (p. 187)

This passage from Daniel, with its ironic comment on the role of ideology and its insight into the idealized vision of the conquest of the West, provides a convenient entryway to Doctorow's first novel. Strictly speaking, Hard Times does not in itself fall under my characterization of the historical novel. However, it contains in embryo elements that will be realized at a much higher stage in Daniel. Thus the setting of the novel in the West towards the end of the nineteenth century, the portrayal of the rudimentary social circumstances under which the action unfolds, as well as the treatment of the western, shadow forth a critical attitude and literary skills that will come to fruition in Daniel. On the other hand, the meaning that Hard Times posits broadens its significance when read in conjunction with the other novel. For the reader tends to become much more aware of the germs of the

demystification process of popular beliefs and established historiographical trends that lies at the core of Doctorow's vision of history. My analysis will centre then on this double operation of foreshadowing and retroactive association whereby both novels throw light on each other.

Because the western as a subgenre feeds upon the myth of the West, any attempt to shatter the formal conventions entails subverting the cultural tradition that lends them legitimacy. Doctorow himself has acknowledged this to have been the impulse behind the creation of Hard Times.⁵⁰ The juxtaposition of expectations and shattered hopes, the contrast between the myth and the reality of the growth of civilization in the wilderness, and the way in which all this is accomplished (a tightly-knit plot, vivid characterization and a style that combines accurate and sensitive descriptions, a racy dialogue and poignantly reflective passages) place Hard Times above western exotica. On exploding what Jay Gurian calls "the Romance of Democratic Settlement" and "the Romance of Lawlessness,"⁵¹ Doctorow sets out on his quest for the actual America that lies buried under a heap of fictitious historical accounts and subliterate westerns.

The Romance of Democratic Settlement designates

the idea of the West as a virgin land where, unconstrained by the rigidities of the Old World, Adamic individuals can freely develop their selves and construct a society/accessible to all men. The hero of this romance is the self-sufficient, honest yeoman-farmer who achieves economic prosperity through hard work, lives in pastoral harmony with nature, and contributes to the expansion of the nation within the framework of an egalitarian community. The Romance of Lawlessness, by contrast, extols violence and other frontier excesses, equating them with virility. This is the world of the Wild West where the hero outwits his foes--man or beast-- disposes of them single-handedly and is forced into killing, either in self-defence or to protect those who have been wronged. His exploits take place in "rip-roaring hell towns"⁵² and provide occasion to the writer to describe violence and death as positive values.

In Hard Times Doctorow works within the conventions of the western but handles the stock-in-trade of this kind of fiction mainly to deflate the myth of the Wild West. This is done by presenting lawlessness in a value frame that makes it repugnant. The dramatization of the vision of the Garden operates through absence of what the myth involves: none of the

settlers attempts to work the wind-swept, sun-baked land and they could not care less about nature. The town's life is parasitical and depends for survival on catering to the miners' basic natural drives--hunger, thirst and sex. As David Emblidge puts it, "The novel is dystopian, the story of a failed, sterile Eden."⁵³

Whereas Hard Times has none of the semantic and formal intricacies of Daniel, the same impulse to find out how and why things happened impels the narrators of both novels to commit their memories to writing. "What I'm trying to do now is account for the way things went," explains Blue (Hard Times, p. 108). It may be said that in Hard Times Doctorow seems to have come upon an organizing frame for the narrative that he was to use again in Daniel. In both novels, the reader encounters an introspective narrator caught in an extreme situation and simultaneously recording his account under unusual circumstances which are fully disclosed only at the end (Blue on the brink of death writing in the ledger; Daniel confronted with his sister's suicide composing his dissertation).

Next, I shall briefly consider our claim that Hard Times takes on added significance when placed in the larger unit we have called Doctorow's "U.S.A."

The novel recounts the story of Hard Time's

annihilation by the Bad Man from Bodie, its resettlement, illusory bonanza and subsequent destruction under similar circumstances. Gurian is not the only critic to read the novel as "a parable of good and evil which explores the magnetism of violence."⁵⁴ And indeed there are passages in the book that seem to warrant this interpretation. Moreover, Blue and other characters think that evil inheres in the West and that man is powerless against it:

Truth is, if the drought don't get you and the blizzards don't get you, that's when some devil with liquor in his soul and a gun in his claw will ride you down and clean you out. (p. 29)

Bad Men from Bodie weren't ordinary scoundrels, they came with the land, and you could no more cope with them than you could with dust or hailstones. (p. 7)

From a historical perspective, more complex causes than the milieu and individual failings account for the landscape of defeat, derangement and death with which Hard Times closes. Following the conceptual framework set forth in the introduction, I shall search for the roots of the tragedy that befalls the town not in the forces of evil mystically emerging from the land and embodied in a mythic outlaw, but in history. In describing Lukács' model and in analysing Daniel, emphasis has been placed on the fact that being exists as becoming and

that becoming takes place in the historical process through the socially produced world of institutions. A cemetery, a whorehouse-saloon, a windmill, a grave-like dwelling: these are the foundations of the second Hard Times. The settlers' behaviour is mainly powered by self-seeking motives, and relationships are variations of the cash-nexus. More importantly, when the prospects of roadbuilding attract strangers looking for jobs, the property owners grab the money spent by the newcomers without giving a thought to the perilous consequences that are bound to ensue. In short, the architects of Hard Times find themselves in a world they have made and which is entirely responsive to their selfish design for it. The Bad Man is a fictional device that serves to dramatize the individual greed and unconcern for general welfare that ultimately causes the town's downfall.

A historically-minded approach also brings to the fore elements that, although present in the novel, are not particularly privileged. Thus if we take account of John Bear (the Indian), the lodes up in the mountain ranges with their miners and managers, and the stagecoach run by the Territory Express Company a more rounded picture emerges. John Bear is the only person who lives on the produce of the land that he fertilizes through the winter with his own dung. After being struck

from behind by one of the founders of Hard Times (Zar, the saloon-keeper), he refuses to indulge in the blessings brought by civilization (whiskey, whores, canned food) and keeps to himself, practising the customs of his own people to the last ("In front of the bar lies the Russian, scalped expertly...he must still have been alive when John Bear reached him," p. 214). He only approaches the townspeople when his efficient doctoring is needed ("I will say this, whatever else was to happen John Bear was the best doctor I ever saw, white or red: he had a true talent for healing and it must be owned him." p. 94).

It is clear from the beginning that the survival of Hard Times ultimately depends on the profitability of the ore deposits in the mountains. And it is the East, where the mine owners live, that decides the fate of the town. The same goes for the stagecoach company and the projected railroad. The miners are laid off at the last minute, although the owners have known for a long time that the mine will not be kept in operation.

From a broader standpoint, the notion of the Frontier links up with the so-called expansionist theory of American history. Even before independence, the dream of empire stirred the imagination and engaged the energies of many Americans. The dream soon materialized

in the overland westward expansion. Once the Frontier closed, around the eighteen nineties, the United States undertook expansion abroad. In "Aggressive Liberalism," Howard Zinn provides a blitzkrieg account of the process:

After 1880, we moved out into the Caribbean and the Pacific, as far as the coastal waters of China. That story is too well known to recount in detail; the "splendid little war" with Spain; the annexation of Hawaii, and the Philippines and the ugly war of extermination against the Filipino rebels; the taking of Puerto Rico and the establishment of a protectorate over Cuba; the shrewd creation of a Republic of Panama, pulling the site for a canal from under Colombia; the waves of marines into the Caribbean--Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua; the bombardment and occupation of Vera Cruz; in the meantime the concern with profit and influence in China and Japan by the judicious use of gunboats, dollars, and diplomacy. With World War I we became the banker of the world; with World War II we spread military bases onto every land mass, every ocean in the world, intervened openly or stealthily in Greece, Lebanon, Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Korea, Vietnam. By 1969, the Japanese had to protest the use of their former island, Okinawa, to store deadly nerve gas for American military use. 55

Zinn has taken us back to the world explored in Daniel. On this reading, Hard Times implicitly establishes disturbing relationships between the saga across the continent and the national character: it probes into the mythic past and alerts readers to the dangerous "legacy" of a dominant ethos that glorifies economic and military

power, as well as material profit over genuine concern for community, at home or abroad.

Admittedly, I am extrapolating in two senses. First, both the socio-historical basis of men's deeds and the role of individual good purposes are fogged over in Hard Times. Secondly, the imperialistic motivation behind territorial expansion does not appear because Doctorow's main interest lay elsewhere, but also because the conquest of foreign markets was not as yet dominant in American foreign policy at the time when the action of the novel takes place. However, if we go back to the paragraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and remember the passages on the Marshall Plan and the Truman doctrine in Daniel, it may be right to affirm that the driving forces of history as tangentially depicted in Hard Times will, of necessity, lead--and have led--to what Daniel openly exposes.

* * * * *

Whereas there is agreement as to the brilliance, the rapid pace of the narrative and the stylistic virtues of Ragtime, negative comments on the novel stress its fraudulent conceits and distortions, ultimately traceable to what reviewers consider Doctorow's outrageous manipulation of American socio-political history. I shall attempt to demonstrate

that the weaknesses of Ragtime stem from unresolved contradictions that encumber Doctorow's use of his materials and hence cast doubt on his judgement as an historical novelist.

I have remarked on several occasions that Doctorow's narratives centre on those unsavoury aspects of American reality seldom acknowledged in the non-revisionist historiographic tradition. Although the demythicizing process is also at work in Ragtime, it operates in an entirely different literary vein. Gone are the anxiety, bitterness and poignancy of the former novels; no central character engages in tortuous cogitations about the intersection of human purpose and larger socio-political designs. Instead, the story is relayed through an omniscient narrator who, in articulating his vision, modulates his voice in the direction of mildly deriding, good-humoured satire (cf. Daniel's searing irony). The prime target of the satiric impulse in Ragtime is the romanticization and idealization of the past as learnt at school (Paul's "marvellous Mrs. Goldstein unconsciously indoctrinating their children" should come to our mind), as well as the trivialization of events and scandalmongering practised by the press. Both forms represent more simplistic and distorted versions of the then current progressive

interpretation of history. For Ragtime is debunking and reductive both in form and content. The situations are obviously contrived, the three fictive families suggest allegory in their namelessness (Father, Mother, Tateh, Mother's Younger Brother) or grouping (WASP, immigrant, black), as well as in the lack of depth of individual characters. The stereotyping of historical personages and the wild, pathetic or implausible feelings, thoughts and behaviour attributed to them; the choice of period details (architecture, painting, different fads such as food consumption, dieting, spiritualism, Egyptomania), and the sweeping generalizations ("Patriotism was a reliable sentiment in the early 1900's," p. 3; "The value of the duplicate event was everywhere perceived," p. 111; "Guns were going off everywhere," p. 159) are all to be construed as parodic in intention. By spurring us on to read rather than by inviting meditation, the jagged, simplified style prevailing particularly in the first half of the novel, reinforces the spirit of banter that presides over the book. And here, in my opinion, a serious compositional problem arises.

From my perspective, Doctorow's patent lapse as an historical novelist consists in his failure to realize that sustained parodic satire works best when the second term of the antithesis, that is, the

principles held up as moral standards, are implied rather than openly stated. Two examples will help to clarify this contention. In his attempt to mockingly unmask the turn-of-the-century mythology ("That was the style, that was the way people lived... There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants," pp. 3-4), Doctorow often has recourse to counterstatements that smack of crude propaganda: "She happened once to meet Emma Goldman, the revolutionary. Goldman lashed her with her tongue. Apparently there were Negroes. There were immigrants." (p. 5) The tactic extends to whole paragraphs:

That evening White went to the opening night of Mamzelle Champagne at the roof garden at Madison Square. This was early in the month of June and by the end of the month a serious heat wave had begun to kill infants all over the slums. The tenements glowed like furnaces and the tenants had no water to drink. The sink at the bottom of the stairs was dry. Fathers raced through the streets looking for ice. Tammany Hall had been destroyed by reformers but the hustlers on the ward still cornered the ice supply and sold little chips of it at exorbitant prices. Pillows were placed on the sidewalks. Families slept on stoops and in doorways. Horses collapsed and died in the streets. The Department of Sanitation sent drays around the city to drag away horses that had died. But it was not an efficient service. Horses exploded in the heat. Their exposed intestines heaved with rats. And up through the slum alleys, through the gray clothes hanging listlessly on lines strung across air shafts, rose the smell of fried fish. (pp. 16-17)

This passage follows an account of Stanford White's exploits as the derivative genius of housing for the wealthy. The unnuanced pattern recurs so often that one wonders if what is said should be taken at its face value. It occurred to me that Doctorow might be parodying Michael Gold's Jews Without Money. Probably not, but the inference is plausible in that in confining himself to schematic characterization and a series of snapshots of milieux, Doctorow, like Gold, evades historical concretization. This and similar descriptions function as local colour -- what Lukács would call the picturesque or external use of history. The distinction becomes more difficult to establish when Doctorow deals with characters who are meant to arouse the reader's sympathy, the most obvious example being Emma Goldman. Someone remarked that Goldman's function consists in expressing unacknowledged reality. I would concur but add that most of her appearances are tacked on so carelessly to the plot and her comments phrased so dogmatically that they sound like a takeoff on the anarchist's incessant lecture tours and impassioned speeches.

My argument may gain strength by contrasting Ragtime briefly with the works of two other novelists who share Doctorow's major historical concerns. Robert

Coover's The Public Burning (1977) dramatizes the Rosenberg case and McCarthyism as collective manifestations of a society gone berserk. Although Coover is deadly serious in his indictment, he never swerves from the outrageously farcical and zany treatment he devised to convey the theme of a hysteria-crazed country and, despite some excesses, the novel succeeds. By contrast, John Dos Passos' fluid handling of distance and contrasting tones in U.S.A. (1937) reminds me very much of Daniel and not, ironically, of Ragtime -- the novel that would invite immediate comparison--because they both present a panoramic view of the transformation of America at the turn of the century (actually, Ragtime covers roughly the same time span as The 42nd Parallel, the first volume of the trilogy).

In brief, I am making the case for either a novel organized as a sustained humorous assault on the targets of satire (The Public Burning), or for a novel that modulates the tone and the style so as not to blur the goals the writer is striving for (Daniel, U.S.A.). If the Comédie humaine represents "the triumph of realism," Ragtime reflects Doctorow's confusion between two Weltanschauungen -- his "consciously formulated stance" and his "artistically configured views." I shall deal farther on with the genesis of this problem. Let us

proceed with the examination of the handling of the material within the framework of the historical novel and of how its categories operate in Ragtime.

The failure to "concretize" history, that is, to dramatize the encounter of objective social tendencies and individual destinies, also accounts for Doctorow's trivialization of historical figures and the central role they play in the narrative, until the moment Coalhouse Walker enters the novel. In his recreation of real-life characters, Doctorow relies on what Hegel calls the psychology of the valet -- a kind of trafficking in the trivia tabloids abound in. I should be at no loss to discover examples of this kind of procedure. How do Freud's ruined stomach and bladder throw light either on the scientist's breakthroughs in psychology or on the impact of his findings on the development of American society? Does saddling Houdini with a severe Oedipus complex add to his assigned historical role of a poor immigrant who partly fulfills the American Dream (success and wealth through strenuous work) on the one hand and, on the other, fails to realize that his attraction rests on his continually enacting the public's unconscious fantasy of escape from bondage, and that this very fact explains why his art has no appeal for the upper classes?

Some critics have faulted Doctorow for including Emma Goldman among the historical luminaries, since she played an insignificant part in shaping American history. However, beneath the progressive veneer, the prosperity and consensus of the period, this was also an era of quickening social and labour protest. Wobblies and anarchists sought to raise class consciousness and generate a free space where working-class demands could be debated and activities organized. On these grounds Goldman's career could have articulated the objective role dissension played in the political spectrum of the times and how the system dealt with it. Unfortunately, Doctorow concentrates on anecdotal aspects of Goldman's public and private life and has her establish implausible, not to say absurd, relationships with other people in the book. Chapter Eight comes to mind as a concrete instance of narrative and descriptive force marred by the spuriousness, ludicrousness and bad taste of the situations concocted to bring a group of characters together (Goldman, Nesbit and Mother's Younger Brother). By lapsing into trivialization, Doctorow not only drains Goldman of her historical significance but subverts the socio-political configuration he set out to portray. For the novel itself should manage to convey the sacrificial role that

Doctorow believes radicals have played in American history.⁵⁹ I do not see how sporadic references to "Red Emma" being detained "as a matter of principle" whenever public order is disrupted, or the remark at the book's close that "The anarchist, Emma Goldman had been deported" (p. 270) can suffice to put the idea across. In Doctorow's view, the corollary to the victimization of radicals is that, as time goes by, their principles or proposals are appropriated by the liberals to achieve power (Daniel, p. 140) and incorporated in the system that destroyed or broke them:

A clear example is Emma Goldman's feminist stand on abortion and contraception..., which was strongly part of the reason for her deportation. I think -- as much as her anarchism. Of Deb's endorsement of the radical idea of social security, which Roosevelt picked up twenty-five years later. 60

Making Evelyn Nesbit the main target of Goldman's proselytizing was the best way to ensure that the anarchist's ideals would fall on deaf ears. As was suggested earlier, Doctorow's portrayal not only trivializes the human and historical aspects of Goldman, but also at times verges on caricature.

Similar inconsistencies and ambiguities occur in the delineation of fictional characters. If Houdini is unaware of the socio-political pattern of his career

(ch. 5), Tateh undergoes a conscious process of ideological accommodation by willingly dissociating himself from the working class and striving for middle-class aggrandizement: "Thus did the artist point his life along the lines of flow of American energy." (p. 111) From an historical perspective, Tateh's story signals the attractiveness and possibility of concretizing the American dream. Some critics view this denouement as an ironic comment, since Tateh's accomplishment happens through sheer luck or chance. Care should be taken not to overemphasize the writer's subtlety. I would argue that Doctorow is having trouble reconciling the fate (co-optation) he has ordained for a character he obviously loves and the overall conception of history presented in the novel.

In order to clarify this contention, we should pause briefly at the portraits of Ford and Morgan:

Henry Ford had once been an ordinary automobile manufacturer. Now he experienced an ecstasy greater and more intense than that vouchsafed to any American before him, not excepting Thomas Jefferson. He had caused a machine to replicate itself endlessly. His executives and managers and assistants crowded around him to shake his hand. Tears were in their eyes. He allotted sixty seconds on his pocket watch for a display of sentiment. Then he sent everyone back to work. He knew there were refinements to be made and he was right. By controlling the speed of the moving belts he could control the workers' rate of production. He did not

want a worker to stoop over or to take more than one step from his work site. The worker must have every second necessary for his job but not a single unnecessary second. From these principles Ford established the final proposition of the theory of industrial manufacture--not only that the parts of the finished product be interchangeable, but that the men who build the products be themselves interchangeable parts. Soon he was producing three thousand cars a month and selling them to the multitudes. He was to live a long and active life. He loved birds and animals and counted among his friends John Burroughs, an old naturalist who studied the humble creatures of the woodland--chipmunk and raccoon, junko, wren and chickadee. (pp.112-13)

He had sensed in Ford's achievement a lust for order as imperial as his own. This was the first sign given to him in some time that he might not be alone on the planet. Pierpont Morgan was that classic American hero, a man born to extreme wealth who by dint of hard work and ruthlessness multiplies the family fortune till it is out of sight. He controlled 741 directorships in 112 corporations. He had once arranged a loan to the United States Government that had saved it from bankruptcy. He had single-handedly stopped the panic of 1907 by arranging for the importation of one hundred million dollars in gold bullion. Moving about in private railroad cars or yachts he crossed all borders and was at home everywhere in the world. He was a monarch of the invisible, transnational kingdom of capital whose sovereignty was everywhere granted. Commanding resources that beggared royal fortunes, he was a revolutionist who left to presidents and kings their territory while he took control of their railroads and shipping lines, banks and trust companies, industrial plants and public utilities. For years he had surrounded himself with parties of friends and acquaintances, always screening them in his mind for the personal characteristics that might indicate less

regard for him than they admitted. He was invariably disappointed. Everywhere men deferred to him and women shamed themselves. He knew as no one else the cold and barren reaches of unlimited success. The ordinary operations of his intelligence and instinct over the past fifty years had made him preeminent in the affairs of nations and he thought this said little for mankind (p. 115)

These two archetypal Americans, who helped to develop a new phase of capitalism through a further division of labour and financial concentration, are shown to be despicable bigots who despise human beings ("mongoloids," "Vermin," for Morgan; "too dumb to make a good living," for Ford, p. 112). The other prominent businessman, Father, exhibits as many prejudices, as well as meanness in his dealings with people and lack of moral scruples in the pursuit of wealth. The reverberation of these negative images throughout the book cannot but reflect unfavourably upon a worker turned movie tycoon. Using Doctorow's metaphor of the business pyramid. It may be argued that the system admits of only two figurative locations in it: at the bottom, in which case one is "a cog in the wheel," or in the direction of the top, where the architects of the system and its beneficiaries (Father, Tateh) find their place. Doctorow unwittingly emphasizes Tateh's split-level mentality when, in the closing pages, he writes: "He said I am not a baron, of course. I am a Jewish

Socialist from Latvia." [My emphasis] (p. 269) Now it is clear from the reversal in his life, that the former socialist just pays lip service to his ideals. But Tateh goes even further in his betrayal: the fact that he "made a good deal of money producing preparedness serials" (p. 269) involves much more than acquiescence. It actually robs Doctorow's character of all moral credibility, especially when one remembers the pacifism running through Daniel. Had Tateh lived in the age of "Thermal Pollution," he would have produced serials sponsoring nuclear weapons (from preparedness to deterrence!). For the turn-of-the-century breakthroughs in science and technology ineluctably hastened the proliferation of atomic arsenals. It might well be that Doctorow has changed his views from "bread to arms" since writing Daniel. There is both internal and external evidence to disprove this suggestion: Father's characterization and Doctorow's own declarations in recent interviews. The strongly sympathetic creation of Tateh betrays a dissonance between the ironic political discourse of the novel and certain artistic resolutions. The fact that Father's and Tateh's behaviours are so similar regarding their participation in the promotion of war materiel would logically call for the same response. However Doctorow's ambivalence (moral

objection to Father; genial apologetics of Tateh) not only ignores poetic justice, but also overdoes the happy ending, when Tateh envisions a film about:

A bunch of children who were pals, white black, fat thin, rich poor, all kinds, mischievous little urchins who would have funny adventures in their own neighborhood, a society of ragamuffins, like all of us, a gang, getting into trouble and getting out again. (pp. 269-70) 62

By now, the original ironic impulse has been diluted with sheer sentimentality hardly attributable to the author's intention to mock the turn-of-the-century nostalgia or justified as part of the co-optation phenomenon.

In the Coalhouse-Sarah story, Doctorow seems to have hit upon a situation capable of redirecting his narrative along the lines of the historical novel, since the lovers' fate is firmly grounded in socio-political circumstances. Until this story begins to unfold, the reader is kept busy following the brisk pace of the narrative with its constant shifts from public scenes to private ones, and the independent story lines are made to converge through coincidences. Except for a few arcane, extraneous touches, the recounting of the loosely-knit plot recalls the straightforwardness and accessibility of chronicle. This assertion implies my disagreement with those critics who identify a

particular character -- the Little Boy -- as the angle
of ⁶³vision of the tale. Barbara Foley, who has studied
Dos Passos' influence on Doctorow, attributes similar
functions to the narrative voice in Ragtime and the
Camera Eye: "both respond with almost excruciating
sensitivity to the callousness of their historical
worlds and thus furnish a naive but clear-eyed standard
of ethical judgment."⁶⁴ The voice I hear as I read along,
however, has the qualities of oral narrative and
establishes the "primitive" casual links of a
storyteller more interested in amusing the audience and
mocking the ways of the world than in registering their
deep moral significance. I do concede Dos Passos'
seminal influence but not exactly at the structural
level. Rather, I would stress the importance of U.S.A.
as a quarry of historical topics and particulars,
traceable also in Daniel.

A more direct influence coming from "far away" and
long ago" operates in Ragtime: Michael Kohlhaas written
in 1808-10 by the German romantic storyteller and
playwright Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811). I shall not
rehearse the parallels already detected by Walter L.
Knorr and John Ditsky.⁶⁵ Instead I shall explore the
changes that the reworking of Kleist's Novelle bring to
Doctorow's work. I find it significant that in

The Historical Novel, Lukács singles out Kohlhaas as one of the best forerunners of historical fiction.

Paradoxically, by narrowing his focus to one of the stories, Doctorow expands the socio-historical horizon. Put differently, Kleist's material allows Doctorow to anchor his socio-political critique, so far expressed in an abstract and programmatic manner, in a solid historico-literary subject. For aside from Father, Coalhouse Walker is the only character built as a manifestation of the "concrete universal," that is, "the typical" resulting from the interplay of historical trends and individual purpose.

Doctorow has acknowledged that he had long been interested in utilizing Kleist's "idea of a man who cannot find justice from a society that claims to be just."⁶⁶ In transplanting the German story -- which in turn was borrowed by Kleist from a chronicle based on a real-life case -- Doctorow shifts the emphasis from class struggle to racial conflict. In examining how Doctorow handles the details of Kohlhaas, I would like to underscore once again a phenomenon that manifests itself throughout Ragtime: a dual tendency in the artistic resolution of the material on hand.

At times, Doctorow shows a remarkable gift for grasping history as a complex process and translating

it into superior fictional form. Witness his creation of an appropriate parallel to the main "world-historical individual" of Kohlhaas. In Kleist, Luther tries to persuade the honest horse-dealer into turning the other cheek as every good Christian should do, no matter the injustices done to him. The same function falls to Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) in Ragtime. Both men are highly respected by the "outlaws" and both use their moral ascendancy in the interest of the powers that be. The irony in Ragtime cuts deeper in the sense that, contrary to other militant black leaders of the time (W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance), Washington advocated the "advancement" of his people in strict subordination to the will of whites. Thus Carmichael and Hamilton put their finger on his historical role when they call his practice "the politics of deference" and associate him with the "Negro Establishment," that is, those blacks co-opted by the white power structure. Washington's poverty of awareness is further thrown into relief by the fact that Coalhouse possesses a skill (he is a rag pianist) and economic independence, the two accomplishments sine qua non that, according to "the great educator," would automatically earn blacks political and civil rights. In scarcely four pages, Doctorow manages to compose what I consider to be the best chapter in the book

(pp. 203-07). The scene brings into significant confrontation the two characters' divergent rhetoric, and dissimilar visions of Negro dignity and rights, thus dramatizing the collision of two opposing historical trends by means of imaginative fictional situations, subtle touches of humour and caricature, and satiric sting. I hope Lukács does not turn in his grave were he to learn that the meeting took place in the church-like atmosphere of the Morgan Library founded in ... 1924! (The time frame of Ragtime is 1902-1918.)

Doctorow has been charged with a more serious breach of historical anachronism, which consists in having smuggled the ethos of the nineteen sixties under the skin of a turn-of-the-century Negro. This suggestion may be easily dismissed if we keep in mind that Doctorow inherited the story from Kleist. My critique will proceed, therefore, from the premise that the American writer failed to avoid some of the pitfalls inherent in reworking the literary material.

Kleist embeds his tale firmly in the climate of the first half of the sixteenth century. At that time the German states, governed by electors or princes, and members of the Holy Roman Empire, had been recently shaken by momentous religious and political movements -- the Reformation (Luther's Wittenberg Theses, 1517)

and the peasant war (1524-25). From a broader historical perspective, it was also a period of transition from the twilight of the Middle Ages to the dawn of modern times. All these complex factors operate in determining Kohlhaas' behaviour. Kleist creates his character in the image of a medieval freeman whose honour and generosity in carrying on his trade earn him the respect of the community:

Until his thirtieth year this extraordinary man could have been considered a paragon of civil virtues. In a village that still bears his name he owned a farm where he peacefully earned a living by his trade; his wife bore him children whom he brought up in the fear of God to be hardworking and honest; he had not one neighbour who was not indebted to his generosity or his fair-mindedness...
(Kohlhaas, p. 114) 68

Endowed with a strong sense of social justice and deeply religious faith, Kohlhaas humbly honours his rulers, whose relationship with the people he still conceives in medieval terms. The story hinges precisely on the clash between a dying form of the state, based on personal bonds of loyalty and reciprocity, and the emergence of the much more abstract modern form which culminated in the European absolute monarchies:

At the same time another equally praiseworthy feeling began to take ever deeper root in him as he rode along and heard, wherever he stopped, of the daily injustices committed at Tronka Castle against travellers: a feeling that if the whole affair had been

deliberately preconceived, as it certainly appeared to have been, it was now his duty to the world at large to exert all his powers in securing redress for the wrongs already perpetrated and protection for his fellow citizens against such wrongs in the future. (Kohlhaas, p. 121)

But who shall describe the tumult of his mind when he saw the proclamation, its text accusing him of injustice, and its signature the dearest and most venerable name known to him; that of Martin Luther! (Kohlhaas, p. 151)

Returning to his chair, Luther asked, 'What do you want?' Kohlhaas replied: 'To prove that you are wrong in thinking me an unjust man! In your proclamation you say that my sovereign knows nothing of my case: very well then, get me a safe conduct to Dresden and I shall go there and put my case before him.' '...Who do you say has cast you out from the community of the state in which you have lived? Has there ever, so long as states have existed, been a case of anyone, no matter who, becoming an outcast from society?' 'I call that man an outcast,' answered Kohlhaas, clenching his fist, 'who is denied the protection of the law! For I need that protection if my peaceful trade is to prosper; indeed it is for the sake of that protection that I take refuge, with all the goods I have acquired, in that community. Whoever withholds it from me drives me out into the wilderness among savages. It is he - how can you deny it? - who puts into my hands the club I am wielding to defend myself,' (Kohlhaas, p. 152)

But if Kleist bares to the very bottom the arbitrary absolutism of the petty states, the decadence of the Junker class, and the collusion of a reformed religion, he also makes it clear that his character has a flaw -- a tendency to obduracy that under baleful and

unfortunate circumstances hardens into "diseased and deluded fanaticism." (Kohlhaas, p. 143)

Turning to Ragtime, we may observe that Doctorow has borrowed almost wholesale the chain of events without duly connecting some of them with the socio-political substratum of twentieth-century America. I shall confine myself to the most serious weakness. Coalhouse Walker's letters parallel Kohlhaas' edicts, which are issued on "the authority inborn in him," in a clear reference to Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In his second writ, Kohlhaas "called upon the country to withhold all aid... from Junker Wenzel von Tronka, against whom he was engaged in a just war..." (Kohlhaas, p. 140) After having set fire with his army to the Junker's castle, parts of Wittenberg and three sides of Leipzig, Kohlhaas issues a third writ:

...he styled himself 'an emisary of the Archangel Michael, who has come to punish with fire and sword all those who shall stand on the Junker's side in this quarrel, and to chastise in them the deceitfulness which now engulfs the whole world'. From the castle at Lützen,...where he had entrenched himself, he appealed to the people to join him in establishing a better order of things; and the writ was signed, with a touch of madness, 'Given, at the seat of our Provisional World Government, Lützen Castle'. (Kohlhaas, p. 148)

Coalhouse's second letter reads:

One, that the white excrescence known as Willie Conklin be turned over to my justice.

Two, that the Model T Ford....be returned in its original condition. Until these demands are satisfied, let the rules of war prevail. Coalhouse Walker Jr., President, Provisional American Government. (p. 187)

Coalhouse seeks redress for personal grievances -- which no doubt have been inflicted on him on account of the colour of his skin -- and never makes himself the bearer of popular claims. This explains why his proclamation and the guerrilla overtones attached to the signature lack substance. As far as Coalhouse's band is concerned, the revolutionary connotations sound even more spurious. Mother's Younger Brother's story has been unfolded so as not to allow of any ambiguity: his unrequited love or infatuation is the catalyst that springs him into action. The young blacks make their appearance as deux ex machina, and the irrational bonds that bind them to Coalhouse, as well as their ritualistic behaviour and identification with the pianist perilously bespeak of a fascist potential in them.

To conclude, it may be said that both Kohlhaas and Coalhouse are noble men sinned against by self-seeking individuals who handle the machinery of the state. Both trust the system and resort to violence once the legal options have been exhausted, and both take personal responsibility for acts which ultimately result from the socio-political conditions of their time. They differ in

that Kohlhaas' armed rebellion is rooted in the historical context of the sixteenth-century German states, whereas Coalhouse's terrorist activities do not mesh with the chain of events that lead to them.

Critics who think of Ragtime as a successful historical novel argue that the sentimental tone pervading it is meant to mock the nostalgic recollection with which mainstream America views the turn-of-the-century period. Granted, although the sentimentality is not always satiric in intention. Counterpointed to this tone, some of them also detect "bitter irony," wielded⁶⁹ to debunk the misremembrance of the "good old days." As John Clayton puts it, "in Ragtime history is flattened⁷⁰ into myth only to demolish the myth." I have strongly suggested in the preceding analyses that the difference does not appear to me to be so clear-cut. I would argue that, after a false start in which his attempt to explode the myth of social harmony and widespread prosperity translates into a zestful yet outward and schematic overview (first eight chapters), Doctorow loses his bearings as an historical novelist. My ask will consist in marshalling evidence to demonstrate that the artistic disorientation stems from the rather confused ontological and epistemological premises that

inform his beliefs.

Novelists should not be expected to articulate their thoughts in the form of lucid, logically constructed reasonings unless, like Sartre, they claim for themselves the title of philosophers. I do not intend to pick on Doctorow's weaknesses as a thinker, but to single out those aspects that generate dissonance and inconsistencies in Ragtime as an historical novel. I am referring to questions that have engaged the human mind from time immemorial, such as realism and idealism in philosophy, the limits of knowledge, and the mimetic and anti-mimetic nature of literature. These seem to be big words and unmanageable issues; however Doctorow has either discussed or alluded to them in one seminal early essay, as well as in several interviews which restate the formulations advanced in "False Documents."⁷¹ I shall try to put the main assumptions in a nutshell.

Doctorow claims that fiction and nonfiction interpret contingent reality through language, and at one point places both on the same ontological footing by levelling them out as narrative: "I am thus led to the proposition that there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction: there is only⁷² narrative." In keeping with this contention, he seems to deny the existence of an objective reality outside of

consciousness ("reality is ⁷³ amenable to any construction that is placed upon it."), although his concrete analyses of the historical process contradict this assertion. So does his belief that storytelling is a privileged way of thinking that leads to the apprehension of the truth: "we novelists have it in us to compose false documents more valid, more real, more truthful than the 'true' documents of the politicians or the ⁷⁴ journalists or the psychologists." In our society, the novel has been demoted to the level of "fiction" because the universe it creates cannot be corroborated, whereas "empirical fictions" enjoy the prestige accorded to verifiable facts in a pragmatic world. Doctorow disagreed with the high authority currently conferred upon the semantics of politics, journalism, social sciences and historiography (although he uses the more ambiguous word "history"), preferring to emphasize the wisdom and acuity writers are endowed with by virtue of their openness to life, their embrace of totality and their willingness to wrestle with ambiguity in order to attain the truth. These goals, we may infer, are best accomplished by writers like Philip Roth who do not give up on the mimetic function of the novel, no matter how arduous the task may have become at a time when ⁷⁵ antinovels are fashionable.

Consistent or not, the views outlined so far seem to spring from someone who has done some serious, if not very profound, thinking. Let me now quote what Doctorow replied to Paul Levine's question whether novel writing conceived as composition of "false documents" placed a burden on him:

I don't take a vow to be responsible. I'm under the illusion that all of my inventions are quite true. For instance, in Ragtime, I'm satisfied that everything I made up about Morgan and Ford is true, whether it happened or not. Perhaps truer because it didn't happen. And I don't make any distinction any more -- and can't even remember -- what of the events and circumstances... are historically verifiable and what are not. But I suppose that if you were to say to me, there's a danger in this sort of thing, I would have to agree. 76

Confronted with pronouncements such as these, one cannot help but to observe that any attempt at writing historical novels on this assumption is bound to founder the way Ragtime does.

To conclude, then, the dissimilar nature and quality of Daniel and Ragtime stem from the primacy of discordant factors in the writing process. In the earlier novel, Doctorow seems to have been well aware of the questions discussed above and have spared no pains to produce a work in which his own fluctuations regarding the composed vs. objective nature of the historical process become an integral part of Daniel's

efforts to elucidate the past and its conditioning of the present. Despite all the doubts and confusion, Daniel's probings bring to him an apprehension of the complex and contradictory character of his country's history. What eventually triumphs is fiction as a form of truth, artistically articulated as a concrete, typical totality.

For all its fast pace and mobility Ragtime, by contrast, conveys a shallow, external rendition of the historical process. Except for some portions of the book devoted to Coalhouse Walker, the informing premise -- juxtaposing the American myth of social harmony, political idealism and widespread welfare with the manipulative money-oriented basis of technological development and economic growth -- never comes alive as the fully - textured typicality of the past. By committing himself too much to secondary, external aspects (fast pace, linguistic gambits, whimsical fabrications about world-historical figures) Doctorow impoverishes the representation of the objective significance of the period in the overall life of the United States. The substitution of historicism for historical pageantry places Ragtime in the sphere of show business rather than in the exacting category of historical fiction.

* * * * *

Whereas Hard Times explicitly addresses the theme of horizontal mobility (westward migration), Loon Lake deals with upward mobility in its most popular variation--the rags-to-riches story of a self-made man. The first motif also figures prominently in the later novel, given the fact that motion through space is often associated with a shift in status. Moreover, the role played by the picaresque pattern in Joe's characterization and the episodic structure of the whole accounts for the journey from Paterson to the Adirondacks, to the Midwest, to New Mexico and back to Loon Lake, as well as for the contact with differing social realities.

"Just as geologic landslides reveal the deposits on earth layers,"⁷⁷ so do economic slumps lay bare the gaps between the rich and the poor in class societies. Doctorow has chosen the Great Depression as a backdrop against which the action of Loon Lake evolves, with some of the flashbacks covering as far back as 1910. As pertains to an historical novel, the atmosphere of the period is evoked through feelings (sense of personal inadequacy, anguish, loneliness, rootlessness, fear, meagreness, pretence) and events (miserable lives of the

poor, life-style of the rich, association of big business with strike- and union-busting gangsters, unemployment, eviction of jobless workers) which enact the dialectics of self and society in any historical moment. As the novel progresses, however, this interrelatedness is either broken and consequently the individual and the social factors start operating non-dialectically, or muted to such an extent that the individual becomes the focal point of the novel. In this section I shall try to establish the causes of this displacement and its effects on the novel as a whole.

An appropriate way to start is to follow the fortunes and examine the attitudes of the two protagonists. The socio-economic background to their character formation is sketched so as to highlight similarities and contrasts in both psychological and historical terms. Neither Joe nor Penfield feels at home in the working-class environment in which they were born, although their perception of the world and their horizons of expectation differ entirely. Feeling rejected by his parents, Joe experiences existence as exclusion and despises both the minimal life led by the Paterson mill workers and the workers themselves, as if they had willed the misery attending their class. By contrast, he "was keen for life" (p. 4) and at fifteen

had already settled on his future goals and how to achieve them: "I felt I could get by make my way whatever the circumstances ...I would steal kill use all my cunning..." (p. 9)

Penfield grows up partly "in contact with the circumstances of his life" (p. 39), so similar to Joe's. The victimization of the miners, however, elicits outrage in him and imprints his mind with the idea of revenge. On the other side, Penfield's family constellation and personality contrast with Joe's. Possessing few endowments, he does not find the reassurance to boost his ego in his well-meaning but tactless father, nor in his mother's idealized image of himself:

I note the boy Warren Penfield's relentless faculty of composition. Rather than apprehend reality he transforms it so that in this case, for example, in the eviction of the striking miners from the Colorado Fuel Company's houses, the pitiful pile of his family's belongings on the wagon bed is represented as a vision of high civilization. No wonder his father is angered by his constant daydreaming. Jack Penfield perceives it as mental incompetence. How he wonders will his son survive the harshness of this life when he the father and she the mother are no longer there to protect him? As to book learning, Warren can do that passably well, but as to plain good sense the character of his mind is not reassuring.

Neda Penfield takes a different view but not without some irritation that the boy doesn't give her more support for it. Her view is that he is a rare soul, a finer being

either than herself or her husband. By some benign celestial error he was born to them and to their life of slag who would more properly have been the child of a wealthy family going to the finest schools and with every material and intellectual advantage. He gives her qualms of course but she nourishes a private and barely articulated conviction that he is not deficient only latent, that his strength is there but still wrapped up in itself still to unfold in its fullness when the time is ripe. (pp. 37-38)

Loon Lake is the crossroad where both characters converge as well as the crossroads that determines their fate. Impelled by the memory of the miners' suffering, Penfield makes his way to Loon Lake to kill its owner, the man who as an officer of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company in 1910 had shown no respect for the victims of a work accident, so engrossed had he been in putting the mine back in operation. Unresponsive to anybody's plight but his own, Joe chances upon Loon Lake when running after "a vision of incandescent splendor" (pp. 31-32)-- Bennett's lit-up, private train with the naked Clara inside. Both receive the same welcome (they are attacked by a pack of wild dogs) and hospitality (Bennett instructs the country doctor to minister to their wounds and his servants to put them up until their recovery), and the allure of the mountain retreat and its owners proves so overpowering that both eventually settle in Loon Lake.

Being the older man, Penfield has been living on

the 'Bennett' estate as "poet in residence" for a few years when Joe arrives as "injured intruder," soon to become "sole guest" and eventually master of Loon Lake. For my purposes, what matters is that Penfield in 1929 and Joe seven years later go through the same process of secondary socialization that demands the internalization of a counter-definition of reality, with Bennett as the mediator or significant other.⁷⁸ Penfield's background of emotional instability and mental disturbance, his unsuitability for action, as well as his remnants of social awareness and moral qualms prevent him from "successfully" adjusting to the world Bennett represents. Sinking ever deeper into alcohol and mysticism, he becomes a posturing poet "sloshing in self-pity" (p. 113). By contrast, Joe's resolve and manipulation of the weak--Penfield included--reward him with an adoptive father and the power and money that attach to a Bennett.

Such is the bare outline of the major story. The plot however unfolds through indirection and ambiguity, with the existentially separate stories (and personalities) of the two protagonists continually meeting and parting, intersecting and fusing.

Loon Lake starts, then, in the oppressed and oppressive world of mill and mining towns (Paterson, New

Jersey; Ludlow, Colorado) as perceived by two children of the working class. As the novel progresses, the socio-economic horizon narrows and the narrative concentrates on Joe's deliberate break with the past, his adventures as a hobo and an unskilled industrial worker in a Bennett plant in Indiana. The book ends in the world of industrial and corporate wealth to which masters of Loon Lake belong.

An entirely ironic reading of Loon Lake would assume that the shrinking of "the historical factor in human life"⁷⁹ is of a piece with Doctorow's debunking strategy, consisting in portraying the myth in the making through the consciousness of the protagonist himself. We might wish to conclude then that the Great Depression recedes into the background in order to underscore the premise of individual omnipotence that informs the legend of the self-made man. The irony would be reinforced by the fact that the rise to prominence comes about not through industriousness, honesty and the unexpected reward that results from having rendered a service to a wealthy man (i.e., the Horatio Alger pattern), but through ruthlessness, deception and corruption. Joe's ability to slip in and out of roles with manipulative control of other human beings, his cunning to get away with murder, his emotional

resilience and moral inconsequentiality would all lend credence to the tactic of the self-exposure of an intelligent crook. Nevertheless different assessments of the protagonist have been propounded. In spite of sharing assumptions similar to mine about the historical nature of Doctorow's fiction, some critics view Joe as a sympathetic character. John Clayton, for instance, goes as far as to say, "Who is it who knows Power so well, sees oppression so sensitively...?"⁸⁰ Others place Joe in the company of Huck, Ishmael and Nick Adams, all of them archetypal ingénus. It is worth noting that if these readings distort the character in various directions, the one-sided interpretations echo dissonances in Joe's treatment which in the end manage to make an artistic failure of Loon Lake.

In analysing Ragtime, I argued the case that the writer's relationship to the historical material, be it events or the record of events, is of vital importance to an appreciation of the significance of a work. I think that a similar approach can be applied to advantage in this case too. As with Ragtime, the broad outlines of the vision expressed in the novel correspond with Doctorow's "consciously formulated worldview." In Loon Lake, ambiguity creeps in in the delineation of some characters, the introduction of mystic touches, the

frequent collapse of irony into sentimentalism and melodrama. An added complication results from the complex fictional texture. I must admit it is hard to tell which is the causal factor. Assuming that an experienced reader's insight has some validity, I would argue that Doctorow became so engrossed in technique that his subject matter and historical approach were soon rendered a by-product of his formal expectations. We are left then with a work that may be technically innovative but has no formal depth. From the standpoint of the historical novel, Loon Lake focuses on individuals without describing the social conditions for the emergence or apparent primacy of individualism. The social space is brought into the novel only when required as a device to open or close episodes in the protagonist's saga. Put differently, Doctorow draws the dialogical system of class antagonism into his field of representation not as an integral part of the characters' lives, but when the plot demands unexpected twists.

Since Loon Lake centres upon Joe, I shall confine my analysis to his characterization. If Joe's motivations appear to be contradictory, this has little to do with his youth, or with the baffling discordant realities Daniel, for instance, had to face. Rather,

they reflect his creator's failure to fashion a complex character who would require concomitant novel forms to express the subtleties or confusion of his consciousness. We may distinguish three uneasily coexistent but discontinuous identities in Joe's personality: the derelict hobo, the dubious quasi-knight and Joe of Paterson. Not that we are dealing with a further development of the Jekyll and Hyde case; these are only three avatars of the pícaro, who underlies and provides consistency to the other fitful incarnations, until the final identity is achieved (Joseph Paterson Bennett).

Doctorow introduces Joe as a rogue-hobo who knows what he is like, what his abilities are, and what he wants to become. He prizes energy, life and force, is awed by wealth and class ("style"), and longs for power and fame. He loathes poverty, pretence and self-delusion; and the "bestiary of human virtue and excellence" (p. 18) does not arouse his pity nor does it generate understanding, but awakens his contempt and anger. As the preceding description may indicate, this side of Joe is economically but fully realized and is conveyed through an energetic, sensuous style tinged with self-mockery and irony. If Doctorow had proceeded along these lines, the novel might have been a

successful historical novel of the Depression, initially cast in the picaresque mode and probably becoming more and more ironic as the rogue-hobo--turned into Joe of Paterson--bids for the highest material spheres. However, the fault-lines in characterization already appear in the opening section when Doctorow, without quite changing his course, endows Joe with highly suspicious faculties:

I don't remember anyone's name, I don't remember who the gang members were, I don't remember the names of my schoolteachers, I was alone in all of it, there was some faculty of being alone I was born with, in the noise of life and clatter of tenement war, my brain was alone in the silence of observation and perception and understanding, that true silence of waiting for conclusions, of waiting for everything to add up to a judgment, a decision, that silence worse than the silence of the deaf and dumb. (p. 5)

Just as courage, skill, stoical endurance and understatement individualize the Hemingway hero, so do observation, perception, understanding and generalizations distinguish those characters whom Doctorow intends the reader to identify with. Unlike Daniel, Joe does not seek self-knowledge and meaning in the social fabric of his country, nor does he wrestle with opposing ideologies in his attempt to comprehend the purpose of history and make a life for himself from this understanding and his intellectual and moral

honesty. The logic of the pattern Doctorow has chosen to satirize tells us that, in order to become Joseph Bennett, Joe cannot but be guided by the ethic of self-interest, which leaves little room for existential broodings, conflicting social ideals or deep-seated emotions. It is clear from the book that the Bennetts of this world amass their wealth by exploiting workers, preventing the latter's organization by illegal means and, failing this, by co-opting "the leadership of the unions" who become "watchdogs of management." The first computer printout on Bennett reveals that he had participated actively in the constitution of great corporations and promoted the penetration of foreign economies by the creation of mining monopolies, thus controlling the country's major natural resources (pp. 56-57). Joseph Paterson Bennett's career does not differ greatly from his father's in this respect (p. 258). In fact, Bennett Sr. is a fictional negative-valenced "world-historical individual" ("he was of his generation and reflected his times in his person," p. 161), bearing a strong resemblance to Morgan both in his implied financial wheeling and dealing and in his outward sign of life or mortality ("fast-growing mole on the side of the nose," p. 161; Morgan's "skin disease that had colonized his nose and made of it a strawberry," Ragtime,

pp. 115-116).

Moreover, endowing Joe with Daniel-like qualities dissatisfies the reader because they remain detached outbursts of consciousness never integrated with the figure of the rascal that has been firmly planted in the reader's mind from the outset; and it is precisely this figure that fits smoothly in the Bennett pattern. Similarly, Joe's isolated quixotic frenzy in the Fat Lady episode jars as much as his knightly craving for and submission to Clara with the unprincipled, energetic rogue who quickly seizes on the carpe diem motif of living life to its utmost intensity⁸² ("I knew my life and I made it work, I raced down alleys and jumped fences a few seconds before the cops, I stole what I needed and went after girls like prey, I went looking for trouble and was keen for it," p. 4; "he was not unmindful that his life since leaving Paterson had been a picaresque of other men's money and other men's women," p. 238). Apart from being discordant, these and similar desultory components undermine the satiric and ironic pattern and ruin it with whining sentimentality ("It is the whispering return to my body of my derelict soul. Oh, my derelict soul of the great depression!" pp. 208-209).

I do not wish to convey the mistaken impression that an upstart like Joe or the wealthy in general are

unable to experience inward conflicts or are totally lacking in humane traits. My aim is to bring out the contradiction between the overall debunking strategy, designed to stand the self-made man myth on its head, and the elements that run counter to the larger pattern of the book and mar Joe's characterization. Even if, in my opinion, the doubling of characters (Joe - Penfield) serves mainly as a ploy to generate formal complexity (apparent multiplicity of point of view, interlocking narratives, mixture of styles), Penfield is a better realized character than Joe because his "life farcically set in the path of historical and natural disaster" (p. 97) is recounted obliquely and mockingly through his alter ego's consciousness and "comes to [him = Joe] as entertainment" (p. 97). In fact, the relaying of the narrative through the protagonist militates against the global satiric intention and accounts for the unconvincing sensitivity thrust at times in the structure of Joe's character. Placing Loon Lake in a literary-historical perspective may shed light on this failing.

The Horatio Alger formula of hitting it rich has a significant genealogy in serious American literature. The ironic treatment of the pattern becomes widespread in the fiction dealing with immigrants who, once in the

United States, do not realize the dream but realize that it is a dream few can accomplish; or if it comes true, it usually involves a moral downfall either because of the corrupted means employed to achieve the end, or due to the betrayal of the higher values brought over from the native land. A thoroughly American approach to the myth, and perhaps its most illustrious formulation, occurs in The Great Gatsby (1925), where Fitzgerald transforms the theme into "an elegy for the lapsed American dream of innocent success."⁸⁴

Joe and Gatsby, both self-created achievers of wealth, resemble each other in their status as antiheroes, as parvenus who accomplish their goals through dubious means. Granting that the two writers' visions of American history differ, probably Doctorow would have partly avoided many a pitfall had he selected an observer like Nick Carraway to interpret the meaning of Joe's career. The narrative distance would have allowed him enough leeway to iron out the inconsistencies, mute the sentimentalism, and re-establish the totalizing function of the social dimension of the novel.

As it stands, Loon Lake wavers between two visions insufficiently fused to create sustained conflict, yet obtrusive enough to displace or at least blur the

exploding of the myth by dehistoricizing it. One vision proposes a world of human homelessness and helplessness (Joe as derelict hobo and quasi-knight); the other a naturalistic universe in which only those with cunning and energy can win (Joe of Paterson). To this unstable alliance Doctorow's demythologizing of American history has been reduced. The dwindling of the social horizon parallels the sapping of the satiric pattern and the ironic tone. Indeed most of what transpires between Joe's first and second coming to Loon Lake has a tangential connection with the travesty of the American dream. As the book draws to a close, the theme takes the foreground again, and what I have indicated as Doctorow's major weaknesses manifest themselves the more preposterously because the writer seems to flaunt his literary prowess, as he discloses Joe's motivation to stay in Loon Lake and the nature of his "sacrificial" vengeance:

...I know what to do about this pompous little self-idolator [Bennett], I'm going to put the fucker where he belongs I swear oh my Clara I swear Mr. Penfield I swear by the memory of the Fat Lady I know how to do it,...and I have the courage to do it and it will be a beautiful monumental thing I do I will testify to God that he is a human being, that is how, I will save him from wasting away, I will save him from crumbling into a piece of dried shit, into a foul eccentric, you see, I will give him hope, I will extend his reign, I will raise him and do it all so well with such style that he will thank me,

thank me for growing in his heart his heart
bursting his son. (p. 257)

And then the surprise ending: the computerized biography of Joseph - Paterson Bennett (née Korzeniewski). Mutatis mutandis, this is the framing device I suggested Doctorow had turned to good account in Hard Times and Daniel. Because Loon Lake as a whole does not succeed, the "tour de force" has become a mannerism incapable of performing the synecdochic role that record-keeping and the dissertation have in the earlier novels. Instead of portraying the process of Joe's metamorphosis or the implications of such transformation in the course of the narrative, Doctorow has chosen to understate them flatly in a few lines. But a computer printout of Joseph Paterson Bennett's file cannot restore the debunking perspective at the last minute, nor can it establish a substantial connection between past and present.

Doctorow's conviction that "The novel has to constantly recreate itself by assaulting its own traditions, the form has to be abused somehow in order to be re-invented each time you write a book,"⁸⁵ may be a valid claim provided that the experimental daring be matched by substance. In Daniel, for instance, the meanderings of the plot, the abrupt shifts in scene,

tense, voice and style replicate the complex impact of an objective contradictory reality on subjective experience. Loon Lake, by contrast, reads as an inconsequential narrative in which Doctorow shows off his rhetorical and formal pyrotechnics. The closer the novel is examined, the more arbitrary the postmodernist elements seem to be in relation to the work as a vision of life. I insist Doctorow should not be blamed for sloppiness; formally, Loon Lake is a carefully thought-out novel. Nonetheless, the wrenching of chronology and logic as attempts to break the fetters of linear translation and conceptualization, and the cinematic transitions (cuts, dissolves, fades in and fades out) have no objective correlative in the life of the protagonist nor in the perception of the world as articulated through those strategies. On the other hand, the denial of continuity in time and the identity of being through space and time ("the same man with all men, the one man in all events," p. 9; the trinity of the Ludlow girl [1910], the Japanese girl [1923] and Clara [1930's]) --metaphysical outcrops in a down-to-earth Darwinian landscape--do not go beyond vexing allusions, or appear at length in the excerpts from the works by Penfield, acknowledged in the novel itself as a failed poet. Because of the lack of dialectical link

with the characters' experiences, Joe's protestations concerning the social and labour scene sound as gratuitous as the thematic montage and as hollow as the metaphysical flourishes. The same applies to the straining after rhetorical effects.

I do not wish to slight Doctorow's story-telling and stylistic virtues. There is ample evidence, even in Loon Lake, to prove that he can be imaginative and make the best of his talents. As I noted in Ragtime, it is Doctorow's judgement that lends itself to criticism, and his devolution from Daniel to Loon Lake casts doubt about his quality as an historical novelist.

Conclusion

With the help of Lukács' theoretical constructs and practical analyses, I sought to assign a precise meaning to the concept "historical novel" to be utilized in the study of Hard Times, Daniel, Ragtime and Loon Lake. The historical novel was characterized as a particular form of narrative which attempts to comprehend both the complex of socio-political forces that shape events in a specific historical period and the manner in which the individual characters' lives are inseparably conjoined with the concrete historical circumstances of their age. By embedding the fictional story in the social substratum, the historical novelist is capable of portraying the different levels of individual response to diverse historical trends, thus achieving the representation of "the totality of objects" in a given epoch and its connections with the present.

The purpose of this study has been to elucidate Doctorow's attitude towards history as well as to explore and assess how this attitude operates aesthetically in the four novels. In order to facilitate this task and work from a global perspective, an intertextual narrative context was created ("U.S.A."), in which the individual pieces enter into a relation of

complementarity with one another. For, when read together, these works throw into sharper relief not only Doctorow's historical vision, but also his artistic strengths and weaknesses. While the writer's overall view of the American past and his concern with technical experimentation hold the four novels together, the individual works are uneven in conception, impact, and thematic and formal significance. As the preceding analyses have tried to demonstrate, the central issue concerning Doctorow as an historical novelist probably turns on a question of judgement, an aspect that ultimately determines the balance between the vision and the concretization of the vision in the actual piece of writing.

Briefly stated, Doctorow asserts a number of socio-political and economic views that evoke the interpretation of America which started to take shape in the writings of revisionist historians in the early nineteen sixties. This position basically consists in foregrounding segments of American reality that had been played down or ignored by the prevailing historiographical orthodoxy. Thus on the domestic scene, the stress falls on the disguised class nature of American society, the persistence of poverty in a wealthy country, the continued victimization of racial

94

minorities, the indifference to ecological issues, the suppression of dissenting radical movements, the collusion of big business and government, and the manipulative use of power and the mass media. In foreign policy, the issues attacked range from the conception of national welfare as the result of both warfare and a succession of new frontiers (territorial, economic and military expansion) to the identification of American self-interest abroad with genuine democracy, and the escalation of the arms race. To these concerns shared with revisionist historians, Doctorow adds his own criticism, and perhaps repudiation, of radical ideologies (Old and New Left) and of the immaturity of the revolutionary sixties, which he tends to present as either martyrdom (Susan) or self-dramatization (Sternlicht).

But since "[a writer] thinks narratively and comes
86
to judgments through stories," my attention focused on the novels themselves. Starting from the assumption that Daniel represents Doctorow's best achievement as an historical novelist, I made it the pivot of my study and demonstrated that it fuses almost to perfection Doctorow's historical consciousness and his craftsmanship in the sphere of postmodernist techniques. Daniel reveals a lucid grasp of the interaction of

historical processes and extreme personal situations, and achieves "breadth and depth in the artistic portrayal of social tendencies and individual destinies. I suggested that Hard Times intimates Doctorow's vision of history and becomes much more significant when embedded in the total fabric of "U.S.A." Perhaps because Daniel represents such a quantum jump in relation to Hard Times, the novels on turn-of-the-century America and the Depression come as a disappointment. The regression occurs mainly in the distancing of the political discourse and the fictional plotting in Ragtime, and in the defective characterization and the uncertainty of focus in Loon Lake. I located the sources of the deficiencies in Doctorow's own contradictions as to the objective/composed nature of reality, the function of "empirical and nonempirical fictions", and the urge to "assault" realist narrative techniques.

To conclude, it may be said that in terms of my understanding of the historical novel, only Daniel led to significant art in that it yields the full complexity of socio-historical and individual processes through a form that grows from the material itself and expresses it convincingly. I sense that Doctorow's strengths as an historical novelist are brought out by real events capable of evoking in him deep and serious feelings. In

the absence of an internally developed bond with history, his narrative talents seem to gravitate into the construction of spurious fictions (Ragtime) or into hollow formal experimentation (Loon Lake).

Notes

¹ See Robert Scholes, and Robert Kellog, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford UP, 1966), for a description of their genre theory.

² E.L. Doctorow, Welcome to Hard Times (1960; New York: Bantam, 1976). Further references to Hard Times will be made parenthetically in the text.

³ Doctorow, The Book of Daniel (Toronto: Random, 1971). Further references to Daniel will be made parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Doctorow, Ragtime (Toronto: Random, 1975). Further references to Ragtime will be made parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Doctorow, Loon Lake (Toronto: Random, 1980). Further references to Loon Lake will be made parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Georg Lukács, "Art and Objective Truth," Writer and Critic and Other Essays, trans. and ed. Arthur D. Kahn (1970; New York: Universal Library-Grosset, 1971) 25.

⁷ Lukács, The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1962; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 104. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Lukács uses the words "drama" and "tragedy" almost interchangeably; to a certain extent, the same applies to "epic" and "the novel." Actually, the novel is the characteristic genre of the age of prose, as Hegel noted. Hence unless Lukács is specifically referring to the primitive epic poems, "epic representation" and similar phrases are used for the bourgeois epic, i.e., the novel.

⁹ Lukács takes this example from Otto Ludwig, Historical Novel 149-50.

¹⁰ Quoted in István Mészáros, Lukács' Concept of Dialectics (London: Merlin, 1972) 63-64. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ Roy Pascal, "Georg Lukács: The Concept of Totality," George Lukács: The Man, His Works and His Ideas, ed. G.H. Parkinson (London: Weidenfeld, 1970) 151. Commenting on the fact that Lukács' first published book includes "destiny" in its title, Pascal explains

that this "is a term he [Lukács] continued to use to indicate the dialectical law that embraces teleology and causality, individual purpose and choice, and social and natural law."

12. Lukács, Writer and Critic 79.

13 Lukács, Writer and Critic 78.

14 Lukács, Writer and Critic 158.

15 Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin, 1962) 33.

16 Lukács, Meaning 68.

17 Clear indications of Lukács' valuation of both tendencies is provided by this excerpt from "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism": "Conflicts of allegiance in literature are likely to be more complex than in the practical fields of politics and economics. Curiosity, a delight in novelty for novelty's sake, a romantic anticapitalism, may lead an extreme modernist to accept socialism. He may believe that this 'revolution of forms' is identical with socialist revolution, even its true expression. Again, sectarian communist intellectuals often fall for the dream of a 'proletarian culture', for the idea that a 'radically new' socialist

culture can be produced, by artificial insemination as it were, independent of all traditions (proletkult).

Meaning 105.

18 Lukács, Meaning 21.

19 Lukács, Meaning 23-24.

20 Lukács, Essays on Realism, trans. David Fernback, ed. Rodney Livingstone (1980; Cambridge: MIT P, 1981) 151-52.

21 Lukács, Meaning 68.

22 Rodney Livingstone, introduction, Essays on Realism, by Lukács 21.

23 Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon, 1969) 52.

24 Marcuse, 80.

25 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950 (1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin-Chatto, 1961) 114.

26 Quoted by Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach, Trans. Anna Bostock (Baltimore: Pelican-Penguin, 1963) 113-14.

27 To the best of my knowledge, Barbara Foley is

the only critic who discusses theoretical issues and proposes an interpretation of contemporary historical fiction in relation to Doctorow. See "From U.S.A. to Ragtime: Notes on the Forms of Historical Consciousness in Modern Fiction," Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner (Princeton: Ontario Review P, 1983) 159-178.

28

Gene Wise, American Historical Explanations, 2nd ed. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1980). See the foreword and prologues to the 1973 and 1980 editions, for a critique of American historical scholarship.

29

Joseph Moses, "To Impose a Phrasing on History," CLC, 2: 140.

30

Wise, Historical Explanations. On the basis of Thomas S. Khun's concept of "scientific paradigms," Wise discusses the three "explanation-forms" which constitute the main historiographical trends in American history--progressive, counter-progressive or consensus and New Left.

31

William Appleman Williams, The Contours of American History (1961; Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966) 273.

32

Theo Pinkus, ed., Conversations with Lukács (Cambridge: MIT P, 1975). These concepts are closely

connected with the Marxist interpretation of freedom and necessity. Thus Lukács says: "So I arrive back again at Marx's conception: men make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. I formulate this now in the thesis that man is a responding being. This means that he reacts to alternatives that the objective reality puts to him...In reality there are causal relationships which are set in motion in a specific way by a teleological initiative, while preserving their causal necessity. Now I believe that, arising from this, the relationship of freedom and necessity is also posed in a new way, in a concrete form, which does not abolish freedom, but rather makes it concrete." 131-32.

33

Richard Trenner, "A Conversation with E.L. Doctorow," Ontario Review 16 (1982): 15.

34

Susan E. Lorsh, "Doctorow's The Book of Daniel as Künstlerroman: The Politics of Art," PLL 18 (1982): 384-97.

35

Trenner, "A Conversation with E.L. Doctorow," 15-16.

36

This concept of the early Lukács was further elaborated and widely used by his former student, Lucien Goldman. In English, it is usually translated literally

as "possible consciousness," which seems to me inadequate.

37 In current psychoanalytic literature, the biological and psychic growth of human beings is explained as encompassing successive and complementary developmental phases, known as psycho-sexual and separation-individuation processes. This progression starts as soon as the baby is born and involves, at the minimal stage, a subject (infant), an object (mother) and the libidinal energy or impulse which is directed towards the object. At the beginning the infant has no independent identity; it perceives itself as one with the mother (symbiosis). Biopsychic growth consists precisely in starting to perceive the self and the mother as two distinct entities (self-object differentiation), which is a precondition for the self-identity and ego autonomy achieved in later phases of the individuation process. These early transformations cover roughly the first seven years of life.

38 Quoted by Lukács, Historical Novel 67.

39 David Lodge, Language of Fiction (New York: Columbia UP, 1967). See 78-87 for a brief statement of his methodological approach.

40 Lodge, Language of Fiction 79..

41 I am particularly referring to lines 25-27:
Licence my roving hands,- and let them go,/Before,
behind, between, above, below./ O my America! my new-
found-land...

42 Trenner, "A Conversation with E.L. Doctorow," 8.

43 Doctorow, "False Documents," American Review 21,
ed. Theodore Solotaroff (New York: Bantam, 1977) 230.
Doctorow uses this phrase to describe what literature
does to "the human mind."

44 Kenneth Burke, Appendix D, A Grammar of Motives
(Berkeley: U of California P, 1969) 503-517.

45 I am obviously borrowing the concepts worked out
by Booth in Rhetoric.

46 Booth, Rhetoric 184.

47 Radosh and Milton confirm that the bail was
"prohibitive" and that the government had recourse to a
"lever" strategy or tactic to "break" the accused (e.g.,
prosecuting Ethel, demanding the death penalty). They
further remark that "the execution of an individual
convicted of conspiracy as opposed to the more serious

charge of treason was unprecedented in U.S. history."
142.

48 Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation (London: Merlin, 1970) 263.

49 Mészáros, Alienation 269.

50 Larry McCaffery, "A Spirit of Transgression,"
"Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner, 33-34.

51 Jay Gurian, Western American Writing (DeLand: Everett-Edwards, 1975).

52 Gurian 46.

53 David Emblidge, "Marching Backward into the Future: Progress as Illusion in Doctorow's Novels," CLC, 2: 143.

54 Gurian 130.

55 Howard Zinn, The Politics of History (1970; Boston: Beacon, 1971) 206-207.

56 Excerpts of reviews appear in CLC 2: 140-145.

57 These phrases describe two of the three senses that Lambert Zuidervart isolates in Lukács' concept of worldview as used in Meaning.

- 58 Referred to by Lukács, Historical Novel 50.
- 59 Trenner, ed., Essays and Conversations 44-45;
61;68.
- 60 Paul Levine, "The Writer As Independent Witness,
"Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner, 68.
- 61 Trenner, ed., Essays and Conversations 13-15;
66-69.
- 62 Doctorow must have had in mind the Our Gang
comedy series.
- 63 Arthur Saltzman, "The Stylistic Energy of E.L.
Doctorow," Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard
Trenner, 95; 97.
- 64 Foley, "From U.S.A. to Ragtime" 159.
- 65 See their respective essays included in
Essays and conversations, ed. Richard Trenner.
- 66 McCaffery 44.
- 67 Stokely Carmichael, and Charles V. Hamilton,
Black Power (Harmondsworth: Pelican-Penguin, 1967) 130-
152.

68 Heinrich von Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas,"
The Marquise of O— (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 114-
 213)

69 See the studies by Saltzman and David S. Gross,
Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner.

70 Clayton 116.

71 See note 43.

72 "False Documents" 231.

73 "False Documents" 232.

74 "False Documents" 232.

75 Doctorow expressed himself on these issues in
 his conversations with McCaffery. Interviewer: Philip
 Roth suggested back in the early 1960's that it's more
 difficult for contemporary writers to create realistic
 fiction because "reality" is less realistic, more
 extravagant than any world the writer can hope to
 create.

Doctorow: Certainly the clatter, the accelerated rate of
 crisis, the sense of diffusion of character, the
 disintegration of belief or social assumptions are
 reflected in the novelists who find the novel itself no

longer convincing and also write anti-mimetic novels essentially about how it's impossible to write. That view--- doesn't explain Roth, does it? Fortunately, he keeps trying. Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner, 41.

76

Levine, "Independent Witness," Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner, 69.

77

Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960) 61.

78

Berger and Luckman have developed these concepts in their book on the sociology of knowledge. See Part III: "Society as Subjective Reality," 119-168.

79

Lukács, Historical Novel 42.

80

Clayton 116.

81

Doctorow thinks that the labour leaders defined their role in this direction in the nineteen thirties. Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner, 67.

82

Although I have not done any research into it, I sense that Doctorow draws upon J.D. Salinger's work in several ways. There are explicit and implicit references to it in Daniel and the Fat Lady appears in "Zooney." The character itself is a creation of Seymour, the eldest of

the Glass children. Zooey says that the first time Seymour mentioned the Fat Lady to him "I didn't know what the hell he was talking about." He later concludes that "Seymour's Fat Lady" represents mankind ("It's Christ Himself."), "Zooey," Franny and Zooey (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 43-157. I also suspect that Penfield's forays into Buddhism have something to do with Salinger's interest in the subject.

83 "He didn't need intentions, plans, the specificity of hope. Presenting his heart [to Clara] was enough," 84; "But how she felt was of overriding importance to me, how she felt!--then and every moment after--was my foremost concern, what I lived by," 85.

84 Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (1960; New York: Dell, 1969) 314.

85 Jonathan Yardley, "E.L. Doctorow: Mr. 'Ragtime,'" Miami Herald 21 Dec. 1975.

86 The narrator describes his mother thus in "Lives of the Poets," Lives of the Poets (Toronto: Random, 1984) 118.

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