IT'S G-D'S BLOODY RULE, MA

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ABSTRACT

The title character of E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) is a graduate student in political history at Columbia University in the late '60s; he is also the son of fictional versions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were tried together for treason in 1951 and executed in 1953. The time present of the novel is 1967, when Daniel's long effort to relieve himself of the burden of memory is morphing into an obsession with figuring out guilt and thus distributing blame, for his own victimization as much as that of his parents. This essay argues that Daniel's "trouble breathing" is a function of the utter and un-vanquish-able co-determination of the public and the private, household and nation-state, the socialist dream of equity and the ethical obligations of Judaism. The interpretive strategies of Marx and Freud deliver superb insight into the over-wrought, over-determined family dramas of McCarthy-era Anti-Semitism and Jerry Rubin's radical New Left, but epistemological insight, even if it is as effectively domestic as it is socio-political, does not mean release from ontological suffocation, especially not for Daniel. Cultural *critique*, however informed in its modern secularity by Judaic origins, does not address all the matter in his heart. And it is Daniel's ultimate embrace of the fiercest dimension of Chosenness, his ancestral ethos of suffering, including his grandmother's bequeathing of the martyr's pursuit of justification, that paradoxically drains his anguish, his anger, and his viciousness—with the help, in the book's final spiraling turn between public and private, ethnos and ethos, of us readers who bear witness to the history written in Daniel's Book.

Keywords: Doctorow; Rosenbergs; Daniel; Judaism; New Left.

For Laura Wexler, Reva B. Siegel, and Priscilla Wald, prophets of humane intellect in our troubled times.

Atheism is wasted on the non-believer. (Richard Rodriguez, 2013)

THREE TITLES, DANIEL'S WAY

I can't decide on the title for this essay: it could be, "It's Not Alright, Ma; I'm Totally F—ked," which is how the fictionalized Rosenberg son, in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), feels into his twenties, regarding the Soviet Communist involvements of his parents that landed them in the electric chair. Narrated by Daniel himself (switching from third-person reportorial to first-person confessional), the novel

proceeds on two timelines, one in the time present between Memorial Day and Christmas of 1967, the other in the late '40s and early '50s of his childhood, to explicate why and investigate how he came to be "fucked" even before he was born. Freud, that is, the interpretive power of psychological acuity, commands Daniel's interrogation of his parents' unorthodox child-raising, with Oedipal repercussions for sure, that cannot be understood unless placed *within* the political scene of Jewish utopianism *cum* American Anti-Semitism. As it turns out, the political scene of the Cold War is itself a "family drama" inviting Freudian interpretation: a horror-story generated by McCarthy and his Conservative Christian xenophobes but enacted, crucially and on *all* sides of his parents' case, by US Jews—in what is, arguably, a Jewish tradition. Freud, in recognition of the utter fragility of the most intense intimacy, is seen as tenor *and* vehicle of the Grandest of Global Schemes.

The title could also be, "It's Alright, Ma: You've *Only* Been Fried," which renders caustically the relative innocence of Daniel's parents and their confrères, who were at heart just socialist dreamers looking beyond genealogical and indeed historical loyalties in pursuit of a just and equitable world of safety and dignity for all. A graduate student in political history at Columbia University, Daniel articulates, in a recurrent dry tone that expresses and recurrently bursts into righteous anger, the incommensurable force of socio-economic domination that has produced the grotesque torture of sanctioned execution (the gore of the trope of "frying" galore) whenever and however useful to whatever empire or nation-state. This is, in short, Marxist cognizance turned bitter resignation, as Daniel comes to recognize that his own ability to act politically as an individual in the midst of late-1960s protest culture, despite the turn to media drama reminiscent of Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin ("Artie Sternlicht" in the novel), has been 100% preempted by the forces governing the history against which he means to protest. Another diagnostic win and prescriptive loss.

Consciously and deliberately, Daniel pursues from the start these two explanatory schemes: the psychological recognitions that were initiated by Freud and that we signify even when we reject much of his detail as Freudian (more diagnosis than prescription) and the economic recognitions that were initiated by Marx and that we

signify even when we reject much of the detail (much stronger demystification than praxis). Indeed, Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* offers as sharp, as deep, and as intense an entwining of public and private as to be found in American literature, wherein domestic drama occurs operatically in public, and public forces of the most invidious kind invade the private. And yet, this already hyper-focused interface between the political and the personal in *The Book of Daniel* is not limited to the twin interpretive regimes of Marx and Freud.[1] For there is a third explanatory scheme, one that also explicates the private as public, the public as private (family as political, political as family) but that has proven, it would seem, problematic, given its near total absence from the critical archive.

There was a burst of critical and academic interest in Doctorow in the 1970s and '80s. Reviewers of the first rank first debated Doctorow's historical veracity and political intent in direct terms: is Doctorow trying to exculpate the Rosenbergs in *The Book of Daniel*? Is the radicalism of the novel thereafter, *Ragtime* (1975), dangerously nostalgic or brilliantly revelatory?[2] But a scholarly cohort soon turned attention to Doctorow's experiments in postmodern narrative structure (*Loon Lake* in 1980 was taken to complete a trilogy) and thus to the varieties of post-structuralist history-telling obtaining therein.[3] Of course, Freud recurred in the abstractions of Jacques Lacan and Marx in the excavations of Foucault, with Derrida's extraction of Nietzsche encompassing both even as formal *critique* yielded quickly and necessarily to thematic investigation since the deployments of Freud and Marx in *The Book of Daniel* are Doctorow's own and, invoked by name, attributed to Daniel himself! Doctorow's strongest readers pursued the how, why, and what of fiction-conveyed revisionist

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[1] In this essay, as in common academic usage, "Freud" is shorthand for "Freudianism," that is, psychological if not psychoanalytical approaches to the individual psyche but also to large-scale social forces thought to operate analogously; so too, "Marx" is shorthand for "Western Marxism," that is, approaches to capitalist society focused on the causal power of its economic relations, including the interpolation of individuals therein.

[2] See Epstein 1977; Green 1976; Kauffmann 1975; Stanley 1975. All of these writer-critics were then termed "Jewish public intellectuals."

[3] The chapter titles in Paul Levine's excellent little book on Doctorow—including "Politics and Imagination," "Fiction and Radicalism," "Fiction and History"—index the thematic issues that dominated the early criticism (Levine 1985, 5).

history—and the cultural politics thereof.[4] But in the 1990s, when the US academy turned to gender, race, and colonial subjectivity as *the* right and proper objects for critical inquiry (however much still overwhelmingly post-structuralist in ontology and epistemology), Doctorow scholarship became less conspicuous, particularly in the non-specialist journals.[5] In 2018, Mark Steven would ask: "How do we account for the critical neglect of Doctorow relative to his contemporaries?" (Steven 2018, 119).

By its very title *The Book of Daniel* points to a very specific form of critical myopia.[6] The original "Book of Daniel" is, after all, a repeatedly triumphant, though often phantasmagoric chapter of the Hebrew Bible—featuring a dream-interpreter in a barbarian court who has been charged by the Lord with keeping their colonized people together and alive! Yet, try to find in the critical archive for *The Book of Daniel* more than a passing mention of Jewish rites and beliefs, never mind of Scripture or Talmudic method or liturgical martyrology—or of G-d Himself.[7] Half a century after the novel's publication, it seems remarkable how little Doctorow scholars have responded to its religious concerns—because they have been acutely attentive to other matters and despite (perhaps even *because* of) the fact that the majority are of Jewish descent. But to pursue what the novel pursues is to engage an historical analytic of increasingly epistemological synthesis and, I believe, ontological force that Daniel himself increasingly recognizes and puts to work in his "Book"—Doctorow's own radical secularism notwithstanding. In short, it is time to let Daniel's fundamental Jewishness

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[4] Exemplary explorations of Doctorow's postmodernism include: Carmichael 1993; Foley 1983; Harpham 1985; Johnson 1982; King 1988; Morris 1991; Reed 1992; and Stark 1975.

[5] Americanists publishing in Europe (Demark, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, England) and, indeed, in Latin America (Mexico at least) continue to be interested in Doctorow, including his later works, keeping political economy and social history in view. I also find intellectual camaraderie in the scattering of US-based scholar-critics who have worked on *The Book of Daniel* since the '90s, producing assiduous close readings (several for *Studies in the Novel*) that update Marxist historiography (including ideological critique via Louis Althusser and Sacvan Bercovitch) and Freudian social theory (trauma and affect theory via Cathy Caruth). See Derosa 2009; Gordon 2016; Kwon 2014; Morgenstern 2003; Rasmussen 2010; and Steven 2018.

[6] Professor Allen Guttman's lecture course on Jewish-American writers during my sophomore year at Amherst College in 1976 was, I am delighted to suggest, the initiating tutorial (along with a seminar on "Race and Ethnicity in the United States" taught by N. Gordon Levin, Jr.) for my career-long interest in the ethno-religious dimensions of literature and the arts.

[7] The English nomenclature of "G-d," vowel-less, postdates *The Book of Daniel*, but is deployed here in respect for contemporary Jewish practice and its persisting need to differentiate.

fully register, what we might even call—with all due respect to Flannery O'Connor and all due suspicion of her Christianity—its G-d-haunted habitus and pulse of heart.

The current view, in other words, needs to entail the long view. After all, the discursive formations we call Marx and Freud are relatively new. They compete for the explanatory upper hand, yes, but also make for strong allies in contemporary thought-containment, as Daniel well knows, since he himself sets the table for the interpretive operations of the novel. On the other hand, the religious hermeneutic dogging Daniel is ancient and may well, in the end, encompass the other two—despite the misleading assumption, built into the Freudianism and Marxism of mostly secular, nearly assimilated Western European Jews, that this third scheme had been superseded.[8] The operating assumption, in and around the US academy, from the late '60s through at least September 11th, derived from a predominantly radical and agnostic (often anti-religious) intelligentsia, was that the ethical concerns of Judaism had survived in US arts and criticism *only* in order to register common humanity, beyond the ethos of ethnos.[9] Yet, it was—it is!—the task of *The Book of Daniel* to identify and in elegant reversal of the universalizing impulse to reclaim that third mode, which is rooted in Torah and in the experience of the Jewish people, suffering with hope, suffering in hope, indeed suffering hope first to last.[10]

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[8] For the developing interplay between "Religion in Literary Studies" and "Literature in Religious Studies," see Tracy Fessenden's series of generous yet acute thought-pieces, which access the state-of-the-art and in doing so attend to the persisting resistance in the Americanist academy to vernacular theologies and devotions (even under the rallying cry of "the postsecular"): Fessenden 2007, Fessenden 2010, Fessenden 2012, Fessenden 2014, Fessenden 2016, and Fessenden 2021. For her own counter-example, which is a tour-de-force, see Fessenden 2018. Fessenden's accumulative bibliography constitutes a larger context and theorization for this essay than Doctorow criticism per se, as do the works cited in Ferraro 2020.

[9] Of course, Doctorow criticism notwithstanding, not all the American literary professorate of Jewish extraction have been secularists. It was in fact a couple of fellow travelers, Sara B. Blair and Jonathan Freedman, who helped (along with the Boyarin brothers) to initiate a distinguished trajectory of "new Jewish studies" addressing Jewish identity in ways not limited to the social determinants of race, gender, and class—to which this essay aspires to contribute, belatedly! Blair and Freedman 2004.

[10] I have been teaching *The Book of Daniel* since early in my career, but I stepped back from writing about the novel in the late 1990s when a *Narrative Society* panel on "religious approaches to the Jewish American novel" featured more panelists than attendees. Undergrads of many stripes (including future Ph.D. Jinan Joudeh) have shared my enthusiasm for the novel, and several graduate students learned in Judaica—Lisa Naomi Mulman, Amber Manning, and above all Matthew Biberman, who supplied texts in pointed affirmation of my intuitions—have proven indispensable to my thought and research. The current spur comes from the special issue call of Chiara Patrizi and Pilar Martínez Benedí, which got me (re)thinking about the Judaic entwinements of public and private. My gratitude

The dream of a universal condition of met human needs, from food and shelter to intimacy, dignity, and community, emerges profoundly (as with Marx, as with Freud) from Jewish ethics and vision. The Jewish subtext of thought and commitment runs deeper still, for the novel also understands, Daniel himself understands, that the angry refusal of G-d is itself a Jewish tradition—rekindled among Ashkenazi refugees by the felt abandonment entailed in the late 19th-century pogroms, then held fast through the first US generations of desperate poverty and stark anti-Semitism, then horrifically ratcheted up by the Holocaust and (though not Jewish-specific, because of planetary terror) the double "droppings" (as Daniel puts it) of the atomic bomb. The circumstances of socialist American Jews, as with the American Jewish experiment writ large only more so, offers no break toward a Christian regime of forgiveness, no license to forget, the utopian dreamwork notwithstanding. Why else would a novel that takes us from Memorial Day through Halloween to Christmas skip over both Easter *and* Passover? As Paul Robeson asks in the Hebrew-derived spiritual, "DIDN'T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?" (128).[11]

In recurrent passages evidently drawn from his dissertation, Daniel the professional intellectual identifies the political issues in play, which he sees as recurrently American and recurrently global, and he does almost from the start of the novel:

> Many historians have noted an interesting phenomenon in American life in the years immediately after a war. In the councils of government fierce partisanship replaces the necessary political coalitions of wartime. In the greater arena of social relations—business, labor, the community—violence rises, fear and recrimination dominate public discussion, passion prevails over reason. … Take World War I. … 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. (23, 25)

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subsequently to the anonymous readers at *JAm It!* for insisting on clarity if not concision, and to Beth A. Eastlick for helping with both.

[11] Parenthetical page references are to the longstanding paperback edition that replicates the original hardcover: E. L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel* (New York: Random House, 1971).

In this modeling, the forces of political economy are the great determinant, but the process works its way out in the United States through the parricidal impulse of Christian America, to scapegoat and indeed murder its father-faith, which is at once visited upon and enacted by the Isaacson family, as the Marxist construction of religion as false consciousness rationalizes his parents' disaffiliation from Judaism and thus filial confusion—Mom and Dad, or Grandma?—for Susan and especially Daniel.[12]

Doctorow names Daniel's father "Paul Isaacson," invoking both Abraham's foundational assent to sacrificing son Isaac to G-d's will and the tradition of filial dissent embodied by Paul the Apostle, who gave rise out of Judaism to Christianity. From threatened infanticide to de-facto patricide—and back again. In the novel, it is Paul himself who acknowledges that the Jewish-strengthened American legal system is putting on a "passion play" for their "Christian masters" (197). But it is not Christian martyrology—the one great Isaac-son-ian sacrifice of self that would forgive all and thus afford a relinquishing of Jewish orthopraxis and Jewish separateness—that ultimately governs Daniel's search for explanation and, more importantly, Daniel's embrace of testimony as a mode of religious—and thus socio-political—action. Whereas it is the sweet girl-child Susan who eventually kills herself in new-age despair, broken by the inability to find redress in the public sphere, it is the belligerent Daniel, otherwise vigilant in his contest against emasculation, who comes to see himself paradoxically as heir to his grandmother's fierce embrace of the Levitical mandate, to be the Chosen One of the Chosen Many. He is taxed to "justify," somehow, the most intimate suffering of

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[12] It has been part of the intellectual fun of Doctorow criticism to identify the Marxist and Freudian thinkers upon whom Daniel as assembler-narrator draws, with particular emphasis, congruent with the emphasis here, on social theorists *combining* the two traditions. In a 1977 consideration of *The Book of Daniel*, Joseph Epstein spotted interpolations from "revisionist historians" (I don't think he meant the label as a compliment) including William Appleman Williams and David Horowitz. When Paul Levine interviewed Doctorow about "marry[ing] the insights of Freud with the insights of Marx," naming Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and Walter Reich, Doctorow acknowledged the ambition and its controversies, reminding Levine that Reich was "excommunicated by both the Marxists and the Freudians." Ten years later, Sam B. Girgus, distinguished scholar of Jewish America and its media studies, added Christopher Lasch to the litany. I myself suspect the "new" cultural historians of Doctorow's own generation, especially the earliest essays of Michael Paul Rogin and Richard L. Slotkin. Epstein 1977, 88; Levine 1978, 48; Girgus 1988, 86.

the family by means of the very public acts that caused the most intense forms of said suffering. The dilemma, of course, is how?

The answer lies, paradoxically, in the electric-chair mandate of his mother regarding himself: "Let our death be his bar mitzvah" (299). At the time, Christians and other gentiles were prompted to interpret Rochelle's final words as a disgusted dismissal of the G-d of the Hebrews, but it is my conviction that Daniel has long felt his mother's injunction to be intended literally. He has come to comprehend his parents' martyrdom as Jews to be his own special election to Judaism. Over time, he has learned to see his vulnerability to the public eye, which he hates, as itself a special opportunity, not in contradistinction from but in concert with his (acceptance of) Jewish responsibility. As he disdains the conventions of narrative construction that enable his exploration, so Daniel despises the interpretive apparatus of lit-crit for its generic reductions. But he needs the reader to hear and adopt: he needs her genres (needs perhaps even her genes) in order to make sense of it all and redistribute the desperate matters in his heart (23). The only way forward is back, historical analysis as interrogation of the self, self-exposure as collective witness. Thus, by tracking Daniel to his Book's end, I should be able to confirm my third, encompassing title: "It's G-d's bloody rule, Ma; let your death be our readers' bar mitzvah."

TROUBLE BREATHING

There is a snippet of dialogue between young Daniel and the lawyer for their cause, Jacob Asher, that indexes a figural regime brutally redolent of the troubles at hand for Daniel and yet eerily resonant today—that is, in the wake of the snuffing-out of Black Lives That Mattered and of Elders Without Defense Against Covid. In the back story of the novel, at the time of trial, the boy Daniel complains about a bout of car sickness to the car's driver, defense attorney Jacob Asher, who may not quite get the full force of the avowal, though otherwise he is notably empathetic to all of the Isaacsons. For the adult Daniel, recounting in time present invokes the once-and-still-persisting fear of what he calls elsewhere, "death by suffocation" (254). What Daniel the analyst is after,

of course, is the impact of the treason verdict and electrocution of his parents upon his sister and himself, to the point of invoking the Nazi death chambers:

> "What?" said Asher.
> "The gas fumes. I want to open the window."
> "Fumes? There are no fumes."
> "Just a little." I was having trouble breathing. (238)

It is my job, then, to trace the trouble with Daniel's breathing and to explicate what he does, finally, to relieve it, however unavoidably reductive and, indeed, presumptuous as such a procedure must be.

Asher is impressive for his social insight if not his defense tactics, since he "understood how someone could for swear his Jewish heritage and take for his own the perfectionist dream of heaven on earth, and in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, still consider himself a Jew" (119). Asher's insight stops short of Daniel's implicit quandary: how might it be that under such circumstances the "secular" radical could not only *consider* himself a Jew but in thought and, especially, in action actually *be* one—and in more ways than the genealogical technicality of being born to a Jewish mother? John Clayton (1983) argues that the Jewishness at work in *The Book of Daniel* is that of radical *secularism*, adeptly harnessing Asher's insight into recognizing the Jewish roots of universalistic humanism: "The code of being Jewish can put so much pressure on one to be universally responsive to human suffering that in the absence of strong pressure to accept the religious doctrine, the code takes one beyond parochialism" (110). In effect, by taking self-conscious acceptance of *doctrine* as the litmus test for lived religion, Clayton secures the secularity of Jewish radical humanism for its subscribers—not just Paul and Rochelle, but also Daniel and Doctorow. But is that *all* there is to radical Jewishness? What if we honor the revelatory force of praxis over doctrine—worship as the precondition of belief, in lived experience as in official

corridors?[13] I wish to explore the full range of forces at work within the Isaacsons' experience, supernatural as well as biological and social, especially the metaphysical implications entailed in Daniel's (wrestling with) the suffering of his family. At the start of his book, Daniel asks with a raised voice, "WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?" Many times through, I feel compelled to figure out at last: what does G-D have to do with it?

Formally, my exploration responds to what I take to be the New Critical mode of narrative construction—visceral figuration, ubiquitous resonance, macro in micro, multiplex ambiguity yielding codeterminations, and rules of genre—underlying and indeed interlocking the flashy postmodern conceits. After all, Doctorow was trained as a Kenyon undergraduate in the New Criticism of the Southern Agrarians by none other than John Crowe Ransom (Fowler 1992). It was only after completing a draft of the novel according to the conventions of third-person realism that Doctorow, in frustrated anger at its claustrophobic insufficiency, flailed out at the text on his typewriter in Daniel's voice—and thus hit upon the revelatory idea of switching Daniel's narrative between third- and first-person, supplemented thereafter by interpolations in other registers. In the novel that resulted, the metaphoric regime of near suffocation climaxes as Daniel the bio-historian and auto-reporter is sorting out the extent of his parents' guilt, the limits of his ability to accomplish such sorting, and the resultant impact of that combination of known and unknowable. He comes to accept, finally, the always-already public-ness of his family's deepest intimacies and to entrust his bearing of witness on behalf of the Isaacson's horrific legacy to the readers of the Book he has made. It is then, and only then, embracing Jewish suffering and Judaic sacrifice, G-d's demands and human frailties, that Daniel is able to open up his lungs and clear those horrifically compromised air passages.

[13] "Worship as a precondition of belief" is a cornerstone of a critical interpretive procedure that attends inductively not to doctrine and official institutions but to what historians call "lived religion": the ethno-ideational determinants, operative effects (including affect), and felt metaphysics of individuals and groups of individuals who aren't exactly (in the Protestant formulation) true believers or (in the original Jewish sense) fully righteous (Ferraro 2020, 21-3).

"The novel as a sequence of analyses" appears as a phrase inserted as meta-commentary during the first of the three scenes constituting the triple climax of Daniel the character's investigation into what really happened (281). I say "triple" because Doctorow, or at least Daniel, thinks and writes in units of three, which I mean to honor by exegetically shadowing and, where I can, re-enacting at an analytical remove. I say "climax," the fallen sexual metaphor, because throughout the novel, in a calculated delay, Daniel has marshalled and somewhat reinflected its orgasmic connotation from a score of related forms of violent intimacy, from untimely teasing withdrawal during intercourse in pursuit of fiercer delivery (so illustrated with the young wife Phyllis) to the cruel coming of old ladies, whose "hearts make love to the world not gently" (credited to the dream visit of Daniel's maternal grandmother's) (70). Indeed, the leitmotif of "still being fucked" describes the force of the New Left upon the Isaacson offspring, who are put on display as poster children to leverage anti-Establishment furor, mere political playthings, such that "still being fucked" reaches back in its phenomenology of exploitation to the penetration of Old Left ideas and actions into the Isaacson household—the original deadly intercourse. Of course, the Jewishness of all this is the first thing repressed by Daniel's parents and thus the last thing available for Daniel to reclaim, though we see by mid-novel that he has been thinking about it, however metaphorically and self-pityingly gendered: "According to Evans, observers in New Zealand report that mosquitoes there land on the floating pupae of females, slit them open with their genitals, and mate with the females before they can emerge" (178). Fucked, as Daniel views it, identifying with the female pupae, before he was born, a primal brutality that is at first and last ethno-religious. "What is most monstrous," Daniel insists, "is sequence," especially when, under the ideology of American individualism, it preempts self-determination (245).

CLIMAX #1: AT TRIAL, THE PRIVATE FAITH OF A COMRADE

Climax #1, for simplicity's sake, focuses on the question of his parents' espionage, as told over the shoulder of his mother at the trial. Here the psychological dynamic, as it emerges within and then commands the political arena, is what Daniel the investigator

is principally after—the Freud of the family drama encompassing the Marx of class struggle, as it were. After a couple of years of imprisonment, his parents, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, were tried together for spying on the United States for a foreign government. The physical evidence is astonishingly thin, but their elder friend Selig Mindish has turned state's witness—presumably under the threat of being charged himself for treason, which carries the death penalty, and which in Mindish's case is being used itself as an interrogation device. (The last point is made to Daniel by his foster father, Robert Lewin, who teaches law at Boston College and is the epitome of a liberal, highly educated, and committed Jewish American.) The boy Daniel was not there at the trial, of course. The adult Daniel, thesis-writer and history-hound, has held to the assumption that Mindish was the true betrayer—of the United States' nuclear integrity, of the innocent or at least minor involvements of his parents, and thus of Susan and himself; and he has also nursed the idea that there was another couple involved in the atomic espionage that Mindish is protecting and for whom, then, his parents are sacrificed.

What Daniel figures out, or decides he must internalize as true-enough, is that it was only at the trial that his mother realized that his father, Paul, had conspired with Mindish to be the fall guy, whatever unclear role he had also played in the spying itself. The scene of recognition is narrated from Rochelle's point of view:

> But before he [Mindish] said the words that put them in their graves he turned and looked for a moment at Rochelle, looking for one fraction of a second into her eyes with the same moronic smile dying on his face and the absurdly significant dental x-ray slide in his spatulate fingers; and in the little grey pig eyes of the dentist was the recognition she sought. A wry acknowledgment of this moment in the courtroom, in their lives, and she was stunned to read in it the message not of a betrayer … no not as betrayer begging forgiveness [*sic*], there was no appeal for forgiveness … he presented the private faith of a comrade, one to another, complicitors in self-sacrifice, one to another, and I cannot communicate beyond this but by now you must know why and what is happening. She saw the comrade's life of terrible regret, of sad determination, one to another, and the assumption of their shared knowledge, the sexuality of it. And then she turned to look at her husband. … And there swept over her now the horrifying conviction that Paul did not have to return this look of Mindish. That while she had been shielding him from her dread he had withheld from her his one crucial perception. And that

> what in this moment overwhelmed her was something her husband already knew in himself and for himself. (280-81)

Here is what Daniel sees his mother inferring: Without her permission, Paul has agreed—perhaps it was even his idea—to sacrifice himself to death by jury, thereby not only protecting more guilty parties, but leveraging what he sees as the self-evident injustice and ethnic scapegoating into a theater of protest against un-American practices and a future rallying call for socialist dissent. ("If Jesus had not been tried, if he had not been put to death, how would his teachings have endured?" [184].) What Paul did he did "alone," as Rochelle realizes, meaning without her consent or foreknowledge. Paul not only takes Rochelle with him to the grave of misguided if idealistic self-sacrifice, but in so doing he orphans their children and assigns to them un-addressable life-long ignominy, a perverse actualization of Abrahamic sacrifice that keeps on killing.

The public tragedy was one of self-defeating idealism, clearly enough, but it might also be said to have been subtended by its private component: Paul's determination to fall on the sword of the Third International's utopian dream has betrayed Rochelle in the most obscene way. For Rochelle in 1954, Paul betrays most foully the protectorate of the marriage and parenthood that proceeded out of blessed intimacy: that carnal consecration which beautifully consummated their gentle romance and shared social vision ("one warm night, with the stars shining and the blackberry bushes, and the crickets' fiddle and the frogs' jug band, they knew each other and it was good" [196]) and that issued, in all probability, in conceiving Daniel. For Daniel in 1967, then, the breakdown of his parents' marriage at the trial recasts the specter of his biological conception from his sense of its original grace, which was for a long time the foremost exception to the rule of his overdetermined victimization, to the inception of the rule itself: that he was "fucked" before birth by an Abrahamic "fucking" that was as Isaacson-specific as it would draw down the always-already recurrence of anti-Semitism at large. Neither inference nor implication will dissipate. There is, literally, no way out of the repercussions, that's the ultimate lesson of climax #1; or as Daniel himself once put it, more gently, "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, and the Lord G-d who is so frantic for recognition says you have to ask how they are and would they like something cool to drink, and what is it you can do for them this time" (30).

At this point in the novel, Daniel has resigned himself to a "killer" of an Oedipal recognition. The paternal figure of ever-protective fatherly love, the masculine figure of ever protective husband love, is destroyed. He suddenly sees his mother in ways that partly acquit her of the damage done to the Isaacson children and partly shares her pain of surprise betrayal—he gets in bed with her, emotionally speaking. In the full scope of father-to-son descent, realized and made real, Daniel's conviction that his father has betrayed all, especially himself, is not as over-the-top Oedipal-successful as I, in this formulation—which catches Daniel's anger as it peaks into cathartic combustion—assert. For Daniel likes also to think, however vicious the possibility, of last-minute reconciliation between his parents. In any event, the Oedipal dimensions of climax #1 paradoxically or at least dialectically throws him back onto his Paul-derived commitment, as a whip-smart Ivy-trained big-picture intellectual, to socio-historical analysis, the Church of Marx Scientist. To that extent he doesn't so much displace his father after all as fulfill him. Marxian analysis, updated and indeed made prescient, dominates climax #2, defeating for good Daniel's quest for a personal scapegoat, and thereby intensifying the Freudian dynamic of both the Isaacson household and the nation state.

In pursuit of the fiction he felt he needed to tell, Doctorow took significant liberties with the historical record of the Rosenbergs. In the late 1960s he had access to the trial transcript, contemporary newspaper accounts, and the work of historians, though no acknowledgments of such accompanied the publication of the novel. Both Rosenberg children were male. The man who, with his wife, ultimately adopted the two

boys was not a lawyer but rather the leftist teacher and leftie activist, Abel Meerepol.[14] Neither son died young, of their own hand or any other way. Despite recognizing the ultimate force of the novel, in which *Leviticus* incorporates Freud and Marx, it is still reasonable of my reader to ask, how right did Daniel get it, at least with regards to the involvement of the actual Rosenbergs in espionage?

Anna Sebba, the judicious recent biographer of Ethel Rosenberg, reports that, in the wake of the 1995 declassification and release of thousands of KGB transcripts, it is clear that Julius Rosenberg was conducting espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union, especially as a recruiter of other spies, including those who could provide details of the Atomic Research at Los Alamos. In the collective interrogation into Russian spying, which began under the auspices of "The Venona Project," Ethel is mentioned in only a single transcript of the Venona papers recording Julius' domestic circumstances: she evidently knew of her husband's espionage but was discounted as a potential Soviet recruit—despite being "sufficiently well developed politically)"—by her "delicate health." Sebba (2021) summarizes the criminal implications:

> Under US law, Ethel was not obliged to report Julius's illegal activities to the authorities. On the one hand, it was (and is) against the law to take affirmative actions to conceal a crime. Between these two legal principles, it is clear that Ethel and Julius's relation was so close that it is inconceivable she did not know and encourage his espionage for the Russians, which in the legal terms of 1951 made her complicit to a conspiracy. But was that a crime—let alone a crime punishable by death?
> One of the key ironies of the case is that the two co-heads of the Verona team hoped that Ethel would be spared. (225)

Certainly, then, Julius Rosenberg's espionage was an act of treason; Ethel's condoning of it an instance of conspiracy, possibly punishable but not on penalty of death. In Doctorow's fictionalization, the full degree of Paul Isaacson's involvement in obtaining nuclear secrets remains opaque. But it is not the spying per se but rather the

[14] Meerepol was a figure in his own right who under the name Lewis Allen had written "Strange Fruit," Billie Holiday's signature, utterly haunting evocation of racial lynching that might, in fact, have made a strong if controversial alternative title for *The Book of Daniel*—if the religious dimensions of the novel weren't so important.

determinedly sacrificial presentation of self at trial—resulting directly in his own death, Rochelle's death, and their children's orphanhood, lifelong confusion, and exploited ignominy—for which Daniel Isaacson holds his father responsible. So in Doctorow's version, or at least that of Daniel Isaacson, Paul Isaacson's treason is as much marital as it is political: a betrayal of the woman whose resistance to personal suffering was the *raison d'être* of an otherwise shared political vision, constituting in the end (for Daniel at least) a relative innocence and bloody victimization at the hands not only of the United States federal judiciary but also her partner-in-everything's unilateral and evidently secret decision to make the ultimate sacrifice, of self, wife, tribe—and progeny (32-3).

CLIMAX #2: IN ANAHEIM, BETWEEN BUCHENWALD AND BELSEN

In the run-up to Climax #2, Daniel flies to Los Angeles in late December to find the aged Selig Mindish, hoping to confirm that Mindish was the active sacrificial agent in the espionage, an idiot to the point of evil, while his father was merely the last-minute misguided fall guy, however voluntary. He readily finds Mindish's daughter Linda, his childhood friend, with whom he adopts the persona—for the last time, basically—of the righteous, indignant son looking for a scapegoat. After sniping at each other, he realizes that the violence of their mutual recrimination is, in effect, incestuous, which allows him to concede—for the first time—that there are convergent, mostly co-determinative domestic narratives: "I saw she was as locked into her family truths as we were locked in ours"; indeed, "I saw myself as having provided Linda the opportunity to say out loud the righteous complaint that this family had had in rehearsal for fifteen years." As with the Isaacson-Lewins, so with the Mindishes. "My heart was beating wildly. I found myself needing more air than I had" (291).

It is the intersection of the entwined family truths that Daniel tests at Disneyland, the original amusement park, in Anaheim California, which Daniel prefatorily characterizes as "a town somewhere between Buchenwald and Belsen" (285), meaning a place of captivity where Americans of all stripes and colors volunteer to be held in the anodyne of history-evacuated, Other-denying consumer fantasy. Daniel's

crack about Anaheim is prefatory because what immediately follows, setting the scene for meeting up with Mindish, is an extended riff on the functioning of Disneyland that is a tour-de-force of Western Marxist cultural analysis decades in advance of Baudrillard and Birmingham-School Cultural Studies. Daniel insists, correctly, that nostalgic white-washing on the scale of Disney, Inc., is a particularly virulent distillation of the Christian dispensation to be forgiven of sin and to be released from the obligation of memory, individually *and* collectively. Replacement of Deuteronomic law by the golden rule offered Jews release from Torah discipline upon conversion, tempting enough even without the ensuing cycles of negotiated peace followed by slaughter and Temple-burning. Two millennia of such tragic cycles have reinforced the Judaic injunction never to forget. As Daniel knows all too well, the Disney-esque sentimentalization of the past represses the defining violence of the nation-state—at once too tied to Christian ideology and not Christ-responsible enough—and in so doing suppresses the obligations to repair and redress, above all the mass destruction that is so manifestly American. The Tomorrowland of Total Forgetting, Disneyland, U.S.A. is where Daniel finds Selig Mindish, on Christmas Day 1967.

Of Mindish, Daniel is warned: "He's senile … There's nothing left up there" (292). And yet upon Daniel's approach, Mindish breaks out of his sustained dementia and recollects Daniel, to his daughter's utter astonishment. All the more disconcerting, then, that Mindish puts his lips to Daniel's forehead, embracing memory and person, in an act that the reader recognizes as reminiscent of the ritual through which Daniel's maternal grandmother has blessed him, only in this instance without strings attached and with his pet mispronunciation of "Danny":

> "Denny?"…
> "It's Denny?"
> For one moment of recognition he was restored to life. In wonder he raised his large, clumsy hand and touched the side of my face. He found the back of my neck and pulled me forward and leaned toward me and touched the top of my head with his palsied lips. (293)

Selig is the ghost of himself, available to Daniel and thus to certifiable history in avuncular fondness only, of all forms. Daniel cannot therefore fob off responsibility

from the Isaacsons to Mindishes, his best imagining and effort notwithstanding, which in his heart of hearts he has known all along: “IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?” (17). Indeed, he has known all along that a “red line describes the progress of madness inherited through the heart,” putatively “from Grandma’s breast through [his] mama’s and into [his] sister’s,” but the madness that really matters—to love the world not gently in G-d’s mandate—has proceeded from grandmother to mother, from mother to son, and especially from grandmother to son, as his mother damn well knows, too (71).

CLIMAX #3: ON THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, SOMETHING PEOPLE DO TOGETHER

“What more is there to say? … I suppose you think I can’t do the electrocution” (295-96). Whether electrocution was, for Daniel’s estranged parents “a reconciliation in heat and love and terror,” Daniel’s conceit of the electrocution as “something people [do] together” applies to his own long delayed rendering of his parents’ death, to be thrown into his readers’ faces as into those of his parents themselves (282). The brutality of portraying his parents’ execution, exploitation upon exploitation, as emotionally voyeuristic as it is exhibitionistic, and as masochistic to self as it is sadistic to them, has felt, literally, unimaginable. His narrative hand is stayed (the recurrent motif is of the phone ringing thus intervening in processes of torture and torturous self-revelation) until it has no choice. Electrocution turns out to be something Daniel must do especially with his mother—a dance in part, reflective of her last stand and dying wish, but also leveraged to Daniel’s needs and emergent vision at year’s end 1967.

Near the beginning of the book, in one of those astonishingly coy yet nasty asides, Daniel signals parenthetically his ultimate concern and why it is going to matter:

> Share and share alike, the cardinal point of justice for children driven home to them with vicious exactitude. (Do not strike, this is rhetorical but true. Only a son of Rochelle’s could say this line. In our house there could be a laying on of words like lightning. Dispensed outrage, the smell of burning in the mouths of our mother and father. Once she said, “Let our death be his bar mitzvah.”) (61)

The introductory phrase of this closing sentence, "once she said," appears to be as casual an invocation as the language affords, which may well be how a reader takes it the first time through. But with 20/20 hindsight we can hear that it comprehends three clamoring inflections: "once" as "sometime in our childhood," as per the occasion of siblings fighting over whatever goods are available, even the property of memory); "once" as "once upon a time," as a favored but putatively distanced story-moment in the book being composed; and "once" as "a single time only," because immediately thereafter its articulator was put to death with her husband ("the smell of burning in the mouths") by electric chair. Here is what the undergraduates love to flag as foreshadowing, though the high-school critical term underplays what occurs, as usual. For Daniel is going to restage his parents' federated death by electricity in an inexorably Isaacsonian way by taking it—"FRYING, a play in ten overt acts"—as the last-chance opportunity of his mother for "a laying on of words like lightning," its pun Daniel-intended: a yet-again fiery injunction that is not only the very-last-ever but the overarchingly inclusive, the close-to-comprehensive relay of mother to son (157, 61).

Consider now how the eventual delivery of the full context for the parenthetical passage, including its key line, occurs at and as the culmination of the book's most climactic paragraph. I have in mind the third and ultimate stretch of narrative in which, as the lever is about to be pulled, Rochelle cries out in resistance and in maternal rally, in a manner that the rabbi in attendance thought kind and politic to deny:

> 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. She wore her grey, shapeless prison dress and terry cloth slippers. She knew that my father was dead. On her face was a carefully composed ironic smile. She calmly gazed at each of the witnesses until he turned away. Some, seeing her glance nearing them, simply would not look at her. Then my mother's eyes lighted on the prison rabbi. It was the same man whose ministrations she had refused for the last forty-eight hours. "I will not have him here," she said. The rabbi in his tallis and yarmulke walked toward the door. Before he was gone my mother called after him: "Let my son be bar mitzvahed today. Let our death be his bar mitzvah." The rabbi said later he didn't hear this remark, her voice not in this moment at its strongest. (298)

Daniel's staging of the double electrocution, particularly the final words credited to his mother, is the culmination of his inquiry into the past that, paradoxically, reclaims terms for present and future. We are treated to an Oedipal charge, in which Daniel has determined that it was his father's starry-eyed death-wish that abandoned him to infamy, while he envisions his mother fighting the power—it takes a second round of pulling the lever to kill her—to her horrific end. So too, we are invited to a Marxian leveraging of Freud, that the ritual of disavowal is the discharging of war-inflated energy upon a projected enemy-in-our-midst, anti-Semitically, the postwar home front of the incipient Cold War. In this it has long been the temptation of Daniel to keep G-d and even Jewish identity beyond its mid-century association with American Communism out of the novel's agenda.

Rochelle's "Let our death be his bar mitzvah" may be simply sarcastic, the way an eight year-old boy understands intended meaning as strictly opposite to that named, that what G-d could there be worth acknowledging (and that's what Daniel tells us the Hebrew G-d most wants: recognition) given her public execution and the consignment of her orphaned son to the title of a lifetime, "son of traitors." Sarcasm is what the melodramatic black comedy would, on first reading, suggest: a final act of denying G-d and the Covenant.

But listen to that comedy. By pretending not to have heard Rochelle's final words, the unnamed prison rabbi attempts to dial down the apparent act of rejection and thus drain Christian disdain. Feigning deafness sends out the wrong message, confirms a misunderstanding and so backfires. Whereas the prison rabbi may well be equipped with a couple of traditional prayers, there are no last rites in Judaism; he does not possess any special powers to sanctify or absolve, indeed the afterlife (of which Jews are seriously doubtful, Judaism agnostic) is not even at issue. Sure enough, Rochelle has a few bones to pick with G-d, should He in fact have the decency to show up to this particular nasty heated-up Cold-War circus for which He, as always, is partly responsible.

Still, it is hard to think that Rochelle doesn't also mean "Let my son be bar mitzvahed today" literally—with an instinct and thus a mandate for its future

circulation, both public and private. "On one level, of course, her cry expresses her rejection of Judaism," John Clayton (1983) reminds us, "But beyond that rejection, it asserts a counter-ritual to bring her son to manhood, an initiation into the community of the oppressed" (110). Let me press further its Jewish implications: it is nearly impossible to think that Daniel doesn't understand his mother's final act as a passing-of-the-burden, a laying on of words as private as it is public, and in that convergence compoundingly literal. That is, as if, in my own emulative declaration: "On this day, this our young son, of my Jewish womb born, is made adult in the heart-exploding, cloak-rending way of lived Jewish reality—which is on the gruesome altar of never-ending sacrifice, the martyring not only of we his actual progenitors, who have been found guilty of treason and thus symbolically excommunicated by the nation-state, but that of our people throughout history, enslaved and exiled, pillaged and plagued, burned and gassed, often at the hands of the angry G-D—whose rebel offspring have turned into the mass-killers of religious imperialism." After all, the climax of what Rochelle says, what Daniel has long anticipated and now dramatizes, is phrased cunningly so resonantly and indeed so resoundingly, in the *singular*: "Let our *death* be his bar mitzvah," invoking parents-as-one and The-Jewish-People-as-One. Electro-fusion as something Jews are given the opportunity, hellish as it is, to do together.

What we hear, what Daniel has prepared us to hear, or rather to feel—in the burning intensity of the electric climax—is the formidable theology of Rochelle's mother, a vernacular turn on the discourse of Jewish suffering. In a key stretch of narrative constituting the second half of Book I, introduced by that first unidentified invocation of his mother's dying mandate, Daniel gives voice to his maternal grandmother directly, comments on his father's seeming dismissal of all theology and on his mother's seeming dismissal of her own mother's life, yet then recounts a "visit" to him by her in a dream, which segues into one of his notorious set-pieces that figuratively summons, thus summing up, the trajectory. Again, it's sharply, pointedly, poignantly sequenced.

As a child and yet again as an adult, Daniel can't get over his mother's reduction of her mother's suffering to a history lesson, that is, a history *only*: "Your grandma slaved

all her life. To end up with nothing" (69). Rochelle thereby denied the value of her mother's existence and by extension, then, that of herself and (given the ferocity always of Daniel's self-reference) her son. Daniel has had to tell himself, "Ignore the reverberations. Ignore them. Ignore" (69). But, for all his vaunted self-referencing, the figure at the center of Daniel's alienation from his mother's alienation from his grandmother is not ultimately himself, or at least not himself alone. It is G-d.

The clever conceit that delivers grandmother's voice, her actual voice presumably, is a letter to the Bintel Brief—the original "dear Abby" column of Abraham Cahan's *Jewish Daily Forward*, which in its heyday was the most read and circulated Yiddish language paper on earth. The letter from grandmother is long and evocative of tremendous suffering, rendered in English with Yiddish syntax, but which would have been written in Yiddish itself. The letter reaches its own climax with a doubled-over doubling back: a testament to G-d remaining "pure and shining over Hester Street" despite it all (for still there are schools, sugar cubes, and summer days) and a curse upon the G-d-refusing young. "But what I cannot forgive, Mr. Editor, is the thankless child who becomes ashamed of his mother and father, and forsakes their ways, and blasphemes and violates the Sabbath to be a modern American; and is attracted to Godless ideas in the street like a fly to paper. And who tells you to speak English" (66). It is of course Rochelle she means, and her deleterious marriage to Paul the Dedicated Forsaker.

It was Rochelle, after all, who threw off the Biblical name bestowed by her mother in favor of the name of a town in suburban Westchester County, doing so on the way to abandoning Judaic law in pursuit of "Godless ideas"—meaning an ideology not just agnostic or even atheistic but directly, politically antagonistic to felt spirit, never mind its institutions. In lock step, her husband's relentless Marxist preaching against religious belief took the Russian peasantry as its fundamental global example ("God was an instrument of the Czar") and Rochelle's own mother ("who grew up, of course, in the *shtetl* of a provincial Russian town, a Jew, but also a Russian peasant") as its local instance of impoverished irrationality, however implicitly: "a life committed to superstition could have no other end than madness, because madness was the disease

of fantasy and fantasy of God, or superstition, was itself madness" (69). Daniel tags this corollary on religion-driven madness with an apparent reminder to self, "my father always gives you more of an answer than you bargained for," but the actual reminder to self has been conducted offscreen, namely that the explanation Daniel had sought—wherefore comes Grandma's crazed intensity?—was, in fact, close to the one his father actually supplied, though of course in the pre-emptive arrogance of a post-religious ideologue rather than, say, the insecure wonder or affirming doubt of a fellow practitioner (69).

For G-d rejection, as in heart rejection, may have been the official operating procedure of Daniel's parents, but Daniel has known all along that his grandmother was a force to be reckoned with, not despite but because her "ignorant" suffering has yielded thought both sharp and prescient. In her dream visitation to Daniel, Grandma delivers a riposte to Judeo-Marxist G-d denial and an eloquent anticipation of her daughter's death-bed commandment:

> In any one day, it is possible to derive joy from your being and be nourished by it. In a filthy room with cold, broken windows and the clatter of your oppression in the streets, it is possible. And starving, with your teeth rotting in your mouth, and age like lead in your bones, and your eyes shattered with the horror of what you have seen—all together, and with the madness of your children thrown in, I call it God. And there is a traditional liturgy which is lovely in itself, but which reminds you too that others born and died know this feeling also. So I sing to myself in that language. And my curses are my love for them whom I curse for existing at the mercy of life and God, and for the dust they will allow themselves to become for having been born. And my complicity in their being, the fruit of my womb, that I could have tricked them this way outrages me. Unable to stay in their presence for my love of them which they do not understand, and my terrible fear of their blasphemy, and their tampering with all the deep, intricate solderings of the universe. Do you begin to understand? I am speaking of the only form of ecstasy allowed to old ladies. It begins with the fear of not being able to breathe. And they inherit that from me, too, as you do, that excess of passion that shimmering fullness of stored life which always marks the victim. What we have, too much life in each of us, is what the world hates most. We offend. We stink with life. Our hearts make love to the world not gently. We are brutal with life and our brutality is called suffering. We scream into our pillows when we come. (70)

Words from Grandma in the ear of Daniel's imagination. Ramped up by the wisdom and prejudices of age, the hearts of women who have experienced life's terror, like Grandma herself, "make love to the world not gently." Her primary object of atonement is, shockingly, for her complicity in birthing the young, whose G-D-given passion drives G-D denial itself—a peculiarly wicked paradox for those who accept the burden of Chosenness, Grandma most of all.

Grandma has no choice, so neither does Daniel: "I recogniz[e] in you the strength and innocence that will reclaim us all from defeat. That will exonerate our having lived and justify our suffering" (70). Note, for the record, the key verbs of martyred selection: to reclaim, not redeem; to exonerate, not forgive; and to justify, not extinguish. The text flirts with the specter of Christian martyrology, referenced as recently as the embrace of the phrase from the "Hail, Mary" ("Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus"), but Grandmother is the knowing devotee to the G-d of the Torah, and the terms there are of divine property, law, and rights—not of salvation, mercy, and the permission to relinquish.

Grandma is then heard to say, or rather, as Daniel switches registers once again (this time to '60s youth culture), is said to say: "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. And pennies being the sum of her life's value" (70-1). Daniel invokes grandma explaining herself in common tongue with, as always, sardonic resonance: a "family" practice that is at once individual ("to make a ritual of it" with the blessing of the penny) and collective (what else is Judaism if not the ritual transfer of the knowledge of G-d's demands?). Tradition as election, election to Tradition, with the pun on grace and the self-abnegation of a pennies-countable life in the United States of the Almighty Dollar. Grandma's terms here at once anticipate Rochelle's formula of dismissal ("to end up with nothing") yet are far from it (the blessedness of each penny and the use of the penny to commission grandson Daniel to the task of reclamation, exoneration, and justification), a double affect of ceaseless pain and commensurate resolve.

To hear Rochelle's last words as Daniel does, as less a resigned curse than a rallying demand, all we need do is to judge her imperative according to the theology it implies, a paradox once again. In common contemporary parlance, especially with the larger Western communities of which Jews are a vital part, the term "bar mitzvah" invokes the ritual of a boy reading Torah in public for the first time, to the appreciation of family, synagogue, and in the liberal West non-Jewish guests, often with festivities outstripping that of Christian Confirmation, to which it is frequently compared, even in respected dictionaries and encyclopedias. (And, of course, there is now a female equivalent, a "bat mitzvah," as there are, in the more progressive branches, Talmudic scholars and rabbis who are women.) But the historical use of the term refers to the boy himself at the moment he becomes eligible to read Torah and thus constitute one of the ten in a *minyan*—the quorum of ten males born to Jewish women who are at least 13 years of age requisite for congregational Jewish worship (Klein 1986, 37). The point then is that fate has decreed—nay, G-d has decreed—that Daniel is to be a Jew, technically and thereby fundamentally speaking. Bar mitzvahed as the surviving son of a Jewish woman, whether he chooses to undergo the collective ceremonial confirmation of Jewish self-affirmation, or not. To have his Jewishness confirmed, Daniel doesn't need to proclaim publicly that commitment to memory that is the soul of Judaism (affiliation requisite to devotion and vice versa) because in executing his parents (convicted of treason and thus de-nationalized whatever their convictions) the State has left him with no "escape," nowhere to go except historical acknowledgement and G-d-recognition. In the most minimal sense: as the son of a Jewish woman, he is to be bar mitzvahed at age 13 no matter what he thinks or does. And in the most profound sense: for Daniel is the literal and temperamental son of Rochelle, who for all her seeming denial of Judaism has waged its age-old battles against poverty and abjection, in their latest urban proletarian forms. And Daniel is the literal and intellectual son of Paul, who for all his pronounced suspicion of religious ideology has sacrificed himself and his family to that Jewish dream of security and dignity for all. Thus Daniel is the victim-heir of a fractured yet convergent parental unit, an ultimately united front at once cultural and political, who were destroyed willingly and unwillingly, in a gruesome ritual of symbolic

expulsion and bodily incineration that was—is, and until the Messiah is genuinely with us, will be—as Jew-making and Judaism-confirming as the Diaspora itself.

By his late twenties, through library research and reportorial probing, Daniel Isaacson Lewin has mastered the analytical arts of Political Economy and gathered all the evidence there is to gather, so that for all his self-denying self-recognizing disdain for analysis he in fact comprehends the compounded causes that have produced him (the effect of which is, in affect, himself) and the social history that subtends him. It is in that seemingly full understanding that he comes to realize—the female genealogy coming to the fore—that the Marx-Freud interpretive nexus is necessary but not sufficient. For in the sophistication of his knowledge at once historical and personal, Marx through Freud and Freud through Marx, he opens the door to the Cause behind the causes. As *Deuteronomy* phrases it: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the hearts of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, in order that thou mayest live" (*Deuteronomy* 30:6). Fair enough, until one ponders that final clause, which encodes a threat worthy of Don Corleone (especially for those who don't believe in an afterlife), which is practically the first thing in the entire book that the reflective Daniel reflects upon:

> Actually that's what God does in the Bible—like the girl says, he gets people. He takes care of them. He lays on this monumental justice. … God as a character in the Bible seems almost always concerned with the idea of his recognition by mankind. … 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. (10)

So cometh the one lesson Daniel's obsessively pedagogical parents apparently forgot to relay. But, no worry, G-d was paying attention. As Daniel quips, "Each age has *by trial* to achieve its recognition of Him."

And every child. By age eight, Daniel Isaacson was already the seed of Isaac: the seeded subject of a special election, in the spiraling sacrifice of his parents, the family name, and the universalist vision of Judaism itself, and concomitantly in the preempting of agency both filial and political. In that recognition, Daniel accepts from his maternal

grandmother the call to justify their collective suffering and thereby brings to realization his mother's otherwise ambiguous proclamation—their death was my bar mitzvah!—in which Daniel is held by the Jewish memory of Covenant, held in the Covenant that is Jewish memory.

DANIEL'S THREE ENDINGS

May I remind you that Daniel Lewin, né Isaacson, thinks and writes in units of three—a trinitarian structuring of narrative, yes, but conveying thereby a multiplicity and overdetermination of interpretation evocative of Midrash. The final four pages of Daniel's Book, a.k.a. Doctorow's novel, is organized into "THREE ENDINGS," which are, by all rights, that is, by the lights of the Book as a whole, interrelated attestations of the after-affect and thus meaning of the tripartite climax—the analysis that is the narrative that has been so long in coming, for us as for Daniel.

BOOK'S END #1

In the first ending, entitled "THE HOUSE," Daniel visits the old neighborhood to peek in at the old house a week after returning from California, to discover the house full of black life, not that of the Isaacsons, which is to say not that of Jews anymore, technically speaking, though in contemporary Judaism African-Americans are often embraced as fellow sufferers and thus spiritual kin, as his parents made primary. Thus Daniel announces to no one in particular, except of course the reader: "I will do nothing. It's their house now" (299). For once, Daniel is being sensible, acting with common sense, eschewing despair and resentment, lasciviousness and disdain.

BOOK'S END #2

In the second ending, pronounced "THE FUNERAL," Daniel invokes his childhood experience of his parents' funeral only to segue without clear passage into an account of his sister's very recent funeral—"My sister is dead. She died of a failure of analysis"—which moves Daniel into surprising action given that he, in his mother's long-ago fashion, "has refused the company rabbi" (301). Ignorant of the Mourner's Kaddish,

Daniel stops the proceedings and runs to hire the "little old Jewish men, the kind who always come along for a fee to say the prayers the younger Jews don't know … prays for their newly dead, their recently dead, their long since dead" (301; also Klein 1986, 130-31). As Daniel quips, "It's a bonanza. Other shamuses come running, like pigeons, when they see the crowd. I accept each blessed one" (301-2).

What happens next, concluding the second of the three endings of Daniel's book, is affirmation staged as much in Daniel's language as in his behavior, a linguistic embrace of Jewish history, socialist family, and Judaic personhood: "My father and mother [the Lewins] go back to the car. The funeral director waits impatiently beside his shiny hearse. But I encourage the prayers, and when one is through I tell him *again*, this time for my mother and father. Isaacson. Pinchas. Rachele. Susele. For all of them. I hold my wife's hand. And I think I am going to be able to cry" (302). Rendering his birth parents' given names in an approximate transliteration of the Hebrew—his father is no longer Paul but Pinchas, his mother of course Rachele rather than Rochelle—the son of Rachele AND Pinchas takes his place thereby in the line of the great interpreter-protector, the Hebrew Bible's Daniel. In so doing he affirms historical identity and requisite gentleness, improvising an updated yet still very Jewish rite of mourning, tears rather than rending, that recognizes in the ongoing young (the absent figure of the baby boy is nonetheless entailed in the embrace of his wife Phyllis's hand) the life of those who have come before, of family and tribe (including the Lewins who adopted him and whom he identifies—without sarcasm at last—as "my parents," too). Acknowledging the ever-after of his parents' death, his mother's dying call to remember, Daniel ascends, finally, to quotidian civility, even kindness, which can go "hand in hand" (literally) with loving the world not gently; he justifies his father's martyrdom, his mother's double martyrdom, but also the suffering of Jews through history, or at least that of his grandmother, with the suffering to come, at least that will come through him. He has more Mourner's Kaddish to come—perhaps the traditional 11 months, certainly on the anniversary of his sister's death (Klein 1986, 135).

BOOK'S END #3

In the third ending, "THE LIBRARY," Daniel reclaims his temperamental facetiousness, yet his sardonic wit is this time, the last time, generous towards self and towards others, especially those caught in cycles of inclusive vision for justice, grotesquely unjust devastation, and justifying renewal. Call it, that is, the universalist work of Jewish perspective.

"For my third ending," Daniel tells the reader, "I had hoped to discuss some of the questions posed by this narrative" (302). As if he hadn't been doing so, in fierce concentration and spectacularly convergent allusion, for three hundred pages! Putatively writing his very last page in the Columbia library, coming full circle from the interrupted first paragraph of the book, Daniel is told to "move [his] ass out of the building" now by the cry of student radicalism: "Time to leave, man, they're closing the school down. … We're doin' it, we're bringing the whole motherfucking university to its knees!" (302). In response to the eager hope of the New Left, articulated as "Close the book, man, don't you know you're liberated?" Daniel flashes a wry smile (302). This smile is sardonic yet again. The joke is on him but not only on him; its laugh of self-recognition and G-d submission may be private, beyond the scope of the understanding of the young radical before him in 1968, but it is also, because of "Daniel's Book," a matter of public interest and readerly witness, even and especially in its darkest knowing. Daniel's smile transfers to us, in the call to memory, forgiveness, and the embrace of a special burden: for the events bringing Daniel's book to its end are, apparently, the Columbia protest riots of 1968, in stark remembrance when the book was published, but with us still today, especially among the professoriate. In the arson meant to take the university down, Lionel Trilling, among others, lost the repository of his life's work.

Who was Lionel Trilling, you ask? His critical renown was based on a half-dozen critical books, including the epochal *The Liberal Imagination*, another half-dozen volumes of essays and edited editions, not to mention a novel and a short story collection. Of profound note, Trilling was the first Jew to be tenured in Columbia's famed department of English and, with all due respect to Alfred Kazin and Irving Howe, the leading Jewish literary intellectual of his generation, with a capaciously modernist

and international comparativist perspective. He also was beloved, a mensch, making the great breakthrough of Jews into the English academy possible. That a Jewish-led student rally against "The Establishment" destroyed his archive and nearly broke his heart is an irony of Daniel-esque proportions. After all, Lionel was not only in his youth a frequent contributor to *The Menorah Journal*, the organ of Harvard University's Hillel, but also, in his maturity, to the *Partisan Review*—which was founded by the Communist Party of America.

SPECULATIVE NOTE TO MY READER; OR, DANIEL'S PRAYER

I want to return to Paul's recognition, in a letter written to Rochelle while in prison (and taken from the Rosenbergs' archive) that their trial is a "little passion play" conducted by Jews for their "Christian masters":

> Rochelle—Amazing the strong sense one gets of Judge Hirsh and Prosecutor Feuerman working together like a team. … Their collusion is quite shameless—they are like bricklayers methodically sealing us up….
> My darling have you noticed how many of the characters in this capitalist drama are Jews? The defendants, the defense lawyer, the prosecution, the major prosecution witness, the judge. We are putting on this little passion play for our Christian masters. In the concentration camps the Nazis made guards of certain Jews and gave them whips. In Jim Crow Harlem the worst cops are Negro. Feuerman in his freckles and flaming red hair, this graduate of St. John's, the arch assimilationist who represses the fact that he could never get a job with the phone company—Feuerman is so full of self-hatred. HE IS DETERMINED to purge us. Imperialism has many guises, and each is a measure of its desperation. (197)

Imperialism in its virulently anti-Semitic guise has been staged by Jews for Gentile masters before—or so the story goes.

On the one hand, it is my conviction that Doctorow wrote *The Book of Daniel* under the influence, in part, of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the great 1969 "rock opera" of Christ's Passion: the original London studio recording (in brown cover) with Murray Head, Ian Gillan, and Yvonne Elliman, please. (The subsequent stage plays or films feature too much anti-Semitism for my constitution, however true it is, viz., the wisdom of Borsht belt humor, that if Jews avoided all traces of anti-Semitism they would have nothing to read, beginning with Torah!) I suspect most of us in 1969 found the young

Weber's music involving, but it was Tim Rice's lyrics, loosely based on the Gospels of the New Testament yet infused with idiom and pulse from the New Left, that caught many ears. Rice's libretto, and Weber's scoring of it, emphasize three dimensions of The Passion that bear upon the late '60s with varying degrees of anachronism, and directly upon Doctorow's novel, especially its reconstruction of the early 1950s: 1) the position of Roman-occupied Canaan, with Herod in a squeezed position, not a dream interpreter like the Biblical Daniel but a puppet king, akin to the Jewish legal domination of the Isaacson tria1; 2) the role played by media manipulation, from Jewish revolutionaries and the conservative ruling class of colonial government and even the intellectual classes, now as then; and, in response to Christ's felt emasculation, 3) the erotic rivalry between the frightened Apostles and the solicitous Mary Magdalene over Jesus that epitomizes, in turn, his stream of self-pity—which is to say, again in semi-facetiousness, that Jesus is portrayed as an archetypical Jewish Mama's Boy (he didn't leave home until he was thirty, his mother thought he was G-d's gift, and his father demanded the impossible)—as for that matter is Judas. In sum, Rice's and Doctorow's emphases often converge, to the point where Daniel's anguish might be said to elucidate Christ's humanity, if not vice versa. But it is their *divergence* that I wish to make my final point, as it is, I think, Doctorow's ultimate concern.

Daniel does indeed share Christ's despairing acceptance of sacrificial election, especially in the terms of its Weber-Rice version. But *redemption* of all and *resurrection* of self, the resurrection of all and redemption of self, is *not* the achievement of Daniel's Book-long perspectival shift—any more than any other Christian formulation was the original telos. All he professed originally was the desire "to get the matter out of his heart" and thus, as he once thought, to be issued into ordinary life.[15] The matter that he wants out of his heart, understandably enough, is his resentment at the circumstances

[15] Daniel feels the weight of the cry for liberating protection, carried through the blood and the Isaacsonian mission—a liturgical plea for release from all imaginable suffering made explicit in the American upper classes of Lewins whether he attended services or not: "Our Father and our King, O remember thy mercy, and subdue they wrath; and extirpate the pestilence, sword, captivity, destruction, iniquity, plague, evil occurrence, and all manner of disease, obstruction, contention, and every species of affliction, evil decree, and causeless enmity, from us and from all the children of thy covenant" (*The Complete Festival Prayers: v.2. Service for the Day of Atonement* 1951).

of his childhood and anger at his fated role in his parents' execution and its after-effects (of his sister Susan, too) and hate for all those who made it possible, from the history of the Jewish people to the pogrom-driven immigrants, then Old Left to New Left, with his father at the end most accountable. The issue plaguing him is that of the Torah, his parents' atheism notwithstanding, whose YHWH demands not only whole-hearted acceptance of the Covenant but also righteous accountability and determined contrition. The Jewish word is, of course, *atonement*—for every sin of resistance, be it a matter of emotion or conduct—an admission so thorough it affirms the righteousness of whatever punishment G-D has deemed fit to visit upon self, clan, and peoplehood. Indeed, the instruction to love-and-obey could not be clearer, as concentrated in the most formidable of the divine threats in *Leviticus (1936)* 27-29: "27. And if ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrarily unto me; and will not hearken unto Me; 28. Then I will walk contrary unto you in fury ...; 29. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat." Abraham's obedience may have been warranted, securing the original stilling of YHWH's hand without testing His capacity for merciful renegotiation, but the sacrificial altar will seem relatively tame, ritually abstract, should Abraham's children not honor the Covenant. As the rabbis find in the *Lamentations* Midrash: "The Holy One, blessed be He, overlooked idolatry, incest, and murder, but he did not overlook despising Torah ..." (Neusner 1989, 14). Divine anger drives Grandma's terror-filled lament and hails Daniel's bitter uncertainness.

Yom Kippur, usually translated into English as "The Day of Atonement," consists of five lengthy prayer services (or four, depending on how you count the introduction at dusk on the evening preceding), framed these days as the injunction "to pray with the transgressors"—who are, of course, the congregation. The interlocked services feature extended and repeated works of confession that are at once private (sins recited by each member under his breath, tapping the heart) and collective (all doing so for an extended period at the same time, then in group acknowledgement), which is, I must underscore, in contradistinction to the Protestant pulse of publicized self-conviction that Daniel the auto-ethnographer both rues and, with deliberate re-inflection, practices. Although in the United States we are all half Protestant, it is, I believe, the

fiercely Judaic counter-pulse that Doctorow means us to hear: the implicit self-charges that are—in Daniel's case, if not also that of his parents—nearly as exhaustive as the typology of sins (truly impressive) in the traditional Yom Kippur service.

"You live for many years, certainly for as long as you can remember," Daniel explains to us regarding himself, "in a menacing state of unfinished business. The phone rings. You realize your intimacy with what you fear. … You are aroused to that purring eroticism that comes when you understand you're going to get away with something after all" (169). Until he realizes: NOT. In the following paragraph, Daniel drops an unadorned phrase, "the novel as private I," in which the pun on "private eye" refers to the self-interrogation of the book (169). Daniel, that "small criminal of perception," has turned the lecherous art of detection upon himself and is ready, by book's end, to own up to what he finds, the erotic discharge notwithstanding (31). In the indirect manner of his overall testimony, Daniel confesses under his breath to intimacy with what he has feared yet solicited and, of course, indulged. Yet, as with all the book's principal matters, the overdetermination of sought victimization has carried with it relished guilt and provoked contrition: not as much as the reader might like, perhaps, certainly not as much as the Lord would appreciate, but enough for Him in his mercy to work with—enacting that change of Daniel's heart, always already in waiting, whereby the call to martyrdom is transformed "from a curse into a blessing."[16]

But what business is that of *ours*, really? Daniel's first "note to the reader" is a veiled reference to the fundamental challenges of the book to come, with an invocation, at this early point seemingly facetious, of the part his consumer-critics are to play:

> A NOTE TO THE READER
> Reader, this is a note to you. If it seems to you elementary, if it seems after all this time elementary … If it *is* elementary and seems to you at this late date to be pathetically elementary, like picking up some torn bits of cloth and tearing them

[16] From the traditional Yom Kippur Service at mid-century, we come upon what we might name, in the resonance of its pointed appeal regarding the dreamwork of self-and-Israel, Daniel's Prayer: "And even thou wast pleased to turn the curse of Balam the son of Beor [enigmatic figure from *Numbers*], 'from a curse to a blessing,' be it also thy divine pleasure to convert all dreams concerning myself and all Israel, to a good end" (*Complete Festival Prayers* 1951, 107).

> again … If it is that elementary, then reader, I am reading you. And together we men rend our clothes in mourning. (54; ellipses in original)

We don't quite get it, most of us, the first time around. The reference to tearing torn clothes is to the mourning ritual (the poor bring clothes too worn to be repaired for the rending): it encapsulates Daniel's challenge to render his parents' execution in a compounded act of mourning (a propitiation "with words" as it says in a traditional liturgy) that catches up, catches out, and pulls in the reader. In pre-emptive anticipation, as much feigned as felt, Daniel sneers at what he assumes is the sneering assumption of the reader, that "after all this time" and "at this late date" what Daniel the Isaacson Boy needs finally to do is "pathetically elementary"—that is, to get over himself and his damnable history by mourning his parents' properly, even righteously. Of course the term "elementary" invokes Sherlock Holmes' habitual condescension to Dr. Watson, but it also sounds the word "elemental"—in that at this point, early in his book, Daniel has veiled the deepest of human sentiments, an admission of filial love, in what comes across as jaded thus disengaged sophistication. "I am reading you," he claims, "and together we may rend our clothes in mourning" (54).

Together? Sarcastic, perhaps, given the Biblical force of that concluding verb "to rend," but only at first. The stakes of Daniel's public-as-private, family-as-history narrative are raised in an un-Orthodox yet, I would argue, Jewish-informed, even Judaicizing way. Judaism rigorously accepts rigorous converts (spouses, beware!), but it does not proselytize. Indeed, it is understood as a form of graciousness that Jews do not wish their burdens upon Others, whom G-d has mercifully let be. But Daniel's Book nonetheless captures and to some extent tutors its readers, often against their will (who but another grad student could actually *like* Daniel?). We answer Daniel's call to witness, adapting to the central tenet of G-d-determined suffering and adopting the quest to justify the pain and anguish, that it might serve a greater good.[17] Thus, his

[17] The current practice of Reform and other Progressive forms of Judaism includes trans-ethnic empathy and, indeed, the Jewish obligation to bear (return) witness to martyrdom: "Now therefore we honour those of every race and continent who have been innocent victims of cruelty; whose fathers bled, whose children starved, and whose mothers endured the unendurable. They are mankind, brothers and sisters of us all, our companions in death and our partners

readers' absorption in Daniel's accounting becomes his form of symbolic, even political, action, a limited yet substantive agency. At the least, any individual reader's immersion brings memory and memorial home to Daniel, for Daniel, turning each of us into his personal confidante and public confessor; at the most, we find ourselves implicated in the sinning and its requisite contrition: Daniel's sins of course but also ours—as fellow travellers, national confreres, human bystanders—in the collectivity of Jewish sensibility and Judaic worship. For the readerly duration, at least, we join the congregation of remembrance, striking our hearts to the book-long beat of tacit confession and beseeched atonement.

After all, "It's G-d's bloody rule, Ma; let your death be our readers' bar mitzvah."

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in grief throughout the ages. We honor them and mourn them. May they never be forgotten, and may a better world grow from the soil of their suffering" (*Gate of Repentance* 3, 290).

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