THE INTERDEPENDENCY BETWEEN CAUSALITY, CONTEXT AND HISTORY IN SELECTED WORKS
BY E.L. DOCTOROW

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Doctorow’s fiction is marked by an apparent paradox: while it underscores fictionalization and sometimes distorts late nineteenth and twentieth century American history, it simultaneously purports to be a valid representation of the past.

The novelist’s implementation of causality which is a significant component of “the power of freedom”, constitutes fiction’s ability to convey truth without relying on factuality or “the power of the regime”. According to Doctorow, the documented fact is already an interpretation which induces the perception that all documentation is subjective. The author composes fictional contexts that disregard the pretence of reliability in non-fictional texts. Doctorow focuses on how contexts are formed: the contexts are usually defined through the experience of characters who have been exposed to an event or events that were generated by motivations, for example, emotions of fear, racism, conviction, desire and greed, i.e., the catalysts that form history.

Each of the novels discussed focuses on various aspects of society and the fate of specific individuals. *The Book of Daniel* proposes that a human being can only survive physically and spiritually by remaining a social entity. *Ragtime* focuses on the persistent illusion in history that society is fragmented. The various “faces” of society encountered by the main character in *Loon Lake*, mirror one another and reflect spiritual poverty. Consequently, *Loon Lake* demonstrates that the search for personal fulfilment does not require a physical journey, but an inner or spiritual exploration. *World’s Fair* postulates that reality is never exclusively defined by either fortune or misfortune alone. *The Waterworks* offers perhaps one of the most significant evaluations of history as it perceives that the world in which we live is essentially unknown to us. We have neither the practical means to obtain a total perspective of what occurs in society (especially among politicians and the financially powerful) nor do we have sufficient skills to distinguish what the motivations of individuals’ actions really entail.

**Keywords:** Doctorow, causality, context, history, reality, novel, fragmentation, postmodernism, *Book of Daniel, Ragtime, Loon Lake, World’s Fair* and *The Waterworks*. 

Doctorow se fiksie word deur 'n oenskynlike teenstelling gekenmerk: dit beklemtoor fiksionalisering en verwring soms laat negentiende en twintigste eeuse Amerikaanse geskiedenis, maar het terselfdertyd ten doel om 'n geldige weerspieëling van die verlede te bied.

Die romanskrywer se toepassing van oorsaaklikheid wat 'n belangrike komponent is van "die krag van vryheid" omvat die vermoë van fiksie om die waarheid oor te dra sonder om op feitelikheid of "die krag van die regime" te steun. Die gedokumenteerde feit is volgens die skrywer reeds 'n interpretasie, wat tot die siening lei dat alle dokumentasie subjektiief is. Die ouer sekere fiksionele kontekste wat nie-fiksionele tekste se pretensie om betroubaar te wees, ignoreer. Doctorow fokus op hoe kontekste gevorm word: die kontekste word gewoonlik omskryf deur die ervaring van karakters wat blootgestel word aan 'n gebeurtenis/gebeurtenisse dat voorafgegaan is deur motiverings soos emosies van angs, rassisme, oortuiging, begeerte en gierigheid (met ander woorde die katalisators wat die geskiedenis vorm).

Elkeen van die romans wat in hierdie studie bespreek word, fokus op verschillende aspecte van die gemeenskap en spesifieke individue. *The Book of Daniel* stel voor dat 'n menslike wese net fisies en geestelik kan oorleef deur 'n sosiale wese te bly. *Ragtime* fokus op die voortdurende illusie in die geskiedenis dat die samelewing gefragmenteer is. Die verschillende "gesigte" van die samelewing wat die hoofkarakter van *Loon Lake* teëkom, weerspieël mekaar en gee 'n beeld van geestelike armoede. Die roman demonstreer dat die soeke na persoonlike vervulling nie 'n fisiese reis nie, maar 'n innerlike of geestelike verkenning benodig. *World’s Fair* stel dit dat die werkliefde nooit alleen deur of voorspoed of teëspoed omskryf kan word nie. *The Waterworks* bied miskien een van die mees betekenisvolle evaluerings van die geskiedenis. Die roman se siening is dat die wêreld waarin ons leef in wese onbekend aan ons is. Ons het nóg die praktiese vermoë om 'n algehele perspektief te verkry van wat in die samelewing gebeur (veral tussen politici en die finansieel magtiges), nóg het ons voldoende vaardighede om te kan onderskei wat die motiverings van individue se handelinge werkliek behels.
TEXTUAL NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

• All the English translations from German texts are my own.

• Spelling variations of Mikhail Bakhtin’s name in this dissertation ("Bachtin", "Bakhtin" and "Baxtin"), viz. in the list of references and quotations, indicated in brackets, can be attributed to the forms used in the different sources. I have used the form “Bakhtin” in my own arguments and when either the critic or translator preferred this form.

• I shortened the title A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man in the discussions to A Portrait and used the abbreviation “P” in references when I have quoted from James Joyce’s text. Likewise the title Literatur und Karneval: Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur appears in a shortened version in chapter 4, namely as Literatur und Karneval.

• I provided necessary indications whenever I have stressed a word/words, phrase(s) or sentence(s) or provided parentheses. All other italics in quotations appear as they do in the sources that I have quoted.

• The full titles of Doctorow’s works were used except when referred to in quotations. The following abbreviations were then used:

Welcome to Hard Times            WHT
The Book of Daniel               BD
Ragtime                          R
Loon Lake                        LL
“Drinks Before Dinner”           DD
Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Short Stories LP
World’s Fair                     WF
Billy Bathgate                   BB
The Waterworks                   W
INTRODUCTION


Doctorow is well known for integrating recognizable, yet entirely fictional information into his representation of American history. A statement by Brienza enables one to understand why Doctorow exploits fiction in order to show how the real world functions: “One wonders if Doctorow as artistic historian writes to control and systematize our world, to impose at least a bit of order on our chaos” (1981:103). Although Doctorow is commonly regarded as a novelist who adheres to the tenets of postmodernism (Williams, 1996:6), his approach indicates a modernist-like feature that corresponds with two of the salient characteristics of modernism identified by Bergonzi: the unparalleled complexity of modern urban life must be reflected in literary form, and supposedly primitive myths can help us to grasp and order the chaos of twentieth-century experience (1990:408). Doctorow’s fiction, which introduces its own “myths”, reveals that an understanding of the world through artistic representation would be constructive to the way humans live.

Furthermore, the real world and fictional contexts, or reconstructed histories, can never be separated from each other. John Fowles says in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* that writers ultimately write to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is -- or was (1987:86). Not only does Doctorow allow the reader to understand how the real world functions by means of creating fictional contexts, he also presents evaluations of the real world. Doctorow’s novels are often considered by critics as liberal expressions of social critique. However, his aspirations are certainly more diverse than being merely limited to political sensibilities. On examining causality and its social implications in Doctorow’s fiction, it is important to consider the specific nature of events in the form of effects and causative intersections among human beings or, as Fowler calls it, the “collision of worlds” (1992:4).

Doctorow uses dubious facts, real settings, “factual” historical events and figures in his fiction, to emphasize the intention to reflect on history and the real world as it is. The novelist’s objective, however, is not to represent “objective facts”. Trusting the “historian-voice” in Doctorow’s texts will often lead to disillusionment when the reader encounters transmogrified facts. A credible fictional context that provides valuable perceptions regarding
the real world, rests on the writer’s ability to use causality and not on the reproduction of “facts”. Through illustrating this capacity, Doctorow conveys that there is a significant amount of historical relevance present in his fictional work.

William Golding (1984:146) once commented that “[t]he strength, the profundity, truth of a novel lies not in a plausible likeness and rearrangement of the phenomenal world but in a fitness with itself like the dissonances and consonances of harmony. Insight, intuition.” The vitality of fiction does not lie in a credible imitation, but in the representation of the shaping force of reality, i.e., causality. “Dissonances and consonances of harmony” and “insight and intuition” deal with why and how things develop. There is a predisposition implicit in all of Doctorow’s fiction to use prominent fictionality as a mode that is able to express truth more proficiently than facts -- a rejection of “the power of the regime” or a “manifest reference to the verifiable world” (Doctorow, 1994a:152) in favour of “the power of freedom” or “a private or ideal world that cannot be easily corroborated or verified” (Doctorow, 1994a:152).

The artistic ways in which Doctorow represents history have drawn much critical attention. Williams says: “From the start, critical reception of Doctorow has focused mainly on his historical/political themes and his experimentation” (1996:65) of which Cooper’s “The Artist as Historian in the Novels of E.L. Doctorow” (1980) is an example. The author’s or artist’s narrative methods are frequently discussed. Critics acknowledge the fact that Doctorow’s writings are postmodernist American, more specifically, New York fiction, and take cognizance of his cultural identity and how his Russian-Jewish descent influences his work. One may conclude that critics have a tendency to focus on Doctorow’s fictionality as representative of the real world which includes research on general and usually interconnected themes such as politics, morality and history. In relation to this study it is important to note that critics only occasionally address causality-related issues. This topic is usually only addressed in a brief and cursory manner which never really takes all of Doctorow’s major novels into account. For example, Williams identifies the significance attributed to causality in an interpretation of Barbara Foley’s 1978 essay “From U.S.A. to Ragtime: Notes on the Forms of Historical Consciousness in Modern Fiction”:

She might have granted that with the Walker episode Doctorow creates his own version of another Lukácsian principle: historical novels should reveal how past epochs become the ‘prehistory’ of the present (Lukács 1937, 230). In other words, the value of a historical novel lies in its ability to show cause and effect (1996:46).

This reflects the view expressed by Levine in his book E.L. Doctorow (1985): “Doctorow is more concerned with imaginative truth than with historical accuracy. That is, he is concerned
with what truly happened rather than with what really happened.” Causality is the key to analyse “what truly happened” and opposed to facts that explain “objectively” “what really happened”. The latter, however, is irrevocably unified with the deceptive ambition of complete reliability which fiction does not share.

An important article regarding the role of causality in Doctorow’s work is Friedl’s “Power and Degradation: Patterns of Historical Process in the Novels of E.L. Doctorow” (1988:19-43). Friedl maintains that power determines the nature of all social environments. Domination always has one inevitable result -- degradation (1988:20-22). He presents compelling and insightful discussions of Welcome to Hard Times (1960), The Book of Daniel, Ragtime, Loon Lake, The Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Short Stories (1984) and World’s Fair in which he focuses on the “devastating universal power in Schopenhauer’s or Nietzsche’s sense or in Crane’s vivid image” (Friedl, 1988:24). The statement “... power in humans is always the cause of its own destruction ...” (Friedl, 1988:27) is an assessment which takes Doctorow’s themes and concerns discussed in this dissertation into account. However, Friedl’s essay (1988) does not include a comprehensive analysis concerning most of the components connected to the fictional contexts that this study encompasses and he completed his essay prior to the publication of The Waterworks (1994) which is analysed here.

Another critic who offers valuable comments is Parks who refers to the presentation of coexistence in Doctorow’s work. Using Bakhtinian language, Parks states that Doctorow uses polyphonic and carnivalistic narrative strategies (1991a:18). The purpose of these methods is to present a voice to polyphonic culture with the objective “to prevent the power of the regime from monopolizing the compositions of truth, from establishing a monological control over culture” (Parks, 1991a:18). Subsequently, Doctorow succeeds to destabilize the hegemony of official history (Parks, 1991b:457). However, Parks never deals with causality per se, which is an adjacent and important issue to coexistence and “the power of freedom”.

Lorsch and Tokarczyk both refer to the interdependency between causality, context and history. In her article “Doctorow’s The Book of Daniel as Künstlerroman: The Politics of Art” Lorsch observes about the main character, Daniel, that his traumatic childhood more than accounts for his bizarre personality (1983:385). Tokarczyk (1987:4) makes a similar remark when she states in her article “From the Lion’s Den: Survivors in E.L. Doctorow’s The Book of Daniel” that: “Doctorow’s The Book of Daniel portrays the scars of political persecution on its indirect victims, the children of those sentenced in a controversial trial” (1987:4). She
reformulates this idea in various ways that add to the reader’s understanding of the novel: “By depicting the spy trial’s children as people suffering from survivor syndromes, Doctorow suggests that injustice has lasting effects” (1987:5). Tokarczyk also remarks that the memory of their parents structures Daniel’s and Susan’s lives (1987:8). The death of the Isaacsons has the effect that Daniel often intellectualizes, offering theories about the causes of his parents’ execution rather than agonizing over their deaths (Tokarczyk, 1987:11). These insights are highly relevant to this study as they support the basic idea that an interdependency exists between contexts and causality. However, these remarks are isolated and they are not part of an extensive study on causality.

Likewise, Stark (1974:103) momentarily refers to causality in his article “Alienation and Analysis in Doctorow’s The Book of Daniel” when he explains that the Isaacsons, Daniel’s parents

... find their social ideals and heroes in Russia, which alienates them from many of the countrymen. For example, Daniel reveres Bukharin, not because he accepts everything Russian; he admires Bukharin precisely because he opposed Stalin’s outrages. Although Doctorow carefully delineates these causes of alienation, he does not show, nor even hint, that the elder Isaacsons’ politics impelled them to spy; their criminal conviction, rather, dramatizes their alienation.

It is correct that national hatred of Communism during the 1950s and concomitant conservative politics caused the Isaacsons’ execution. Still, this insight is yet again a coincidental “side-effect” of research without the focus on causality.

It should be emphasized here that the above-mentioned observations are predominantly found in studies on The Book of Daniel and that there is little concerning causality with regard to the other novels. This is also due to Doctorow’s reception following his major commercial success in 1974, the publication of Ragtime: “Curiously, no novel since Ragtime has generated a flood of journal articles. ... In all, recognition and praise of the post-Ragtime work has [sic] been slow in coming ...” (Williams, 1996:121).

Another aspect of research on Doctorow that relates to causality requires a discussion, i.e., one may say that relevant research frequently focuses on Doctorow’s contexts that represent the heterogeneity of the American community regarding cultural, social and political identity. Given this state of affairs one may consider Doctorow’s main fictional concerns as “ontological” in nature. His explorations regarding “modes of being” (McHale, 1993:10) extend to both the literary text and the real world, so-called “postmodern manifestations” (McHale, 1993:10). The shared factor that has been overlooked between these ontological
spheres, is the shaping force of causality. Causality is never consciously explored as part of these concerns.

Two aspects need to be noted regarding the literature on Doctorow. Firstly, researchers mention the role that causality plays only in a fleeting and matter-of-fact way. Secondly, as far as could be ascertained, no post-graduate studies on Doctorow's fiction have ever been undertaken in South Africa.

To summarize: Doctorow uses causality in his major novels as a bridge between fiction and reality. An interdependency between causality and context exists seeing that the nature of a context brings about causative processes that are in accordance with the principle of "pluralism": "The knowable world is made up of a plurality of interacting things" (Brown, 1993:2259). Doctorow's contexts can be regarded as ontological suppositions that emphasize the interrelatedness of human lives and the effects and their causes that follow.

The primary question of this dissertation investigates how causality presents itself in the novels by E.L. Doctorow selected for this study. The dissertation intends to examine the meanings of both the events and their effects.

A second point that ties in with the central concern, examines what Doctorow's fictional historical contexts disclose with regard to the real past. The study will focus here on analysing the represented contexts and the causes and the implications of the events.

***

A few observations with regard to the relationship between the selected novels and methodology are necessary to explain the purpose of the theoretical texts by M.M. Bakhtin, P.N. Medvedev, V.N. Voloshinov, T. Todorov and A.J. Greimas.

"Material and Device as Components of the Poetic Construction" in The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics by P.N. Medvedev and M.M. Bakhtin will serve as a theoretical underpinning in the first chapter focusing on The Book of Daniel. Medvedev and Bakhtin oppose the formalist notion that a word's meaning coincides with the word itself. Doctorow's novel illustrates their view that meaning is generated through experience. The Book of Daniel (1971) is Doctorow's third novel, but his first major novel to focus on the results of an event that concerns civilization and a community's ignorance with regard to the aftermath of the event. The meaning of the effects is not limited to the words that just name them, i.e., lexical meaning as the formalists propose,
but by the suffering of the main characters, Daniel and Susan, who witness the consequences of an event that irrevocably changes their lives. The execution of their parents, the Isaacsons, is based on the internationally infamous fate of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in the early 1950s. This chapter will focus mainly on the concepts of identity and heterogeneous coexistence set against the background of causality and context.

V.N. Voloshinov’s essay “Language, Speech and Utterance” reproduced in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* emphasizes the importance of a context in the production of meaning. This will be used as a theoretical basis for the second chapter on *Ragtime* (1974) which, like *The Book of Daniel*, deals with a fictional representation of a period in the American past that pertains to the present as well. Voloshinov also argues that a word’s meaning cannot be dependent on itself, but on the word’s relationship with the context in which it functions. This chapter will analyse the narrator’s reports of events, demonstrating how the climate of a historical era in a specific context determines the meaning of events as reflected by the fate of the characters.

The following and third chapter will continue to examine cause-and-effect relations connected to context, specifically with regard to *Loon Lake* (1980). This novel presents the poor mill kid, Joe of Paterson, and follows his journey from his materially and spiritually impoverished hometown, Paterson, to various places -- or contexts -- until he settles down at the estate “Loon Lake” as the heir to a billionaire, William Bennett. Tzvetan Todorov’s essay “The Quest of Narrative” in *The Poetics of Prose* will be used as a theoretical underpinning for a discussion of *Loon Lake*. This essay focuses on the characteristic of medieval literature that there may be more than one version of an event in one text. One can apply this notion to Joe’s journey and the various contexts he encounters. The emphasis in this chapter will fall on the various, yet always similarly spiritually impoverished “faces” of civilization as well as on Joe’s search for spiritual fulfilment. This is a search which prompts him to leave the places where he previously intended to settle himself. Joe is recurrently disillusioned as every context signifies spiritual poverty. The result is that all the contexts replicate one another. However, a “phantom context” which signifies spiritual fulfilment is also present in the novel. Todorov indicates in his essay which examines *The Quest of the Holy Grail* that a literary statement may have “literal” as well as an “allegorical” meaning (1977:129). The Grail is not only a material object, but signifies Jesus Christ who in turn signifies divinity, love and redemption. Joe searches for his Holy Grail which he imagines at different stages to be New York, California, a carnival and a woman, Clara. In actantial terms, each of these objects
disappoints him. They lead to his choice of Loon Lake which signifies wealth and capitalism as well as spiritual poverty. The implication of this decision is that he contributes in sustaining the relationship between Paterson and Loon Lake. He exchanges his identity from that of the son of exploited workers to that of an exploitative industrialist.

The analysis of *World’s Fair* (1985), generally considered Doctorow’s most autobiographical work, deals with a boy’s growing awareness of his surroundings. Edgar, Doctorow’s namesake, is the narrator who tells about the first ten years of his life. The novel is consequently often reminiscent of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Unlike Doctorow’s other novels, *World’s Fair* is not clearly spun around a singular seminal event, but instead creates the impression of a chronological collection of memories. Edgar Altschuler is nevertheless intensely aware of the effects of causality since he is often confronted with dangers and disasters that are presented in “carnival” terms. This chapter will use Bakhtin’s *Literatur und Karneval: zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur* (Alexander Kämpfe’s translation from the original Russian text) and *Rabelais and His World* as a theoretical basis to examine the carnivalesque nature of the dangers and disasters in *World’s Fair*. Bakhtin’s texts emphasize that reality in its totality is never defined by either fortune or misfortune alone. The novel presents a cyclical structure: misfortune is regularly followed by “laughter” which signifies contempt for suffering. Bakhtin’s books are therefore useful to interpret the view which Doctorow’s novel associates with reality.

The last novel to be examined is Doctorow’s penultimate novel to date, *The Waterworks* (1995). This novel is a combination of most of Doctorow’s major concerns related to causality. Once more, one discovers a seminal event in the form of the misuse of power and subsequent victimization. Note, however, that this event is represented in a distinctly different manner from seminal events in other novels by Doctorow as it is shrouded in mystery. This is part of the novel’s ontological depiction: the characters and readers experience their context as unintelligible due to “hidden” information. This chapter will use Algirdas Greimas’s actantial model to analyse the characters, their morality and the causality that appear in *The Waterworks*. The novel’s premise is that the world is “unknown”. The narrator of the novel, a newspaper editor, McIlvaine, investigates the disappearance of one of his freelancers, Martin Pemberton. The disappearance is a result of Martin’s realization that his evil father, Augustus Pemberton, is alive contrary to his society’s presumption. The mystery surrounding Augustus Pemberton’s feigned physiological death is part of a greater corruption that leads to a clear division between good and evil in the story. McIlvaine and
Donne fail to find Martin. Martin’s investigation leads him to Dr. Sartorius, but Martin is imprisoned and unable to reveal the information which he has obtained. Supported by Greimas’s model, it is possible for the reader to distinguish what the personages’ characters imply. The reader can also participate in Martin’s and McIlvaine’s examinations that do not only have the goals of finding Augustus Pemberton and Martin. McIlvaine’s “Holy Grail” is indeed quite literally to find Martin, similar to Martin’s “Grail” which is to find his father. However, the metaphorical meaning of their “Grail(s)” is to acquaint themselves with the truth of the context in which they live.

To summarize: Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov provide ideas about language that are helpful to read *The Book of Daniel* and *Ragtime*. They maintain that artistic communication is dependent on human consciousness as well as concomitant experience in order to be meaningful. Consciousness and experience are the basis for the awareness of causality which lends credibility to the fictional text. For a discussion of *Loon Lake*, Todorov’s perceptions are also useful with regard to his considerations regarding language. The novel presents a variety of experiences that are part of the main character’s physical journey. These experiences refer to his “Holy Grail”, the metaphor which Todorov uses to illustrate that literary statements in one text are not necessarily exclusively self-reflexive, but often refer metaphorically to one another. Bakhtin’s ideas regarding the character of carnival and its implications offer a way to interpret how *World’s Fair* presents “private” and “public” contexts that are never exclusively defined by either fortune or disaster. Greimas’s actantial model provides an analytic method to distinguish between characters’ personalities on the basis of examining their motivations in *The Waterworks*. The often hidden truth regarding personalities is not reflected by results, but by preceding intentions.

The implications of what occurs and what could happen and the reasons for the events and potential events in Doctorow’s novels make for powerful, poignant and fascinating stories. The question that arises is whether these fictional histories can act as legitimate histories, viz. present the reader with a dependable and undistorted understanding of the nature of past and present contexts.
CHAPTER 1

THE BOOK OF DANIEL: THE DEMAND FOR TRUTH

E.L. Doctorow’s first major success as a novelist, The Book of Daniel (1971), presents Daniel and Susan, the children of the Isaacsons who were executed on the grounds of treason. This chapter focuses on the nature of the context which leads to the execution, as well as the effects of this seminal event on the main character, Daniel, and his sister, Susan.

The novel is an intricate “discontinuous narrative” relaying details about Daniel’s present context as well as his and Susan’s childhood. The story is set at the time when Daniel is a twenty-five year old looking for a thesis. He finally writes an unconventional dissertation which examines his parents’ past and his own life. Daniel’s writings then constitute the text which forms The Book of Daniel.

A chronological account of Daniel’s life may be summarized as follows: when Daniel and Susan’s leftist Jewish parents, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, are imprisoned, the children are brought by their parents’ lawyer, Jacob Ascher, to their father’s sister, Aunt Frieda. Following the execution of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, the children are placed in an orphanage and subsequently adopted. As a student, Daniel marries Phyllis and fathers a child whom he names Paul, after his own father. Susan meanwhile grows up to lead a rebellious existence with bouts of depression. She dies following a suicide attempt in a restaurant. Her death is represented as not only physiological, but one that results from severe dejection. Harter and Thompson point out that the official cause of Susan’s death is technically pneumonia, but she “actually willed herself out of life” (1990:45). Daniel follows an opposite path. He chooses a life to which The Book of Daniel is a testimony.

The real historical context for the novel is to be found in the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1953 on the charge of treason as they had obtained confidential information about nuclear weapons through Ethel’s brother and relayed it to the Soviet Union.

However, the novel is not dependent on the Rosenberg history. The Book of Daniel is much more a depiction of how the reverberations of such an execution affected the Isaacson’ children, a couple with similarities to the Rosenbergs. The central victims in the novel are the children:

It must be emphasized that the plot as we have described it is not really derived from the Rosenberg case; Doctorow does not attempt either to represent it accurately or to
determine where the historical truth of the case lies. The novel is not even the Isaacsens'; rather it is Daniel's own book -- in much the same way that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow's and not Kurtz's (Harter and Thompson, 1990:28).

By deviating from the actual history of the Rosenbergs, the author is able to focus on the fate of the victims' children and consequently contribute to our understanding of the present reality in America and the world as well as our past. Tokarczyk (1987:13) says that the novel shows that the McCarthy Era not only destroyed innocent people, but also left the victims' children with permanent psychological scars. This truth is presented by means of fiction or "speculative history", as Doctorow (1994a:162) defines fiction. The focus of the novel shifts towards "marginal" history which cannot be ignored.

Daniel is intensely aware that nothing within his microcosm, i.e., his private context, including even mundane things, is disconnected from the dramatic event caused by the public, i.e., national context or macrocosm in which he lives:

When the brother and the sister went somewhere, or did something together; when he tightened her skate or helped her with homework, or took her to the movies; the way they moved, physically moved in a convalescence of suffering spoke about it. The way he would hold her arm as they ran across the street in front of traffic spoke about it. The way his muscles tensed when she wasn't where she was supposed to be at any given time of day, that spoke of it as well (BD, 73).

Whatever they did, whatever view they took, it was merely historical process operating (BD, 75).

Daniel's foster father, Robert Lewin, elucidates the above when he says to his wife, Lise: "Honey, we are ironies to them, this house is ironic, if it rains it's ironic. You're crying about a condition of their lives that is irrevocable" (BD, 87). Whether it be people, a house, or rain, nothing has the same meaning for the siblings as it would have for anyone else. There is an incongruity between the apparent nature of the context in which Daniel and Susan live and the meaning which the context actually has for themselves.

The argument presented in this chapter is that Daniel's identity is determined by a dialectic between past and present. This dialectic implies a harmful relationship between the individual and a society intolerant of certain political beliefs. However, not only society, but his family as well fail to provide any protective infrastructure for the individual. To help him survive the upheavals that his family and society exposed him to, Daniel writes a "dissertation" in order to understand and acknowledge the nature of not only his reality, but reality *per se*. His preoccupation with acquiring knowledge and counteracting self-deception -- a demand for truth -- becomes the basis of his identity. Daniel's selections of what he
writes about demonstrate how the meaning of diverse aspects of the American context -- which seem to have no connections -- are for him interconnected with each other because of his parents' execution. The novel therefore presents the idea that the meaning of all experiences is determined by past experiences.

The main questions of this chapter are: What are the causes of Daniel's and Susan's victimization? How does the novel reflect the experience of personal, physical space as a result of the Isaacsons' execution during Daniel's and Susan's childhood? Furthermore, how does the novel reflect the theme of causality in terms of Daniel's identity and his experiences of space or places?

This chapter aims to give an account of the causative circumstances surrounding the execution of the Isaacsons. It will examine how spatial situations that "confront" an individual are results of a preceding event or earlier events and how space acquires a specific meaning through experience. Daniel's story shows evidence that his demand for truth is characteristic of his identity and heightened through his interaction between present spaces and past experience.

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Medvedev's and Bakhtin's essay is in essence a critique against formalism. Likewise, Daniel also undermines formalist notions of writing. Their objection against formalism is mainly directed at the "transrational word". They feel that there is an unacceptable discrepancy between the signification potential of a word and how the formalists view a word:

*The ordinary meaningful word does not gravitate toward or completely converge with its material, physical presence. It has significance and is consequently directed at an object, at meaning, which is located extrinsic to the word. But the transrational word completely coincides with itself. It leads nowhere beyond its boundaries; it is simply present here and now, as an organized material body (1978:105).*

*The Book of Daniel* effectively destroys this formalist notion in that Daniel's experience of his context determines the meaning of the signified. Any word that Daniel uses may be the same one that another person uses, but for Daniel (and the reader of his text), the meaning of that
word changes. The signified of one word is for Daniel different from the meaning which the same word has for another person. Following the execution, Daniel and Susan attempt to flee from the shelter and soon they find themselves overpowered by the size of New York. The word “city” is effectively defamiliarized from the reader’s basic understanding of what the word means when viewed in relation to the children’s traumatic experience.

The meaning of people, places and events differs for Daniel from that of other people’s perception(s) because of how he “processes” them. He interprets everything that is part of his consciousness as well as his own behaviour before and after his parents’ execution. Tokarczyk observes that: “Historical events, contemporary occurrences and political theories are all juxtaposed with the narration of the Isaacson’s [sic] arrests, trial and death” (1987:8). The spirit of the Cold War and McCarthyism is not underestimated. The novel shows that McCarthyism directly disallowed political freedom and suppressed it by means of ruthless victimization: it pervaded whole existences.

The formalist approach regarding content is therefore quite the opposite of Medvedev’s and Bakhtin’s and by implication Doctorow’s:

Material is everything which has an immediate ideological significance and was previously considered the essence of literature, its content. Here content is just material, merely the motivation of the device, completely replaceable and, within limits, quite dispensable ... Thus, the basic tendency of the formalist concept of material is the abolition of content ... The formalists fearlessly reduce all ideological meaning to the motivation of the device (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978:110).

For the formalists the focus rests completely on the artefact itself, not on the relationship that it has with reality or the experience of it. The basic principle of formalism according to Medvedev and Bakhtin is that “... the material is the motivation of the constructive device. And this device is an end in itself” (1978:107).

The first reason why Medvedev and Bakhtin reject formalism is precisely because of this limitation regarding the device, the complete neglect of appreciating the material’s contribution to the shaping of meaning:

There is no way out of this dead end for the formalists. They are not able to admit the perceptibility of the material, i.e., of the ethical, cognitive, and other values in it. This would mean admitting what their whole system denies. Therefore, they stop at a system of formally empty devices (1978:111).
The consequence that Medvedev and Bakhtin identify is that through fear of meaning in art, the formalists reduce a poetic construction to the peripheral, outer surface of the work: "The work lost its depth, three-dimensionality, and fullness" (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978:118).

The gulf between material presence and the meaning of the word can only be overcome by social evaluation (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978:119). This is described as follows:

If we tear the utterance out of social intercourse and materialize it, we lose the organic unity of all its elements. The word, grammatical form, sentence, and all linguistic definiteness in general taken in abstraction from the concrete historical utterance turn into technical signs of a meaning that is as yet only possible and still not individualized historically. The organic connection of meaning and sign cannot become lexical, grammatically stable, and fixed in identical and reproducible forms, i.e., cannot in itself become a sign or a constant element of a sign, cannot become grammaticalized ... It is this historical actuality, which unites the individual presence of the utterance with the generality and fullness of its meaning, which makes meaning concrete and individual and gives meaning to the word's phonetic presence here and now, that we call social evaluation (1978:121).

"Social evaluation" can be equated with Doctorow's viewpoint in the opening of his essay "False Documents":

Fiction is a not entirely rational means of discourse. It gives to the reader something more than information. Complex understandings, indirect, intuitive, and nonverbal, arise from the words of the story, and by a ritual transaction between reader and writer, instructive emotion is generated in the reader from the illusion of suffering an experience not his own. A novel is a printed circuit through which flows the force of a reader's own life (1994a:151).

Daniel's writing is as such a complex sociohistorical act which reflects his cogitation of the world. Each individual represented thought is an utterance that should be interpreted as a historical event.

By reading The Book of Daniel and considering "Material and Device as Components of the Poetic Construction", it becomes clear that the novel contains socially and historically important actions. Every idea that is communicated, from the most dramatic events to the most mundane (re)presentation, owes its true meaning to the nature of Daniel's experience of life -- determined by the Isaacsons' execution.

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The national frame of mind at the time of Daniel's childhood presents people that have direct causative relations to Daniel's life. By formulating "utterances" that contextualize causes, Daniel creates a dominant objective for himself: surviving the effects of what had happened.
The events which lead to the Isaacsons’ death are befitting to the Cold War-climate. They also comment on the mercenary aspect of human nature and the lack of values and social morality. For example, Daniel’s foster father, Lewin, maintains that the threat of the death sentence was part of the FBI’s investigative procedure: they had hoped the threat of a death penalty would ensure that the Isaacsons would reveal names (BD, 239). When the FBI scheme failed, the Isaacsons were already embroiled in the case and had to serve as “an example” of what would happen to Communists. The causes that contribute to the Isaacsons’ fate here are ruthlessness and manipulation.

There are different factors that contribute to the death sentence of the Isaacsons. One of these is also identified by Daniel’s foster father who speculates that the involvement of Mindish, a previous friend and political compatriot of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, contributed to the Isaacsons’ execution and by implication Daniel’s and Susan’s fates. Mindish, the key witness against the Isaacsons, has ambiguous motivations and produces a false testimony:

Well, one motivation is to believe or to have been persuaded to believe in his own guilt. And to live in mortal fear of the consequences. Another is to believe in his own innocence but to believe or have been persuaded to believe in the guilt of his friends. And to live in mortal fear of the consequences (BD, 242).

To identify the main cause here, one has to consider what the factor is that enables a frightened soldier go to war. Pacifism would be interpreted as treason and Mindish is already on the wrong side of the prevailing political climate. The cause is thus the longing for self-preservation. This is similar to a soldier’s reasoning in a war situation. The aim is to survive, to return home and continue with life. In Mindish’s case, returning home would be possible after a term in prison. Fowler (1992:45-46) also observes that Mindish fears deportation since his official papers are not in order. This again implies fearful selfishness.

Another possible reason for Mindish’s testimony against the Isaacsons is that he intended to protect “the other couple”, the actual spies. Fowler presents the following information regarding this couple which identifies loyalty as a possible cause:

Daniel speculates that the Soviet spymasters had allowed the FBI and the American justice system to arrest, try, and electrocute the innocent Isaacsons to deflect attention from the real spy family who resemble the Isaacsons in many particulars, a family with two children who lived near the Isaacsons in the Bronx. In this version Mindish does not betray the Isaacsons for his own safety; he sacrifices their lives and a decade of his own to allow the Other Couple to escape (1992:46).

However, there is also the possibility of yet another selfish motive. Stark (1974:106) says that sexual desire complicates human motivations and that the Isaacsons’ defence includes an
effort to show that Mindish’s testimony is at least partly motivated by a desire for Rochelle and subsequent jealousy towards Paul.

It would appear that a selfish and callous career ambition of the judge appointed to the case also plays a role. The incrimination of the Isaacsons is further “justified” by the Cold War climate and its products like McCarthyism. The judge in the case is evidently guilty of corruption: “... Paul knows a good deal more about him now, including Hirsch’s most intimate professional secret that he hopes to be appointed to the Supreme Court” (BD, 201). Tokarczyk provides a helpful contextualization of the Rosenberg case’s Judge Kaufman’s disposition which approximates that of the fictional judge:

Being Communists made the Rosenbergs targets of prejudice. So did being Jews. Many Americans harbored anti-Semitic feelings. In particular, there was a stereotype of Jews as Reds. The loyalties of Eastern European Jews with radical political ideologies were often questioned. An awareness of growing anti-Semitism possibly based Judge Kaufman against the defendants. The issues of Jewishness was likely to rankle him. Like Doctorow’s fictional Judge Hirsch, he could be described as an ‘assimilationist’. His record was one of successful integration -- at forty, he was the youngest judge. He had attended Fordham Law School and earned top grades in religion, thus gaining the nickname ‘Pope Kaufman’. Distancing himself from his Jewish identity had helped his career. So he might have resented the unfavorable attention the Rosenbergs were drawing to Jews and been lax in protecting their rights (1987:4-5).

Given this background, it appears that the judge guilefully manipulated the national fear to his own professional advantage. This was achieved by the exploitation of Mindish’s confession. The Isaacsons’ lawyer, Jacob Ascher’s defense could have had no positive results for the Isaacsons due to the bias against his clients and because he was subjected to consistent malevolent obstruction through court procedures. The defense of the Isaacsons’ lawyer was therefore futile within this context, as Lewin concludes, because of his attack on Mindish. Lewin asks: “Do you believe the prosecution witness who confesses or the defendant who denies?” (BD, 241). The Isaacsons’ lawyer sees them as chosen scapegoats: “They are held to account for the Soviet Union. They are held to account for the condition of the world today” (BD, 221). Tokarczyk (1987:5) relates what happened in the court room to what happened outside:

Throughout the trial, the prosecution got away with many questionable tactics. Patriotism, not espionage, became the issue. In his opening remarks, the prosecution suggested Communists were likely traitors. The Rosenbergs, like the fictional Isaacsons, were cast as enemies of the American flag.

Tokarczyk continues to describe the jury of the actual case and compares it to the novel’s jury. She points out that remarks from the prosecution like the aforementioned would inevitably have had an effect on the jury and have made them distrustful of the Rosenbergs:
Such insinuations probably had a negative impact upon an already loaded jury. ‘Loaded’ does not imply the jury was fixed to find the Rosenbergs guilty, but that it was not composed of peers who might be objective about the defendants. Rather, like the fictional Isaacson jury, it was devoid of Jews and political progressives. It consisted of a group of homogeneous conventional Americans, including an examiner, an auditor, two book-keepers, an accountant, and an estimator. Often those who choose such professions have authoritarian personalities, which are characterized by great respect for authority, little tolerance for nonconformity, and distrust of outsiders. A jury composed of people with such traits would be inclined to distrust the defendants and be uncritical of the government that represented the prosecution (1987:5).

The anti-Communist context is the reason why Judge Greenblatt (who sends Daniel and Susan to the orphanage) contends even before the verdict that there is “such a thing as too much hope” (BD, 248). This is a clear indication that the course of the Isaacsons was unalterable following their arrest. The reason for this is as Lewin says: “Long before their trial the Isaacsons were tried and found guilty by the newspapers” (BD, 237). To execute the Isaacsons was a desperate, yet achievable attack aimed at Communism. Jack Fein, a journalist in the novel, says that “in the best of times nobody would have cared, nobody would have cared enough to falsify evidence” (BD, 230). The implication of his viewpoint is that the execution was an abnormal decision consistent with an abnormal time. The execution of the Isaacsons is nothing less than a confirmation of a nation’s war against Communism. The execution was intended to pacify the American panic. The national fear that steered prejudice and aggression, conveniently directed at the Isaacsons, was a major cause of the Isaacsons’ fate.

Against the background of fear and aggression, the height of individuals’ actions “in service of the state’s interest” is found in Daniel’s report of the final decision that directly leads to his parents’ execution:

The President of the United States had called in the Attorney General of the United States just before he announced his decision on the Isaacsons’ petition for clemency. It is believed that the Attorney General said to the President, ‘Mr. President, these folks have got to fry’ (BD, 313).

Leniency is not an option as official duty is a mere cloak covering personal ambition and bias for Judge Hirsch and the jury.

Daniel’s contextualization of the causes affirms his obsession with truth. Daniel formulates the truth that he uncovers by saying that God is “constantly declaring His authority with rewards for those who recognize it and punishment for those who don’t” (BD, 20). This serves as a metaphor for ubiquitous misuse of power. Daniel identifies those he believes to be tyrants: the US government, Judge Kaufman, Stalin (who is compared by Bukharin to Gengis
Khan) and even Richard Burton. Not only people in high authoritative or strategically influential positions are indicted as tyrants but also the FBI, the judge, the prosecutor, the press, the jury, the Attorney General, the President and the Communist Party that disavowed the Isaacsons' membership and refrained from assisting their compatriots' children in any way. Daniel's school principal, his teacher, his classmates, the Left of the late 1960s that denounces the Isaacsons' conduct in court as well as Aunt Frieda, Paul's sister are equally guilty. Those who are guilty of callousness towards the Isaacson children are everywhere.

A context defined by the Cold War in combination with ambition, fear and desire and the instinctive inclination to exploit made the death of the Isaacsons inevitable. The Isaacsons' activism and cultural background elicited the severe and inescapable American intolerance towards Communism that furthermore brought about insensitivity and lack of compassion characteristic of large sections of the twentieth century's international society.

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The Book of Daniel is a severe criticism of a political context that exploits and abuses its citizens. The represented state of affairs brings one to the narrator's concept of family. Doctorow's scorn is directed at a national and international absence of care among human beings. The implied humanistic ideal is that America and the world should resemble a healthy family connection:

Reflecting on his own family, Ezra Pound once commented that American history was virtually a family connection. This concern for the intricate connectedness of family and history is a dominant one in all of Doctorow's fiction, but particularly in The Book of Daniel that takes as its focus a radical family and its legacy (Parks, 1991a:36).

The novel examines aspects of two dystopias that resemble each other. His study is a constant need to understand existence on both a macroscopic or public level, i.e., referring mostly to the national condition of America, as well as on a microscopic or private level, i.e., referring to his own family life. The reader should also see the latter as a reflection of the national context.

Daniel is extremely critical of the absence of family care on a private level. When Ascher brings the children to Aunt Frieda, he berates her for not wanting to take care of Daniel and Susan: "What is the matter with you? Vass iss der mair mit dein kopp? [What are you thinking?] Have you no pity? Do you know what trouble is? Don't you know what terrible trouble these people are in?" (BD, 160; my translation of the Yiddish -- PvdM). Aunt Frieda's reluctance appears to be based on the discomfort that she feels in having to care for
the children. She says to Ascher: "'Where will I put them? What do they eat?'" (BD, 160) and "'I'm not making any promises.' ... 'I'll do my best, but that's all'" (BD, 164). Aunt Frieda's personality is not exempt from tyranny. She has egocentric motivations and is callous regarding the individuals' experiences.

Aunt Frieda's disregard confirms Daniel's and Susan's perceptions of the nature of people's actions. Paul's sister's relationship with her nephew and niece is a metaphor for the relationship which humanity has with the children of political victims. She has a moral responsibility to take care of them. However, she is unable to do so by preferring to be ignorant and not having scruples in being neglectful towards them as a family member as well as human being.

In uncovering not only the transgressions of society, but of his family as well, Daniel refrains from exploiting his parents' relative innocence to create sympathy. Instead he is straightforward and consciously makes no attempt to hide the implication of Paul and Rochelle's relentless pursuit of their convictions. The "authority" with which Daniel's parents make decisions is also a reason for the direction of the causative process. Their confidence is reminiscent of other "tyrants" rigorous self-interest.

The liberal class to which Daniel's parents belong is represented as consisting of unpleasant individuals. When the Isaacsons are entertaining guests and Paul discusses politics with a man whose dexterity in argumentation he admires, Daniel dislikes the man because he is "show-offy" and regards himself "a big-shot" (BD, 99). Paul is equally authoritarian in forcing Daniel into a critical, leftist direction of thought. Daniel says of this category of liberals: "They were Stalinists and every instance of Capitalist America fucking up drove them wild" (BD, 51). The parents are, through their beliefs, pedantically assured of their actions, and as a result, subject their children to the consequences of their war.

When Susan's message that "they're still fucking us" is repeated, written in capital letters, Daniel says: "She didn't mean Paul and Rochelle. That's what I would have meant. What she meant was first everyone else and now the New Left" (BD, 169). Daniel considers the possibilities of who is meant by "they", i.e., the American government, the leftists of the fifties and the counterculture of the sixties as well as "the continuing, if not increasing, repressiveness of American life" (Detweiler, 1996:71). However, Detweiler does take the role of the Isaacsons into account as well: "It is even possible that she means their long-dead
parents are ‘still fucking us’, and that twist brings home, literally; the sexual-sadistic confusion of this family romance” (1996:71).

Injustice, equated to rape, appears in the form of various causative connections alongside the parents’ activism. A fellow American -- in national terms a brother figure -- assaults Susan in the name of duty during a protest against the Vietnam War: “She had been carrying a sign that read Girls Say Yes to Boys who Say No, and she was knocked down and a cop had tried to hit her between the legs. Susan unbuttoned the sleeves of her blouse and displayed her swollen wrists” (BD, 91). She most likely participates in the first place because she is instinctively responsive to social injustice. The police officer, on the other hand, misuses his power and consequently becomes a metaphorical rapist. This is similar to the way the Isaacsons unknowingly created their children's future:

Guilty of self-deception, both parents become accomplices in their own destruction. This illuminates one of Doctorow’s themes: the compulsion of the American Left to implicate itself in its own martyrdom. ... In different ways the children are imprisoned in the past: the novel recounts their struggles to deal with the burden of parental sins and break the chain of inherited injustices (Levine, 1985:43).

Not only were the children affected by the Isaacsons’ political ardour, but Ascher’s wife, Fanny, says of Daniel’s parents: “‘They were not innocent of permitting themselves to be used. And of using other people in their fanaticism. Innocent. The case ruined Jacob’s health’” (BD, 232). This confirms the Isaacsons’ apparent indifference to what other people experienced due to their self-justified actions.

Epstein acknowledges the culpability of country and government as represented by Daniel, yet chooses not to over-simplify the circumstances regarding Paul and Rochelle Isaacson. The couple, if guilty on the charges made against them, had still the self-righteous ambition to take matters regarding the whole Western world as well as their children into their own hands:

If the Isaacsons-Rosenbergs were innocent, then they are fully deserving not only of our sympathy but of our rage at their lives being viciously snuffed out. But if they were guilty, then a different set of questions and issues must be considered. If they were guilty of believing that the Western world was unfit to survive, and acted upon that belief by betraying Western secrets about the manufacture of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union, then the question is: Did they deserve to die for acting upon their beliefs as they did? This is a question that does not preclude sympathy for them even if they were guilty, but it does, at the same time, call for a different, graver response than rage at the barbarity of one’s own country (1977:88).

A defense for the Isaacsons would be that every person should have at least the freedom of his or her political beliefs if not actions. Fowler (1992:46) says that in historical reality, the Rosenbergs were circumstantially far more guilty -- or at least far more guilty-seeming -- than
Doctorow’s fictional analogues: “By making his Isaacsons more innocent than were the Rosenbergs, Doctorow makes their children’s plight more classically tragic” (Fowler, 1992:48). However, one should also consider that the fate of the children would have been even more tragic had the parents been able to prevent the injustice done to them and either ignorantly or consciously chosen not to.

Whether the Rosenbergs deserved an execution for acting upon their beliefs, i.e., by having been at least as politically active as the Isaacsons, seems to be a matter of opinion for historians and individuals who have first hand knowledge regarding the circumstances surrounding these people. However, the Isaacsons’ guilt is at least in one regard distinct when one considers the lack of discernment that contributes to the fate of their children. What morality is more important? Political faithfulness in a threatening time or the devotion to one’s children? A defense may be that the Isaacsons were fighting for a better future for their children. It seems like an admirable quest, but an idealistic and dangerous one. Whilst remaining well aware of the moral dilemma, one can nevertheless make the indictment that the Isaacsons are disregarding the well-being of their children due to their liberal politics within a rigorous anti-Communist context.

One recognizes that Daniel as victim is also not unlike his parents and his parents’ “enemies”. For Daniel to write about himself in a way that would create sympathy would defeat truthfulness. Daniel acknowledges what he is doing when he receives the telephone call that informs him of his sister’s suicide attempt. Fowler says the following in this regard:

The overvoice Daniel, the Daniel of the dark coves of the reading room, immediately shares with the reader his life concerns; some terrible news has last night been telephoned to him at this New York apartment to set in motion his family’s hitchhiking journey up to Worcester. And yet Daniel seems compelled to tell us that the terrible phone call, laden with potential heartbreak and patently a scene from which any writer could create sympathy, had caught him in flagrante delicto in the midst of a sort of marital rape of his weeping humiliated wife (1992:34-35).

His marriage becomes a microcosm of America in which he is the tyrant and Phyllis and his son the victims. Daniel recognizes the Isaacsons in his wife and son and the autocrat in himself. He says of his wife: “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” (BD, 16). That Daniel chose to marry Phyllis is therefore a result of his parents’ execution as well. Daniel continues to say: “I suggested to her that fucking was a philosophical act of considerable importance. I knew that in deference to this possibility she would allow herself to be fucked” (BD, 68). Phyllis, like Daniel’s parents, is a liberal who concedes to suffering
because of her convictions. She feels that she has to endure the suffering in order to justify her morality.

The resemblance between Daniel’s own family and his relationship with his parents in an abusive context demonstrates that he, his wife and son are not excluded from society. They belong to the same society with the same characteristics. In order to be honest and gain more understanding, Daniel cannot afford any “nepotism”. He does not overlook a single individual that might have contributed to how the nature of space changed for Susan and himself.

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Daniel’s awareness of the role of causality in his own and his sister’s lives has one distinct effect. He sees things differently: the meaning of his words, everything that he documents, is dependent on the interaction between what is on the page and his own experience of the world. Through the relationship between his writings and his experiences, or social evaluation -- as a reader of his own context -- he gives the world an exclusive meaning. Or, phrased in Medvedev’s and Bakhtin’s words:

To understand an utterance means to understand it in its contemporary context and or own, if they do not coincide. It is necessary to understand the meaning of the utterance, the content of the act, and its historical reality, and to do so, moreover, in the concrete inner unity (1978:121).

Therefore, the word does not enter the utterance from a dictionary, but from life, from utterance to utterance. The word passes from one unity to another without losing its way. It enters the utterance as a word of intercourse, permeated with the concrete immediate and historical aims of this communication (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978:122).

Ascher brings Daniel and Susan to Aunt Frieda after their parents have been arrested. The meaning of the context which Aunt Frieda provides cannot be unproblematic as their spell there causes further disillusionment. Disagreeable experiences at Aunt Frieda’s are unavoidable due to the physical surroundings to which they are subjected. The children are forced to share a bed. Daniel tells: “Susan was regressing and could not wake up to go to the bathroom. In the middle of the night a tide of urine gently lapped my pajamas. I awoke in the urine mists of dawn” (BD, 172). This is not a normal bed-wetting incident. It represents both Susan’s psychological state as well as a disturbance of the moment itself. The unfavourable circumstances should be interpreted as consequences of the Cold War. The meaning of the children’s experiences is therefore directly related to the country’s political situation which Medvedev’s and Bakhtin’s rejection of the transrational word would accept. The Cold War
influences the development of these individuals and ultimately their destinies in more ways than one.

The events at Aunt Frieda's are followed by another noteworthy representation of the physical experience of space, namely at the orphanage where they are brought to, subsequent to their parents' death. Their experience of reality denotes a simple sum: Daniel and Susan plus death of parents equals orphanage. The effects of association cannot be ignored here. The experience of the orphanage is therefore also equal in meaning to the death of their parents. Daniel writes:

I will never forget the smell of that lunchroom: it was a warm good smell, far better than the food. I suppose it was the smell of the vegetable soup which, since it eventually incorporated everything else, outsmelled everything else... 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, and when it was all soaked up, swept the gloppy mess with his broom and shovel. Then he'd mop around with a solution of ammonia... Maybe it was the smell of vomit which did something for the vegetable soup (BD, 179).

The unpleasantness of this description, similar to Susan's bed-wetting incident, appears to be mundane, but is not. Neither is it coincidental in Daniel's process of relaying events nor insignificant. When seen as an utterance in the context that Medvedev and Bakhtin (1978: 120) provide, it becomes much more:

Every concrete utterance, even if it consists of only one word, is a different case. Every concrete utterance is a social act. At the same time that it is an individual material complex, a phonetic, articulatory, visual complex, the utterance is also part of social reality.

Similarly, when Daniel and Susan decide to flee from the orphanage, Daniel recalls the detail of the city. Because space is associated with experience, every detail of the city takes on a meaning that is different from that of other individuals' experience(s) of the same city. The meaning of words like "orphanage" and "city" and the accompanying descriptions are dependent on the social reality of an individual and are much more complex than dictionary explanations:

The connection between meaning and sign [smysl i znak] in the word taken concretely and independently of the concrete utterance, as in a dictionary, is completely random and only of technical significance. Here the word is simply a conventional sign. There is a gap between the individuality of the word and its meaning, a gap which can only be overcome by a mechanistic linkage, by association (Medvedev and Bakhtin, 1978:120).

For Daniel, the city, like the orphanage, becomes equal to the cause of his parents' death: "Alone in the Cold War, Daniel and Susan run down Tremont Avenue" (BD, 189). Space
therefore “becomes” the Cold War just like demolished buildings can be equal to war. The irony here is that Daniel and Susan, although not the only victims of the Cold War, are nevertheless essentially alone in trying to escape the orphanage, and by implication, the Cold War and its effects. Isolation in a densely populated context is an ironic reality which is associated with the physical space of New York.

The meaning that space bears for the individual is therefore dependent on past experiences and cannot always have the same meaning that it has for another person. In geographical terms, one is never alone. Here, the reader becomes aware of the irony of heterogeneous coexistence: the human race is constantly faced with loneliness -- and the implications which it can have -- irrespective of whether we are surrounded by people.

An astronaut looking at the planet from outside the stratosphere will recognize that earth implies togetherness, i.e., the human race belongs from such a distance to a singular global context. The disregard of another’s suffering therefore seems to be accompanied by a certain cruelty. The irony heightens as the contexts of togetherness become smaller. There are simultaneous events no matter how small a context. Either through unawareness of tragedy, or awareness and concomitant reluctance or powerlessness to constructively intercede, seem to be inevitable.

This corresponds with Daniel’s representation of space as he documents it during his adulthood. The concept of America and the world as an extended, interconnected family reappears in Daniel’s book.

Despite the experience of isolation, the retrospective Daniel does not see himself and Susan as exceptions. He mentions his grandmother, a victim of Eastern European upheavals, as well as the Isaacsons’ companions in political alienation and how they have been abused during the Cold War. The contradiction of isolation in a context of “togetherness”, i.e., living together with other Americans, ensures irony:

People were losing their jobs and their careers for things they said or appeals they had supported fifteen years before. People were accused, investigated and fired from their jobs without knowing what the charges were, or who made them (BD, 132).

The most striking example of social togetherness juxtaposed to individual isolation is in the restaurant where Susan attempted to commit suicide. When Daniel and his foster parents visit the place, Daniel represents the concrete context of Susan’s suicide attempt. The following
picture emphasizes heterogeneous coexistence and the concomitant ironic discrepancy between casual activity and the grim reality of Susan’s isolation:

Daniel leaving the Howard Johnson’s dining room perceived walking ahead of him toward the crowds of people waiting for a table, the draped aqua ass of the hostess ... Daniel made his way through the hungry families standing on tiptoe. Kids swarmed in front of the candy display. Popcorn lay in the carpet. In the men’s room all the crappers but two required a coin in the slot. On the other side of the wall, Susan had opened her veins and stood over the toilet until she fainted. He tried to get the picture (BD, 38-39).

This representation of space is a historical utterance representing victimization. “Dining room” as a transrational term does not suffice to signify what it really means to Daniel. He realizes its meaning through his knowledge of Susan’s experience. Susan says to Daniel after her suicide attempt: “THEY’RE STILL FUCKING US” (BD, 169) and “YOU GET THE PICTURE, GOODBYE, DANIEL” (BD, 169). Daniel returns to the scene of the tragedy and tries to decode the “picture”. The “picture” can be equated with an assessment of reality, i.e., understanding: Daniel recognizes that all suffering including the reverberations of the Cold War continue in tandem with “normal” life.

The description above demonstrates how the specific consequences of the execution suffered by their parents, affect Daniel and Susan, but does not even have a minor effect on the daily lives of the American population.

Comparably, peaceful countries are often unaware of what precisely occurs in war-stricken countries. A lack of awareness and means to assist represent some of humanity’s dilemmas: war and the hardship that it causes are always neighbouring issues. Individuals who live, for example, in a comparatively peaceful country are focused on their own lives, tied to personal obligations, i.e., being without time, unable to successfully intervene due to a lack of practical means, financial priorities, et cetera, even if a moral longing to counteract the effects of war exists. Consequently, simple acts of daily living in a relatively secure environment become ironies due to heterogeneous coexistence. In relation to The Book of Daniel, one could argue that the irony is even more severe because the war does not take place in another country.

As the novel opens the people driving past the hitch-hiking Daniel, accompanied by his wife and son, are unaware that the man next to the road is a victim of an active war in their own country. Moreover, the reason why he is there, namely on his way to see his sister who has just attempted suicide, has inexorably connections with that war.
Every citizen inevitably has a relationship with Daniel. He is a victim of a national issue, yet he is a stranger to the common citizen who is most likely to be aware of the Isaacsons’ execution in the same sense that we are aware of the Rosenbergs’ execution. As Daniel hitchhikes with his wife and son: “... not many drivers could pass them without wondering who they were and where they were going” (BD, 13). When they are given a lift, “[t]he people who drove them were not fearful, but patronizing” (BD, 14).

Another important example of thoughtless behaviour towards Daniel and Susan is exemplified by the people during a protest against the Isaacsons’ execution. Susan is almost trampled by the masses. The issue of pardoning the Isaacsons causes the protestors to be completely oblivious to the children until they are identified. The protest’s humane consideration to help fellow human beings who are unfairly treated by their common government, becomes flawed by losing its credibility when the children are not given full consideration. Empathetic behaviour would have been acknowledgement of the children as individuals and to regard them not only as “the Isaacsons’ children”. They are used primarily as instruments for the protest. Harter and Thompson (1990:33) describe the reduction of the two individuals when they say that Daniel and Susan are used as psychological pawns in the social struggle. This is another form of tyrannical behaviour.

This kind of antagonistic behaviour is taken to an international level when Daniel asks: “Why do the facts of Russian national torment make Americans feel smug?” (BD, 26). The knowledge that all peoples belong to the family of the human race, sharing the impact of all human experiences and that all divisions are illusive is completely disregarded.

Subsequently, Daniel tells that two policemen took Susan to the nearest public asylum, instead of the nearest hospital following her suicide attempt. Their action is motivated by a prejudiced, discriminating classification of Susan as demented, because she does not match their conceptions of what a political, ideological and social identity ought to be. There are as many differences between them as there are between the two opposing parties of the Cold War, the USA and the late USSR as there are between Daniel and those who give him and his wife and child a lift. The Cold War appears to be a war which is not demarcated by dates of commencement and end. It is a civil war that still continues. When considering Medevedev and Bakhtin’s approach as well as Daniel’s demand for truth, the meaning of the term “Cold War” may not be limited to what historians would say it is. It is a permanent condition of which the hostility provoked by mistrust between the USA and the Soviet Union’s nuclear
power situation. can be seen as one effect. One of the novel’s epigraphs taken from Allen Ginsberg’s “America” is appropriate here:

America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing. ..
I can’t stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb (BD; my emphasis – PvdM).

Daniel recognizes a correspondence between how his sister is treated by fellow Americans and how the Americans feel about the Soviet Union: “On second thought these mysteries may not be unrelated” (BD, 26). One arrives at a well-known truth regarding international and national differences: they are often accompanied by tyranny from either one or both sides.

Through his writing, Daniel distinguishes himself from the common American citizen as an individual who does not lack awareness. This is apparent in the account of an event that is part of Daniel’s context, but has nothing to do with what happens to him. The image of a woman who was hit by a car while carrying milk bottles helps him to understand his own reality. He sees his parents’ fate as a duplication of this event:

   And we will be pinned, like the lady jammed through the schoolyard fence with her blood mixed with the milk and broken bottles. And our blood will hurt as if it had glass in it ...
   And that is exactly what happens (BD, 122).

Blood, connoting death, is unified with milk which signifies nourishment. This can be metaphorically equated with the Isaacsons’ ideal of sustaining and improving their lives. It is an empathetic relation that denotes an understanding that all of humanity endures suffering at times, yet, longs for security.

The keyword above would be “understanding”: Daniel’s deliberate recognition of the nature of heterogeneous coexistence, namely that divisions among people prevail despite parallel experiences, helps him to conquer the trauma that the past has caused for him.

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Daniel is determined to acknowledge not only the true nature of coexistence, but he also refuses to be deceived by certain situations in which the meaning of space plays an important role.

Equating suffering with existence is evident in events that bear a peculiar disposition which Daniel has regarding “friendly” situations. It appears that “friendliness” confuses him.
Experiences that do not adhere to his perception or expectation of what the meaning of all experiences is, i.e., not being determined by or external to his parents’ execution, propel him to become violent. He practically “corrects” such “friendly” experiences to make them fit his understanding of the nature of reality.

Daniel’s propensity to render meticulous representations of his current as well as past contexts signifies his preoccupation with honesty. This manifests itself as an inability to endure any form of falsehood. To Daniel, falsehood would be to ignore the experiences of the past which is essentially his “education in reality”.

This idiosyncrasy is clear in how he reacts to certain spaces. A longing to share in the “fiction” of other citizens, namely that the War does not exist, at least not for the periods that they do not think about it or lack awareness of it, is recognizable. Yet, he is ultimately unable to do so.

Daniel’s violent reaction to deceptive situations, i.e., any situation that deviates from his perception of what the nature of reality is, serves as evidence of Daniel’s commitment to “get the picture” which Susan wishes for him. An interpretation in this regard which requires modification reads as follows:

Daniel and Susan Lewin-Isaacson are the casualties of history. Each copes with this experience of trauma and loss differently -- Susan through desperate activism, Daniel through passivity and denial. Indeed, for over thirteen years Daniel has hidden from history, has withdrawn from its claims. He is married to a nineteen-year old woman and the father of an eight-month-old child. While he looks like the youth of the late 1960s, he really is not one of them. He prefers the safety of the library to the volatility of the streets. He prefers analysis -- which is what his father, Paul Isaacson, instilled in him, after all -- to political participation (Parks, 1991a:40).

Susan is initially indeed “active” in her struggle to find a way to deal with her past. It is, however, ultimately Susan who is associated with passivity and Daniel with activity. His “dissertation” and survival are proof that he does not deny his past. Daniel analyses and has the intention to know, to understand. He survives. Paul chose to analyse and criticize society and his country’s government and thus chose to be part of a section of society that wanted to dictate that change had to take place. He died because of his actions. Daniel’s earlier life is also a part of the process of survival. This is finally followed by a maturity that enables him to write which is a further active stage in the process of survival. The book does not limit Daniel’s experience to the safe walls of a library. No self-deception is present in Daniel’s documentation. This is recognizable due to the fact that he includes descriptions of how he
reacts to certain physical spaces. His unbalanced personality, shocking as it periodically is, should not be interpreted as signifying regression or hopelessness.

Daniel finds the idea of the secure compartment-like space where Ben Cohen, a friend of his parents works, attractive:

... he works for the City in the subway system, in a change booth. This seems to me a really fine job ... The only thing wrong about this job is that Ben Cohen never stays in one place (BD, 55).

This idealization of isolation remains a theoretical one. He comprehends through analysis that it does not provide a solution for him as it presents an unacceptable limitation of truth regarding reality. Later events that deal with confined spaces prove that self-deception is actually disastrous for Daniel and his family.

The first of two violent reactions to a confined space occurs while Daniel is driving with his wife, and their son in the back seat, through the rain. Daniel observes: "'I like the rain' ... 'The rain has the effect of a cocoon, it encapsulates us'" (BD, 67-68). This is followed by a fit of recklessness when he blackmails Phyllis to take off her pants. She acquiesces out of concern for their son when Daniel starts to drive recklessly. He then burns her with the car’s cigarette lighter. Parks (1991a:43) attributes this to feelings of isolation and powerlessness that cause Daniel like Hamlet to be cruel, especially to the woman in his life. Daniel is incapable of sustaining peacefulness: the result is deviant behaviour. He recommences victimization which he has suffered himself, albeit in another form. However, the fact that he documents this is positive.

Daniel is preoccupied with analysing the rain drops prior to abusing his wife. This analysis might have caused a cognition that brought the attack about:

Shattered raindrops appeared on the windshield, trying to anticipate the small explosions of rain. This was too difficult, so he fixed on one drop and followed its career. The idea was that his attention made it different from the other drops. It arrived, head busted, with one water bead as a nucleus and six or seven clusters in a circle around it. It was like a melted snowflake. Each of the mini-drop clusters combined and became elongated and pulled away in the direction of its own weight. As he accelerated the car, so did they increase their rate of going away from the center (BD, 67).

Stark offers a valuable perspective regarding this image, namely that the meanings of most of the images in the novel change as they are observed and that they are subsequently interrelated with one another: "The novel is to a large extent the sum of these observations and interrelations" (1974:110). This would imply that by creating a metaphor out of the rain,
Daniel realizes that there is no such thing as a “narrative unit” disconnected from society, no matter how mundane it may seem. Driving in the rain is an infinitesimal historical event that appears to be plain on its surface. However, Daniel’s reaction to this initially peaceful encapsulation denotes its incongruity with his past.

The formalist interpretation -- one that would ignore the experience of a broader context -- of what “driving in the rain with one’s wife and son” communicates, would exclude Daniel’s understanding that existence is not encapsulated and safe. He therefore transforms the pleasant, yet “dishonest” moment into an experience which is terrifying, yet “honest” regarding his conception of the nature of reality.

The second incident that measures up to the car episode, is when Daniel experiences another apparently sadistic fit and again the victims are his wife and son. The incident occurs whilst they are taking a peaceful walk in the park which changes drastically. He terrifies both mother and child by throwing his son up into the air in a dangerous manner, catching him close to the ground. This starts out as a game, but spirals out of control. Doctorow explicitly connects this scene with the previous one when he says in an interview:

I see the scene where he abuses his wife, for instance, as the same kind as the scene in which he throws his son up in the air. The act has existential dimensions. Daniel is over-tuned to the world. He doesn’t miss a thing. He’s a hero -- or a criminal -- of perception (McCaffery, 1983:46).

In other words, Daniel’s behaviour is a result of his perception. He recognizes the implications of the park’s peacefulness: Daniel is “over-tuned” to the dissonance of the illusive image of a happy family taking a walk in a park. To be part of this image in transrational terms would not even convey a limited truth. It would disregard social reality. Daniel instinctively refuses to lie to himself in that he does not miss the discrepancy between the peacefulness of the moment and his violent past.

The main character’s craving for “honesty” or truth is also discernible after he escapes from the “false space”. He renders a breathless, detailed description of his surroundings at Fourteenth Street, Tompkins Square Park as well as at Avenue B where he meets Artie Sternlicht (BD, 146-148). It is significant that this alertness and the meeting with Sternlicht follow the episode in the park. Parks says that Artie Sternlicht’s name suggests that “a revolutionary is an artist who casts new light on his moment” (1991a:47).

Daniel, an idiosyncratic student and artist, needs to see reality in a light that is familiar to him, viz. that everything is co-existing and affected by history. His consciousness evinces that
illusions regarding reality are followed by disaster and that in order to avoid being victimized, he too, instinctively, becomes a victimizer.

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Although Daniel successfully reprograms himself, he does not do this confidently. He attains a perspective that ensures his survival, but the historical process of causes and effects also affects his identity. Daniel is an aberrant individual, but at least he acknowledges this and makes no attempt to create sympathy for himself.

His identity is clearly a product of his circumstances. To substantiate this, one can turn to Tokarczyk who says the following about Daniel:

"Feeling unworthy of rescue, Daniel is full of guilt that manifests itself in his negative self-image. Repeatedly he describes himself as a ‘criminal of perception’ and ‘betrayal’. Daniel does have horrible streaks of cruelty that are revealed when he burns his wife with a cigarette lighter and tosses his baby higher and higher, catching him lower and lower. However, Daniel thinks of himself as a bad person. His sadistic acts are consistent with his poor self-image (1987:6-7)."

Self-analysis becomes part of Daniel’s larger “study”. Every description that exists in Daniel’s book is, according to Harter and Thompson (1990:38), a product of his expression of equal disparateness, a book “with a montage, if not a collage-like quality”. Artie Sternlicht says that “everything is significant, every small act changes the world” (BD, 168). Daniel is, however, far more anxious about comprehending the world than he is about changing it. This is the reason why he writes about his misdeeds and this is where the answer lies for the question of how he is able to survive. The only step towards survival is to define his relationship with the world and establish an interconnectedness among things.

The selection of details that constitute the book is not a collage. The world is the true collage and the book of Daniel the interpretation through the filter of the self.

An effect of his interpretation is that two seemingly disconnected things like, for example, a judge’s desire to be appointed to the Supreme Court and two children running alone in a city are brought together. This “ontological” depiction is also found in Daniel’s essay “An Interesting Phenomenon”. He describes actual American history and focuses on how the war spirit still reverberated nationally, in violent forms, after 1945: “The heart and mind cannot be demobilized as quickly as the platoon” (BD, 33). Examples are labour and police strikes that resulted in violence; a nationwide “red scare”; bombings of unknown origin, presumably planted by Communist terrorists, Black anarchists or their enemies; sedition; Communist
witch-hunts; Ku Klux Klan activity and patriarchal animosity towards immigrants (BD, 34-35). All these upheavals are connected to one another as reverberations of the Second World War. This gives Daniel the idea for an article which is a similar approach to the one that he uses in writing his book:

The radical discovers connections between available data and the root responsibility. Finally he connects everything. At this point he begins to lose his following. It is not that he incorrectly connected everything, it is that he has connected everything. Nothing is left outside the connections. At this point society becomes bored with the radical. Fully connected in his characterization it has achieved the counterinsurgent rationale that allows it to destroy him. The radical is given the occasion for one last discovery -- the connection between society and his death (BD, 155-156).

However, Daniel is not a radical like Susan, but focuses on representing his history and context painstakingly:

His father, Paul, has taught Daniel how to analyze: ‘he had that analytic tool’ (43). But it is Daniel’s mother, Rochelle, who knows how to connect (43). To become an artist Daniel must accept the legacy of both: he must analyze and connect (Lorsch, 1983:390-391).

It is of crucial importance to his survival that he does not depend on analysis and connections accompanied by the kind of radicalism associated with his parents and sister. The approach that seems to ensure Daniel’s survival is that he criticizes society, but he does not exhibit an objective to want to consciously improve society. He “connects” with the purpose to interpret his context, a collage, that has destructive effects.

Susan on the other hand, dies because she wants to change the world, yet does not want to understand it, believing that she already does. To really “get the picture” is too tormenting for her. Parks (1991a:41) says that what Daniel does is to reveal the secrets of America to America itself. Daniel compares this sentiment to what happens in a surrealist film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, “Un chien andalou” (1928):

But the central event of the picture is this: a hefty and darkly handsome man in a tight-fitting ribbed undershirt stands in a room sharpening a straight razor. A lady sits on a wooden chair in the room with him. She too is half-dressed. Her face is controlled. Through the window we see that it is a moonlit night and that there are clouds moving through the bright moonlit sky. The man comes over to the woman, large eyed, bow mouthed, and impassive in her straight-backed chair, and with his thumb and forefinger spreads her eyelids as far apart as they will go. Then he brings his straight razor down toward her face and her eyeball. The film cuts to the night sky outside the window. A thin, knifelike cloud is seen gliding across the bright orb of the moon. And just as you, the audience, have settled for this symbolic mutilation of the woman’s eye, the camera cuts back to the scene, and in close-up, shows the razor slicing into the eyeball (BD, 72-73).
Terrible as the images in the novel are, Daniel’s graphic representations have a specific purpose: “On the other hand the only thing worse than telling what happened is to leave it to the imagination” (BD, 72). This is the motivation of documenting his whole history which includes a meticulous description of his parents’ execution. One could conclude that imagining, for example, the Isaacsons’ death, is far more disturbing than that what any individual -- like Susan -- could endure on a permanent basis whilst remaining hopeful that circumstances would improve.

Susan dies like her parents because she wanted to change the world due to constantly thinking about the horror of the past. Daniel says at the end of the novel: “My sister is dead. She died of a failure of analysis” (BD, 317). But was this ever her objective? Susan was never able to accept in any way a world that killed her parents.

She attempts to commit suicide on her way to add a poster of her parents to Artie Sternlicht’s girlfriend, Baby’s, collage. The meaning of adding the poster to the collage could be the motivation of Susan’s wish to end her life. The change that the single fragment brings about is not obvious. Sternlicht purports that this will contribute to wider change. His claim that “we” (BP, 155) (the New Left or he and his girlfriend?) will overthrow the United States with images, reveals his defective ardour. Levine addresses this when he says that

“This is a position of radical individualism which reveals two weaknesses. First, it underestimates the political power of the State and, second, it overestimates the revolutionary power of the individual (1983:190).

The ambition to change society bears the hazard of traumatic disappointment or even fatality.

By adding the poster to the ever expanding collage implies to Susan that her parents have become a fragment which would be constantly reduced in size and importance as other items are added. This is exactly how reality functions: historical events that are prominent, at a certain time, become inevitably overshadowed in people’s consciousness by more recent events. Stark (1974:104) maintains that Susan would be repudiating her parents in favour of her radical politics by adding the poster to the collage which depicts the enemies of the radical Sternlicht. This would cause an even more severe reduction of the Isaacsons’ presence in history. Susan fails to achieve a balance between retaining the knowledge of her parents’ history as central to her life and recognizing them as a crucial part of a historical context. On top of everything else, the implication of shallow images accompanying her parents’ picture might add to her despondency:
The wall is interesting. It is completely covered with a collage of pictures, movie stills, posters, and real objects. Babe Ruth running around the bases, Marlon Brando on his bike, Shirley Temple in her dancing shoes, FDR, a bikini sprayed with gold paint, Marilyn Monroe on her calendar, Mickey Mouse ... (BD, 150).

Susan is not able to deal with the implications of the collage and the world. The effect is that she fails to integrate with the social context and becomes a “starfish”, i.e., completely lethargic, introverted and antisocial. Fowler and Levine provide explanations for Susan’s spiritual death which leads to her physical death:

Susan, her creator feels, could only try to limit the truth she could handle, and the effort to reduce the dimensions of her tragedy is too much for her. She not only believes in the innocence of her parents, she believes that something must be forthcoming from the American national conscience in order to justify her parents’ destruction, to compensate for their literal self-sacrifice. But the implications of her nation’s act against her family are finally too much for her, and she becomes a proxy victim of the electric chair that killed her parents (Fowler, 1992:51-52).

Finally we may say Susan dies of heart failure: the failure of the heart to keep itself intact in the face of the world’s injustices (Levine, 1983:191).

Daniel is also tempted to give up for the same reasons that Fowler and Levine mention. In the orphanage, he starts to imitate a child dubbed the “Inertia Kid”. Daniel finds that it becomes increasingly difficult to stop: “In order to do like he did you had to disconnect your heart muscle ...” (BD, 187). However, Daniel’s writing distinguishes itself as a means to survive by remaining a social entity opposed to Susan’s frame of mind. Daniel’s book is painstakingly truthful. He does not eschew any unpleasantness in acknowledging society’s, his parents’ and his own guilt.

Describing the cold-hearted nature of society is a central part of Daniel’s writing process. His experiences at school can be seen as representative of the strain of remaining a social being within an antagonistic context:

One day the principal came into our room and spoke to the teacher up at the board so that no one could hear him. After he left, I was asked by my teacher to go to another room for a few minutes. It was an empty room and I sat there the rest of the day ... I was told by kids in my class that in prison they pull your fingernails out with a pliers, and they chain you to the wall, and it’s always dark, and the rats eat you ... I was told that the Army had already shot my father because he was a Russian. I was told that General MacArthur flew all the way from Japan to cut off my father’s prick with a scissors (BD, 139-140).

This experience reveals that even the youth is not exempt from partaking in the vices of Western culture. It appears to be a logical decision to disapprove and reject such a society. Yet, although tempted to “disconnect his heart muscle”, Daniel’s analysis and connections seem to be no less instinctive. Parks formulates Daniel’s attitude as follows: “As enraged
survivor, as adversary, as alien within his own society, Daniel struggles to transmute the legacy of defeat and death into a new basis of life” (1991a:38). Survival is therefore linked with the obsession of documentation which is equal to the preoccupation of the writer, artist and historian with his or her subject. The subject of these roles always has a social nature.

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_The Book of Daniel_ sensitizes the reader to the fact that the members of a nation and people all over the world are connected with one another. We are virtually an extended family. However, nations are marked by ignorance and indifference regarding coexistence. The example given is that people who contributed to the Isaacsons’ execution as well as those who have not treated Daniel and Susan in a compassionate manner did not consider the corollaries of their actions. Similarly, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson themselves were not cautious in considering what the effects of their political beliefs within an unambiguously anti-Communist context would have had on their children’s lives.

Daniel examines the circumstances that brought the distinctiveness of his and his sister’s lives about in order to survive. He finds that the context in which he grew up, and lives, is determined by the selfishness and concomitant cruelty of people. His past forms the meaning of his existence which is seldomly surrounded by purely benevolent powers. He finds that people do not have the capacity to intervene in crises, for example, his sister’s suicide. Furthermore, Daniel also realizes that people with belief and career motivated intentions have the potential to be dangerous and are extremely untrustworthy.

His method to survive is consequently to understand the nature of existence: to know what he is dealing with. Daniel develops a demand for truth and a rather dramatic rejection to that which he considers to be untruthful.

This is clearly the more difficult path to follow. Daniel disavows resignation and does not allow himself to be seduced by any form of escapism, for example, by favouring situations that are distinctly incongruous with past experience.

Daniel accepts society without condoning its crimes. Unlike Susan, he continues to live as a social being in a social context that proves itself as hostile. His ambition is not change, but knowledge gained through writing or “reading” the “text” which is reality. It is therefore clear that, as Lorsch puts it, in _The Book of Daniel_ “... art does not separate the artist from his
society; rather, art results from that separation and is, in fact a healthy and valuable response to alienation” (1983:385).

Doctorow’s subsequent novel, *Ragtime*, continues the approach of *The Book of Daniel*. It takes historical subject matter and defamiliarizes it. The author shifts the focus away from “historical facts” towards how the experience of characters’ experiences of events create meaning.
CHAPTER 2

RAGTIME: THE ILLUSION OF A FRAGMENTED SOCIETY

Ragtime (1974), Doctorow’s fourth novel, is widely regarded as his greatest commercial success. Many critics conclude that the novel is an intricately interconnected collection of characters and story lines. It is also famous for incorporating an adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas (1810/1811). In Ragtime a mysterious narrator introduces a WASP family whose lives become involved with the lives of a young black mother and her friend, Coalhouse Walker Jr., who eventually becomes her fiancée. Walker is a proud black man who, like Kohlhaas, rebels against the injustices of society. White men vandalize his Model T Ford, but do not encounter any legal or moral opposition from within society because of their crime. Subsequently, Walker encounters continual resistance and punishment for his attempts to see justice triumph.

This chapter will examine the detailed “composition” of a context set in the first half of the twentieth century. In this representation one finds directly as well as indirectly connected and parallel stories. Walker’s history which enfolds in this context reveals that the narrator/writer “de-composes” social fragmentation, i.e., he shows that social fragmentation is an illusion.

The aim of this chapter is to present an account of the seemingly diverse contexts which represent interconnectedness: to examine the role of the narrator and how he represents causality.

“Context” in relation to the concepts “narrator” and “causality” is of central importance in Ragtime. The novel’s comprehensive juxtapositioning of various aspects of a context’s interconnectedness exposes the superficial nature of society’s fragmentation. The juxtapositions are made possible through one consciousnessness: the intersections and their consequences are literally imagined by the narrator. Examining how causality manifests itself in the novel is an inherent component of examining the relationship between context and text.

Ragtime not only postulates the hypothetical interaction between people in order to represent the world as we, the readers, know it, but is also an illustration of an artistic principle. McHale identifies the ontological dominance of postmodernist fiction relevant to Ragtime and all of Doctorow’s other novels: “... typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects ... ”
(1993:10). One should therefore be aware of the narrator's presence, and what he brings into effect by what he allows to happen by intersecting the characters' worlds.

The central questions to be addressed in this chapter are: How does the narrator represent the context in the novel? What is the role of the narrator and how does he represent causality in his narration?

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V.N. Voloshinov presents a point in "Language, Speech, and Utterance" that throws light on the way in which contexts are represented in Ragtime. In this second chapter of Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1930), Voloshinov discusses the utterance and its role in social contexts. In order to establish a theoretical basis for the argument, it may be helpful to compare the novel's "utterances" to Voloshinov's concept.

Voloshinov's essay is similar to the criticism against the formalists' approach to language discussed in the previous chapter: he criticizes "abstract objectivism" which reduces language to a system of fixed signals that consequently decontextualizes language:

Representatives of abstract objectivism constantly stress -- and it is one of their basic principles -- that the system of language is an objective fact external to and independent of any individual consciousness. Actually, represented as a system of self-identical, immutable norms, it can be perceived in this way only by the individual consciousness and from the point of view of that consciousness (1973:65).

If we advance this abstract segregation to the status of a principle, if we reify linguistic form divorced from ideological implementation, as certain representatives of the second trend, then we end up dealing with a signal and not with a sign of language-speech. The divorce of language from its ideological implementation is one of abstract objectivism's most serious errors (1973:71).

The context in which language operates (and it can of course only operate when there are users that form contexts) is therefore not taken into account by abstract objectivism. A context will affect any individual's consciousness and determine the character of his or her utterances:

The speaker's subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms. That system is merely an abstraction arrived at with a good deal of trouble and with a definite cognitive and practical focus of attention ... In point of fact, the speaker's focus of attention is brought about in line with the particular, concrete utterance he is making. What matters to him is applying a normatively identical form (let us grant there is such a thing for the time being) in some particular, concrete context (1973:67).
The utterances of the novel’s narrator are relevant to a general historical context. They are not isolated from one another, but function in harmony to shape a context by which meaning is generated.

Furthermore, the novel and its social commentary gain even more credibility if and when the novel’s utterances have an impact on the reader. A connection between the real world and the fictional world is established if the implications of utterances are recognized with the help of either sensibility, personal experience or theoretical knowledge which the reader has acquired earlier. The significance of, for example, “There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants” (R, 11-12) is an inconsiderate frame of mind typical of a the represented context. It is amplified by another set of utterances, namely the story of Walker’s victimization as well as the reader’s reception of this representation of a cosmopolitan context.

It appears at first that Doctorow’s literary utterances are based upon the principle of fragmentation, i.e., in his use of language as well as in his representation of society. However, the narrator often makes it possible for the reader to make connections. The connections between some stories are easily recognizable, others are less clear. But there is probably not a single utterance in Ragtime that cannot be meaningfully related to another. What is meaningful is that they are all connected to one another by a context in which the narrator functions as a central consciousness arranging the “fragments”.

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Ragtime is a novel that depicts the social diversity of the broader American context. The characters that appear in the novel include a wide spectrum of both fictionalized historical figures and fictional characters of differing race, culture and socio-political class. Trenner summarizes the major character categories by saying that Doctorow

... places together social groups that in ‘real life’ would almost never directly interact except in rigidly prescribed roles which acknowledge unequal power. These social groups include disenfranchised blacks (represented by Coalhouse Walker and his followers); poor immigrants (like Tateh, a Latvian Jew); the white middle class (exemplified by the family from New Rochelle); radicals (like Emma Goldman); and the aristocracy of capital (the chief examples, Henry Ford and Pierpont Morgan) (1983:9).

There are also characters that appear to be peripheral, yet are essential because they indicate that the context which is marked by diversity is shared.

To illustrate how context functions in Ragtime, it is instructive to consider a marginal character like Charles Victor Faust, who is important precisely because he is marginal. Faust
is a retarded man who temporarily is the mascot for a baseball team. Taking into account Voloshinov’s argument that the meaning of a word results from its context (1973:79) as *a priori*, one could argue that as a narrative “unit” Charles Victor Faust gains meaning through the context in which he functions. His name ironically reflects aristocracy and intellect: even a simpleton is “elevated” by the novel to share a context with presidents and billionaires. The same principle is discernible regarding the poor and marginalized groups in the novel.

The principle behind this kind of juxtaposition is well summarized by Trenner who asserts that Doctorow is concerned with “the morality of connection and disconnection -- of human relatedness and unrelatedness -- on various scales, from an entire society to a single family” (1983:5). This is characteristic of *The Book of Daniel* and *Ragtime*, namely that characters are linked through a context or contexts. Fowler also remarks that, in *Ragtime*, “[c]lose reading ... is linked with major or minor -- in many cases minute -- connections” (1992:66).

However, some critics are skeptical about Doctorow’s juxtapositions. Harter and Thompson (1990:68) refer to Todd who maintains the opposite of Fowler’s perception, namely that “the essential lesson of *Ragtime*’s animated, jagged, syncopated prose is that nothing connects.” The novel certainly presents a jagged appearance. However, Doctorow does provide connections despite the impression of disconnection which the represented world’s present and historical reality engenders. In doing so, he “de-composes” the concept that America and by implication all the people of the world are disconnected from one another.

Unfortunately, misunderstanding this consideration leads some critics to the misconception that some of Doctorow’s descriptions have no significance. Green says that

> [i]t is notable how the author lingers on scenes of sumptuous wealth. The scenes of poor and uncomfortable life are shorter, and anyway the squalor is transformed into a kind of luxury, the luxury of picturesque historical evocation (1975:842).

An even more severe criticism maintains that Doctorow creates an insincere humanist view that leads the reader to luxuriate in the “re-creation of the cars, clothes, furnishings, and *mores* of an unregenerate capitalist age” (Claridge, 1990:17).

The writer’s well crafted descriptions are not meant solely for meaningless entertainment: they do not function on their own and should be viewed within the context of the whole novel. The effect that Doctorow achieves through descriptions of the material world are as Parks (1991a:62) says not to trivialize history, but to demystify it and to promote a new historical consciousness. The novelist achieves this by means of a syncopation of a number of
oppositions and tensions (Parks, 1991b:459). The reader once again realizes what the
tremendous diversity of America, past and present, involves. Child labour, enduring slum life
through a heat wave, the lynching of black people and many other realities are juxtaposed to
"the solid ample furniture and clothes, the wallpaper and the staircases, the motorcars and
corsets and hair styles ... " (Green, 1975:842).

The aim of the narrator is not to represent the world as it seems to be, but to show it as it
really is, i.e., undermining the concept of the world as a fragmented entity. However, the
narrator is not merely concerned with ontology, but also indicts wealthy individuals of not
using their financial power to combat poverty.

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The identity of the narrator in Ragtime is never as clear as in The Book of Daniel, but critics
agree in general that "the little boy" is the novel's central consciousness, who, as an older
man reflects on the events of his youth. The narrator is similar to Daniel in that he is an
insider. He knows a specific context very well and although he creates the impression that he
chooses to relate as much as possible, his selection of what he wants to communicate is
actually done with care, involving a degree of subjectivity.

Predisposition implies that the narrative is the invention of the little boy, the fictional "writer"
of Doctorow's novel. The text is therefore a reconstruction of the context in which the
narrator actually lived as well as actual history. The matter of selection within the novel is
emphasized and is significant in focusing the reader's attention on what may be representative
of the fictional and real histories. It is a text that refers to a common WASP family who could
have existed at the turn of the century, a time when people like Theodore Roosevelt, Booker
T. Washington, Sigmund Freud and Emilio Zapata lived. There is no doubt that some of the
facts that Doctorow imparts about such figures are not always historically verifiable. What
they do and say in the novel, however, contributes to what Doctorow wishes to communicate
about the historical and present American context. By fictionalizing the narrator's authentic
context, the reader becomes aware of how mysterious history often is.

Green objects to this subjectivity:

But what is still more disagreeable is the conjunction of this candy-sucking
comfortableness of nostalgia with a radical severity of judgement of the characters. The
characterization of Coalhouse Walker, the black revolutionary, and Sarah, his martyred
wife, is uncritically romantic; while within the white family at the center of the novel the
author's sympathies are awarded lavishly to Younger Brother, because he is vaguely
rebellious, and most niggardly to Father, because he is a businessman and explorer and head of the family ... (1975:842-843; my emphasis -- PvdM).

The first problem with this assessment is that Green does not seem to keep the writer and the narrator separate. Does he refer to the little boy as writer or Doctorow? Secondly, the little boy may be not as traumatized as Daniel, but he has indeed witnessed horrific events. Sale is not so brutal in his evaluation regarding subjectivity:

Because so many of the juxtapositions are of nasty rich and suffering poor, his politics tend to seem leftist, but Doctorow tells with amusement and affection the story of a radical starving Jewish artist on the Lower East Side who becomes Baron Ashkenazy, movie maker and millionaire (1975:21).

The narrator's enthusiastic tone is marked by a straightforward manner, resulting in confident and at times extremely serious reporting. He knows exactly how he wants to depict the past, and a cue to the narrator's manipulation lies in the episode when the little boy meets Houdini. He says to Houdini that he should “warn the Duke”:

The little boy had followed the magician to the street and now stood at the front of the Pope-Toledo gazing at the distorted macrocephalic image of himself in the shiny brass fitting of the headlight. Houdini thought the boy comely, fair like his mother, and tow-headed, but a little soft-looking. He leaned over the side-door. Goodbye, Sonny, he said holding out his hand. Warn the Duke, the little boy said. Then he ran off (R, 16-17).

Houdini remembers the little boy when it is much too late, namely during a performance hanging high up over Times Square. The little boy's direction alludes to a meeting, prior to Houdini's recollection, between Houdini and Franz Ferdinand (R, 84) and the eventual fate of the Archduke in Sarajevo. In the narration an event that prompted the First World War could ironically have been defused -- by Harry Houdini. This set of circumstances emphasizes unexpected coexistence as well as ignorance represented by the Archduke himself with regard to parallel developments in a specific time context:

When he landed he was escorted to the big Daimler. The chauffeur opened the door and stood at attention. Sitting in the car was the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne ... The Archduke didn't seem to know who Houdini was. He congratulated him on the invention of the aeroplane (R, 84).

Berryman speculates that the little boy's foreknowledge can be ascribed to “the omniscient perspective gained from the experience which has been sifted through recollection and supported by research” (1982:36). He continues to present an interesting problem: “But early in the novel there is a bizarre moment when the dialogue of the little boy, not the voice of the mature narrator, reveals an accurate and unexpected knowledge of the future” (Berryman, 1982:36). However, there is no guarantee that the narrator is reliable and the warning is most
probably the mature narrator’s invention. Parks presents a persuasive understanding: the boy’s knowledge is a gesture of freedom and historical consciousness which as composing artist the narrator has to make (1991b:459). It is an example of the narrator’s manipulation. The narrator has the power to re-create the coincidences of reality according to his own subjectivity or inspiration.

The little boy’s prophecy should therefore be seen as “prolepsis”: “... any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later ...” (Genette, 1980:40). The narrator knows what the outcome of his stories are or what he wants them to be and may want to create instances of poetic justice. “Prolepsis” is an appropriate technique which emphasizes the auctorial involvement of the narrator. Therefore, the utterances are, as Voloshinov would argue, supposed to be read as a collection, which all contribute to the constitution of a meaningful representation of a context.

The little boy’s forewarning does not stand alone as an instance of prolepsis, but is part of a range of characters’ anticipation of change. These are mainly presented by means of premonitions. When Mother and Father make love quite early in the novel she thinks: “Yet I know these are happy years. And ahead of us are only great disasters” (R, 18). This can only be related partly to the unhappiness of the marriage: “The marriage seemed to flourish on Father’s extended absences” (R, 17). But there are indeed disasters ahead of the family that are impossible to predict. The reader is able to recognize Father’s and Younger Brother’s death in retrospect as a confirmation of Mother’s vague anticipation. It is likewise clear in retrospect that Mother refers to the fate of characters whom she had not even met at that stage, namely the destiny of Sarah and Coalhouse Walker.

When her own life intersects with Sarah’s, Mother senses that “[t]he Negro girl and her baby had carried into the house a sense of misfortune, of chaos, and this feeling resided here like some sort of contamination” (R, 59-60). This experience indicates that the narrator not only manipulates what happens to the characters, but that he is also the manipulator of their thoughts and fears. He realizes this in due course. The narrator gives Father a certain reaction when he sees an immigrant ship on his way to the North Pole: “Father, a normally resolute person, suddenly foundered in his soul. A weird despair had seized him” (R, 18-19). This foreshadows Father’s death on the Lusitania as well as the marriage between an immigrant and his widow. Father’s anticipation of disaster continues following his return from the North Pole expedition. He decides that “God had punishments in store so devious there was no sense trying to anticipate what they were” (R, 87). One may speculate that the
reason for the narrator “killing” Father may be seen as the narrator’s wish to accommodate his sense of justice in view of Father’s transgressions.

The personality of E.L. Doctorow that a reader could re-create through the published information available about him and essays by the author himself, leads one to believe that the narrator of *Ragtime* is most likely a personality that shares certain sentiments with his creator. Yet, the narrator is primarily an instrument which the author utilizes in order to make the point that one could come to a better understanding of the past and present world through an artistically crafted, and by implication subjective, reportage. Two significant facets of this approach are the way in which the narrator portrays connections among people and the experimental techniques used to foreground that the information is about the actual world, but is nevertheless done in a non-journalistic, fictional mode.

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One would misinterpret virtually all of Doctorow’s fiction if one did not recognize that by depicting opposing social spheres, Doctorow presents a “bird’s eye view” of social contexts. Brienza addresses this aspect of the author’s work when she remarks that

> Doctorow’s transposing of ragtime’s polyrhythm (simultaneous and sharply contrasting rhythms in a composition) means that the shifts of accent between the rich and the poor, the famous and the mundane, co-occur (1981:102).

She continues by saying: “Hence, perhaps, another reason for the large number of coincidences and intersections of plot and the many repetitions of phrases like ‘at this time in our history’” (1981:102). Here Brienza includes the likelihood that co-occurrences come into contact with one another and influence further developments. Winkler (1988:112) remarks that the “interweaving of story lines is both imaginative and complex, and while the method could make the story seem unreal, in fact it gives it a realistic tenor”. This interpretation sees connections and co-occurrences as controlled by a central consciousness, namely the narrator.

The most obvious connection manipulated by the author, is that of Coalhouse Walker’s intertextual counterpart, Heinrich von Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas who, in turn, has an authentic counterpart, Hans Kohlhaas (Reske, 1969:130). Knorr addresses the point of shared injustice, which Doctorow transforms for his purposes:

> The dominant theme of the Coalhouse episode, outraged innocence seeking to force justice upon an unjust world through terrorism, is likewise the dominant theme, overtones included, of Kleist’s novella, not to mention certain public events in our age. In adopting
Kohlhaas as model Doctorow transforms the theme of class discrimination of the Reformation to that of racial discrimination in our era (1976:226).

Doctorow adapts fictionalized history to simulate relevant history. He contends that connections exist between a historical figure, two fictional figures, and any individual in any multicultural contexts whose life corresponds to a greater or lesser extent with that of Coalhouse Walker’s life.

The novel also reflects connections not only through correspondences, but also through differences. The relationship between Coalhouse Walker Jr. and Harry K. Thaw is consequential even if they never meet. An ironic connection exists between them. It bears few similarities which ultimately only strengthens the prominence of their opposing moralities and fates. They inhabit the same world at the same time and share the identity of a criminal from the perspective of the fictional public. Yet, the discrepancies of their characters and how they are treated after they have been convicted are ironically dissimilar. This juxtapositioning emphasizes the theme of racism. Thaw is a perverse thug whilst Walker is a refined musician. Thaw abuses Nesbit. Walker’s conduct towards Sarah is impeccable. Thaw commits murder because of jealousy and an inherent violent nature. Walker says to Booker T. Washington:

> It is true that I am a musician and a man of years. But I hope this might suggest to you the solemn calculation of my mind. And that therefore, possibly, we might both be servants of our color who insist on the truth of our manhood and the respect it demands (R, 209).

Walker’s maltreatment during his legal quest for justice is constant. While in prison Thaw is given special treatment by the guards: “His behavior fascinated the guards. It was seldom that they had people of his class. Thaw was not really fond of the jail fare so they brought in his meals from Delmonico’s” (R, 26). Walker is finally drawn to terrorism and death while the novel ends on the wry note: “And Harry K. Thaw, having obtained his release from the insane asylum, marched annually at Newport in the Armistice Day parade” (R, 236). Walker and Thaw do not suffer a similar fate because of their differences regarding wealth and race, but the discrimination that Walker experiences is avenged and unites a community in suffering. It is observable how interconnections and their ironic implications shape the nature of the novel’s reality.

The writer employs the narrator to painstakingly and consciously depict a context. The fictional context demonstrates how a context almost always consists of a national population with social, cultural, economic and moral differences. The novel’s beginning includes an intentionally erroneous observation in order to indicate a cultural group’s frame of mind:
“There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants” (R, 11-12). The narrator revokes this observation by introducing a new objectivity: “Apparently there were Negroes. There were immigrants” (R, 13). As in the previous chapter, ignorance contributes to the irony of heterogeneous coexistence.

The narrator emphasizes that different people and groups are never too different from one another. They may, however, share a similar fate. For example, New Yorkers whose ancestors were themselves immigrants, despise the new immigrants. The offences of the immigrants are mockingly represented by the narrator from the consciousness of the “native” New Yorkers to expose their xenophobia. The new immigrants

... were filthy and illiterate. They stank of fish and garlic. They had running sores. They had no honor and worked for next to nothing. They stole. They drank. They raped their own daughters. They killed each other casually (R, 19).

This relation then continues from the narrator’s own point of view, ceasing the mocking tone:

Among those who despised them the most were the second-generation Irish, whose fathers had been guilty of the same crimes. Irish kids pulled the beards of old Jews and knocked them down. They upended the pushcarts of Italian peddlers (R, 19).

The “native” New Yorkers are intimidating people who were in exactly the same situation in which their ancestors were. They have neither the perspective nor the compassion to appreciate the likeness that exists between themselves and the newcomers.

The novel argues that similarities exist despite differences. Resemblance is a significant principle in Ragtime. Emma Goldman addresses this in a conversation with Evelyn Nesbit. She says: “But there are correspondences, you see, our lives correspond, our spirits touch each other like notes in harmony, and in the total human fate we are sisters” (R, 52). When Father returns from his expedition to the North Pole with Robert Peary he sees on Mother’s bedside table a copy of The Ladies’ Battle by Molly Elliot Seawell and a pamphlet on the subject of family limitation by Emma Goldman. Mameh, Nesbit, Goldman and Mother are all pseudo-prostitutes and all except Goldman are also mother figures to the Little Girl. Mother’s compliance to “assume the indelicate attitudes that answered to his needs” (R, 17) is reminiscent of Nesbit’s submission to Thaw (R, 27). Through her marriage to the wealthy Harry K. Thaw, Nesbit prostitutes herself. Goldman tells Nesbit that she once had the intention as a younger woman to prostitute herself for the sake of a revolutionary cause. Nesbit experiences sisterhood with the absent Mameh, Tateh’s wife: “Evelyn felt a strong kinship with the departed mother” (R, 43). Tateh was unable to forgive Mameh and continue
to live with her after she prostituted herself in order to generate money for her family. Nesbit's departure from Tateh and the Little Girl is another similarity between Mameh and herself.

This "sisterhood" is, however, not only gender-orientated, but also a metaphor that illustrates how all people, whether as cultural groups, socio-economic groups or as individuals, find themselves in similar situations.

Equal to this "sisterhood" are examples of "brotherhood" that illustrate in a similar way the idea that people are fellows in humanity. For example, it appears that Henry Ford accepts J.P. Morgan's suggestion that Ford is Seti I reincarnated (R,109). Reincarnation is Ford's explanation for his success (R, 116). Younger Brother virtually becomes Leo Czolgosz, President McKinley's assassin:

Goldman said he reminds me of Czolgosz. Reitman said he is educated, a bourgeois. But the same poor boy in the eyes, Goldman said. The same poor dangerous boy. Younger Brother saw himself standing in line to shake the hand of William McKinley. A handkerchief was wrapped around his hand. In his handkerchief was a gun. McKinley fell back. Blood died his vest. There were screams (R, 130).

This comparison sensitizes the reader to the character's aptitude. The causative background of the rebellion is of great significance especially in the Coalhouse Walker story. Younger Brother is like Czolgosz as they are inclined to act furiously when they interpret intersections that occur between individuals to be unjust.

However, interconnections in the novel also appear in less dramatic forms. Stade observes that Emma Goldman takes in Evelyn Nesbit as Mother takes in Sarah and Evelyn Nesbit takes in the Little Girl "as one musical phrase may combine with others, and as one theme may echo another" (1975:2). Fowler (1992:65) provides a list of coincidental connections that vary between mundane and significant ones and Moses observes that

[the blackness of the Negro, for example, is related to the blackness of the silhouette portraits fashioned by Tateh, the street-corner artist, and these connect with the self-imposed blackness of Younger Brother who becomes -- in blackface -- a minstrel of revolution and bomb artist (1975:310-311).]

Kauffmann also provides an insightful list, worthy of quoting in full:

Linkages and parallels are the materials of this novelist, as they are of many historians. Linkages: when Father, who is a member of an explorer's club, sails for the North Pole with the arctic voyager Robert E. Peary, their ship passes an incoming steamer crowded with immigrants, presumably including Tateh and his Little Girl. Henry Ford is seen as the perfecter of a machine and an industrial system that will revise society; when...
Coalhouse gets embroiled in social violence, it’s because of his Ford. Parallels: Evelyn Nesbit Thaw, visiting Tateh’s tenement room, is bathed and massaged by the veteran anarchist. In the West Room of the Morgan Library, Henry Ford and J.P. Morgan converse as younger and older monarches disposing of the world; later, in the West Room during the insurrection, Coalhouse and Booker T. Washington, who is acting as mediator, converse like younger and older monarches of racial revolution. And in and out of the whole book, Houdini, the visionary vaudevillelilian, the escape artist who disrupts conventional acceptances, weaves like a thread of wonder (1975:22).

This “small world” idea is also present in the following connections that are not mentioned by either Fowler or Kauffmann. There is a connection between the immigrant Tateh and the architect Stanford White who had an affair with Evelyn Nesbit, the wife of Harry K. Thaw who in turn killed White. Tateh shows his wife, Mameh, and their daughter, buildings designed by White. This seems to be a superficial connection, but one which involves another meaningful interconnection. The immigrant family’s presence is not wanted in the uptown neighbourhood because an immigrant, like Tateh, who was coincidentally a lover of Emma Goldman, attempted to assassinate the steel millionaire, Henry Frick.

Interconnections are also observable when Harry Houdini meets the New Rochelle WASP family and sees Thaw during an escape act in prison. Thaw and the family are connected because Mother’s Younger Brother and Thaw’s wife, Evelyn Nesbit, have an affair. Nesbit is in love with both Tateh and his little girl. Later on they become Mother’s husband and stepdaughter. When the black musician, Coalhouse Walker, occupies the J.P. Morgan library, the District Attorney Whitman is on his way to the summer cottage belonging to Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish. Earlier in the novel Fish had asked Houdini to give a performance at her house. The reason for her request is to use Houdini for a commemorative ball in honour of the deceased Stanford White. J.P. Morgan is connected to Walker because he threatens to explode Morgan’s library. The paths cross briefly between that of McGraw, the coach of a baseball team, and Morgan. One remembers McGraw because Father and the little boy visit one of his baseball games. Coalhouse Walker is of course connected to the family via Sarah, his lady friend, and subsequently, fiancée. J.P. Morgan’s fascination with Egypt is the reason why the Egyptian style becomes fashionable. This inspires Mother’s choice in furniture and the little boy’s games. These seem to be mundane connections, but they describe how reality functions.

The novel’s interconnections appear to be coincidental. They seem to be quaint and relatively useless. Morris (1991a:11) says: “Such intersections of independent plot lines seem portentous, but in the end they reveal nothing”. As in life they sometimes cause nothing and they merely imply that the world is small. But far from being meaningless, one finds a moral
purpose in this representation of how reality appears and functions. The connectedness of lives includes an unequivocal indictment against the type of relationship which the wealthy establish among themselves, and that of the national community.

One can apply this criticism to various individuals. Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish represents the hollowness of the rich and is a grotesque character with a passion to entertain (R, 33). The question arises as to whether J.P. Morgan and Henry Ford, with all their wealth, are not able to constructively affect people’s lives. Morgan influences something as mundane as a housewife’s choice of furniture without specific intention. He is able to save the US government from bankruptcy single-handedly. He is able to stop the panic of 1907 by arranging a loan for the importation of one hundred million dollars in gold bullion (R, 106). However, as a humanitarian he has apparently no influence to improve the nature of the national context.

Ironically, humanitarianism seems to be a major part of Morgan’s theory regarding his role in the world. But the lack of humanitarianism becomes the most profound criticism against the hollowness of the rich which is evident in the character’s preoccupation with “prisca theologia”. It is an obsession which he simply does not live up to. The billionaire investigates a cyclical tradition -- one of resemblance -- of “great and good men” who “promulgated the idea of an ongoing, beneficent magic available to certain men of every age for the collective use of mankind” (R, 113). Morgan says to Ford that the function of these people is “to ease the sufferings of human-kind with their prisca theologia” (R, 113). However, Morgan’s credibility with regard to this principle is completely destroyed during Walker’s occupation of his library when he sends a telegram with the message: “GIVE HIM HIS AUTOMOBILE AND HANG HIM” (R, 212).

Henry Ford is presented as a boorish, anti-Semitic character with no humanitarian intentions who maintains “a social Darwinistic apologetic ideology” as Wüstenhagen (1985:460) describes his outlook. The relationship between the rich and the average citizen is based on exploitation, especially in the case of Henry Ford. Rockefeller, Carnegie and Harrimaa who are among the “dozen most powerful men in America” (R, 107) and their spouses are portrayed as bizarre and without any spiritual wealth.

Berryman points out that Father’s ambition to attain achievement is misdirected. His commentary also implies the irony of heterogeneous coexistence:
The failure of the confident explorer is predetermined by the vanity of his ambitions and the blindness of his conduct. At the beginning of the novel the father of the narrator takes his wealth and power for granted. He supports the proud gestures of Teddy Roosevelt without thinking about the poor immigrants in America who cannot share in the masculine vanity of hunting parties and polar expeditions (1982:38).

Employing the power of figures like Morgan, Ford, Fish and even Father to influence processes of causality philanthropically is absent. Wustenhagen (1985:459) also argues that by creating the impression of triviality by merging important historical figures with insights of vital social criticism, the novelist focuses the reader's attention on some powerful individuals' neglect of their social responsibility. This in turn contributes to the nature of the presented context in the novel. Freud "had seen in our careless commingling of great wealth and great poverty the chaos of an entropic European civilization" (R, 36). The New World is therefore only an extension of the Old World in displaying the same social disorganization and degradation.

*Ragtime* continues *The Book of Daniel's* dictum that there are no real borders. The narrator reveals that the fragmented state of the world is an illusion. There are always connections among people, not only because of obvious similarities, but also because of differences. These connections are expanded by inevitable intersections.

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Despite being elusive, intersections have the potential to cause distinct and permanent changes in characters' lives. The author and narrator stress this by providing metaphorical images such as the railway lines (R, 74, 76, 77) and the boy's awareness of "the tracks made by the skaters, traces quickly erased of moments past, journeys taken" (R, 92). These images are similar to the little girl's awareness of the patterns made by the people moving through the station which are erased by a porter's broom (R, 100).

There are, however, also "unrealized effects" in the novel. These display the narrator's involvement and his ability to let the narrative develop according to his understanding of the context which he represents. Unrealized events have "real" potential and imply that certain historical events could have taken place and should therefore not be seen as meaningless.

The freedom of manipulating change has philosophical underpinnings in the novel itself. When Evelyn Nesbit accompanies Tateh to a political meeting, Emma Goldman says to Nesbit: "You came because in such ways as the universe works your life was destined to interact with my own" (R, 50). Goldman misinterprets Nesbit's reason for her presence at the
meeting as politically motivated. Nesbit only attended because she was invited by Tateh. However, her life was indeed "destined" to interact with Goldman's because once her identity is revealed to Tateh, he leaves and they never see each other again. Nesbit's interaction with Goldman thus redirects Nesbit's life, the lives of Tateh, his daughter, as well as that of Mother's and her adoptive son's lives.

When Nesbit explains why she is present at the meeting, Goldman continues the philosophical basis for the novel when she says: "Who can say who are the instrumentalities and who are the people. Which of us causes, and lives in others to cause, and which of us is meant thereby to live" (R, 50). It seems that Nesbit is only serving as Goldman says, as an "instrumentality" in other people's lives. For example, the writer uses her to bring Mother and Tateh together. Nesbit fades into the background from this point onward. Here one sees an unrealized development or an "if-situation": if Tateh had not left, feeling that his life had been desecrated by whores (R, 48), the course of development could have been completely different.

Like Goldman's thoughts, the little boy's deliberations on change serve also as a philosophical basis for the events in the novel. The Ovid tales told to him by his grandfather illustrate the principle that "nothing is immune to the principle of volatility, not even language" (R, 91). Here one recognizes Voloshinov's argument regarding the utterance once again: the textual world changes through language, however, is is made possible by the context in which it functions. The literary utterance's meaning is determined according to the writer's arrangement.

There are numerous cases that could have developed differently and produced different meanings. These developments are dependent on the sensitive relations among people and the actualized intersections that are discernable: if Manah had not prostituted herself; if Nesbit had been followed by reporters as usual; if Nesbit had kidnapped the little girl; if Tateh had not taken Nesbit to Goldman's meeting, et cetera. The if-cases imply the narrator's awareness of causality and are part of the dramatic development.

Furthermore, Tateh would perhaps not have come to the conclusion that his life was desecrated by whores if he had not taken Nesbit along to the meeting which in turn lead to his meditation "on the brutal luck of his life" (R, 73). This directly follows his decision to leave the residence on Hester Street forever. His frustration when he looks at his daughter effectuates his desire for change: "The little girl quietly prepared their simple meals in ways
so reminiscent of the movements of his wife that finally he could bear the situation no longer” (R, 73). This is the first step towards Mother. Tateh is distressed about his and his daughter’s future: “What if they just went on this way in varying degrees of unrealized hope?” (R, 95). He realizes that this is a conceivable fate, but as the novel demonstrates, it is not the only possible fate.

There are also other if-cases that could have prevented Tateh from meeting with Mother. During Walker’s rebellion Father says to Mother that they have to get away and that he would take care of leaving New York temporarily. Mother points out that it would be problematic in view of her aged father and because the school is not yet out and because they had just hired new household staff. Each of these considerations could have prevented Mother from meeting Tateh.

Tateh would probably not have met Mother at all if the city marshall of Lawrence had not issued authority to the police to prevent children leaving Lawrence. Following a strike in Lawrence where Tateh worked fifty-six hours per week “in front of a loom” (R, 93), a social programme is offered to the workers in Lawrence. They could send their children to more affluent families. Tateh decides to let his daughter be taken up by such a family. If it were not for the police interference, Tateh and his daughter would have been separated and Tateh might have remained in Lawrence.

If Tateh had not volunteered for service at the strike committee in Lawrence, he would not have brought the materials home which he used to make silhouette drawings to entertain his daughter. These pictures evolved into a picture sequence that created a cinematic effect. This is the origin of Tateh’s fortune. Even a small detail like the little girl’s interest in the Franklin Novelty Company to which Tateh sells his first “movies” is a cause which leads to Tateh’s fortune and enables him to go to the hotel in Atlantic City where he meets Mother.

Mother asks herself what would have happened if she had continued to walk when she had heard the noise coming from the ground where Sarah’s and Coalhouse Walker’s baby was buried. She unearths the baby and when the police find Sarah, Mother prevents Sarah’s arrest for attempted murder: “I will take responsibility, she said. Please bring her inside. And despite the best advice of the doctor and the remonstrations of the police, she would not change her mind” (R, 59). If Mother had changed her mind, the development would have been completely different. Yet, it would not have been less disastrous due to the given context.
It would also have been possible for Mother to have changed her mind later and by doing that changed the development of the story. If Mother had agreed with Father when he wanted to discourage Walker’s visits to Sarah, the course of events would certainly have been different.

There are also various if-cases in Walker’s part of the story. If Walker had paid the firemen the toll they had demanded (R, 132) and had not insisted to have the car repaired or if Father had bribed Willie Conklin in time, the whole tragedy could have been defused (R, 140). The episode would still have been marked by racism, but it would not have been taken to the dramatic height of Sarah’s death and the subsequent occupation of the J.P. Morgan library by Walker and his gang.

The point of the if-cases is illustrated well by Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s fate. If his driver had not taken a wrong turn, he would not have been driven towards his assassination. It can partly be ascribed to “coincidence”, but it is evident that the narrator continues the story as according to his ontological conception. The narrator is able to make the driver turn the vehicle into any direction. However, the deaths of the Archduke and Walker are made possible by the nature of the context and the narrator’s acknowledgement of the causative impact.

By presenting the numerous if-cases, the narrator emphasizes that language can be manipulated according to, for example, his understanding of a context and what would be consistent with the personalities of the represented characters. In both reality and fiction, change determines a single fate among possibilities. The if-cases in the novel accentuate the unrealized possibilities. They are included because potentiality is just as “real” as the realized events.

However, the “central” story of the novel commences because of actualizations and not plausibilities. When Mother unearths a baby in her garden, a chain of events is set in motion leading to the vandalization of Coalhouse Walker’s car. This is a perfect example to show what the effects of intersections may have. A distressed Sarah buries her newly born baby, Walker’s son, alive. The police finds Sarah and Mother takes the mother and child into her home. Walker begins to visit Mother’s house in New Rochelle. At first Sarah refuses to see him, but Walker persists and comes to the house on a weekly basis. Sarah eventually receives him as a guest. One day, on his way back to New York, Walker suffers a similar experience to that of Heinrich von Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas. Firemen obstruct the road and demand a contrived toll fee which Walker refuses to pay. They subsequently vandalize his car. The
earlier reference to the new immigrants and the second-generation immigrants shows the intolerance of sections of society towards coexistence which Walker suffers as well: "He was not unaware that in his dress and as the owner of a car he was a provocation to many white people. He had created himself in the teeth of such feelings" (R, 131).

The vandalization of his car results in the outcome of the Walker-Sarah story, but the manner in which Walker deals with it also contributes to the development. Walker’s death is the result of a chain of events during which he decided at various points to continue with his quest for justice and not to remain passive. This leads to more intersections that bear destructive results realized by a racist context.

Walker commences legal actions in vain, using the money that was intended for his marriage with Sarah. Sarah’s life and future plans are inevitably also affected, eventually resulting in her death. Sarah approaches the vice-president of America in a crowd, hoping that he might be able to solve their problems, but her action is misinterpreted by his bodyguards and she is violently beaten with the butt of a rifle. This intersection puts Walker on the path of relentless revenge which leads to more intersections and more destruction.

Younger Brother points out to Father that the causes of Walker’s actions are based on the desecration of the car, his futile attempts to make a complaint against the firemen and finally Sarah’s death (R, 157-158). Walker repeats these reasons to his gang, in particular that his own death is determined by Sarah’s death (R, 213, 216). This is significant because this situation also implies that not only the firemen and the bodyguards intersected and impacted Walker’s and Sarah’s lives.

Many individuals in official positions enter Walker’s life after the firemen tell him to pay toll: the traffic officer who does not assist him when his way is obstructed (R, 133); the two officers who arrest Walker on the grounds of crimes he has not committed (R, 134); the police men who do not take Walker’s complaint seriously and advise him to forget the matter as he is probably filing his complaint in vain (R, 139) and the heedlessness of the clerk at City Hall who encumbers Walker’s intention to act as his own council. When Sarah is injured, she is not taken to a hospital, but to a police station. This is reminiscent of when Daniel’s sister, Susan, is taken to an asylum for the mentally insane instead of a hospital after her suicide attempt. Sarah is kept overnight at the station: “She was coughing blood and in the early-morning hours it occurred to the sergeant in charge that perhaps she ought to be looked at by a doctor” (R, 145). These are peripheral characters, yet they are crucial to the story. Their
actions contribute decisively to the changes in the lives of the prominent characters. Furthermore, it is clear that it is not merely the disregard of these few individuals that causes Coalhouse Walker’s rebellion, but the general basis of the disregard: the prejudice and lack of compassion that steer the whole context.

One should consider all these events as utterances, not isolated from one another. Voloshinov emphasizes the need to view utterances collectively:

The structure of a whole utterance is something linguistics leaves to the competence of other disciplines — to rhetoric and poetics. Linguistics lacks any approach to compositional forms of the whole. Therefore, there is no direct transition between the linguistic forms of the elements of an utterance and the forms of its whole, indeed, no connection at all! Only by making a jump from syntax can we arrive at problems of composition. This is absolutely inevitable, seeing that the forms making up the whole of an utterance can only be perceived and understood against the background of other whole utterances belonging to a unity of some particular domain of ideology (1973:78-79).

The events which determine Walker’s fate are narrative units that can only convey meaning if they are presented collectively. As words acquire their true meaning in sentences, all the events that Walker experiences lead to his rebellion and death. Walker’s death is thus determined by the nature of the context in which the events take place.

The causality that Walker sets directly in motion is also recognizable with regard to the family. The start of media interest in the family is attributed to Walker’s rampage, and Father therefore decides to bring his family to a hotel in Atlantic City. This is where Mother meets Tateh, her future husband. If it were not for Walker’s rebellion, they never would have met.

Not only Mother’s life is determined by Walker, but also that of her brother. Younger Brother falls in love with Evelyn Nesbit who — in illustration of the interrelatedness of the novels’ characters — becomes obsessed with Tateh’s daughter. He has an affair with Nesbit, but she eventually loses interest in him and Younger Brother despondently decides to devote his life to his belief in “justice, civilization and the right of every human being to a dignified life” (R, 180). He becomes part of Walker’s gang. After the occupation of the Morgan library, he becomes a fugitive and subsequently continues his personal rebellion by going to Mexico and supporting Emilio Zapata’s revolution. This ultimately leads to Younger Brother’s death.

Another interesting example of causality in Ragtime shows that even an indirect intersection can determine a person’s fate. President McKinley’s assassination in association with other
interactions could be one of the causes of Sarah’s death. Sherman’s bodyguards callously misinterpreted the black woman’s gesture as being threatening. The death of America’s president in power from 1897 to 1901, McKinley, made politicians more aware of assassination attempts (R, 143-144). This far-reaching result of McKinley’s death indicates once more the illusiveness of social fragmentation.

There are also other discernable far-reaching results that emphasize the illusion of society as a fragmented entity when one relates Walker’s rampage to the circumstances that follow the vandalization: children do not appear for school; there are outrages against the city administration and Conklin; firemen demand to be sworn in as police deputies and given arms to defend themselves; cars become licensed; white citizens are arrested for carrying pistols and rifles and Negroes are nowhere to be seen (R, 165). Furthermore, there are false alarms from fireboxes all over the city; the churches are full on Sunday mornings (R, 176) and there are widespread nervousness and uncertainty among municipal authorities, police, state militia and citizenry (R, 178). Other “boomerang” effects that harm individuals who support a society with a supremacist disposition occur, ironically, in the privacy of their homes:

The hospital emergency room reported a higher than usual number of household accident victims. People were burning themselves, cutting themselves, tripping on rugs and falling down flights of stairs. Several men were brought in with gun wounds inflicted in the cleaning and handling of old weapons (R, 176).

These results are unified by their origin, not merely a black man’s aggression, but the racist nature of the national context.

The violence that reverts back to society is, however, not one-sided. Walker commences a war against a section of society, but the result also ensues in further victimization of black Americans. Walker’s enemies, a section of the white population, identifies all black people with Walker: “There were several instances of abuse of Negroes who were seen out of their neighbourhoods” (R, 176).

Booker T. Washington highlights the adverse effect that Walker has on black people. Washington says to Walker: “What will your misguided criminal recklessness cost me! What will it cost my students laboring to learn a trade by which they can earn their livelihood and still white criticism” (R, 208). Although evidently said without full knowledge of Walker’s history and subsequent motivation, this reasoning does identify the causality involved.
The fundamental principle in *Ragtime* is that causality is set in motion within a context of interconnectedness through intersections manipulated by the narrator. It is extremely difficult if not impossible to say how and when the causative power of previous interactions will have its effect, but *Ragtime* depicts a context in which conceivable and sometimes unexpected consequences take place. The artistic depiction of intersections is as a result equal to a “decomposition” of the concept of society as a fragmented entity.

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The causes as presented by the central consciousness of the narrator unify the disparate sections of the society. Furthermore, causality is not only relevant with regard to the narrator’s depiction of fragmentation as an illusion because causes imply intersections, but the reader also recognizes the real world in the fictional effects. Causes are inexorably associated with multitudes of “stories”, i.e., events and actions. This is how we perceive the world which is also how the novel is constructed. Voloshinov analyses the nature of an utterance or word which is useful when one understands every identified cause as an utterance:

The verbal consciousness of speakers has, by and large, nothing whatever to do with linguistic form as such or with language as such. In point of fact, the linguistic form, which, as we have just shown, exists for the speaker only in the context of specific utterances, exists, consequently, only in a specific ideological context. In actuality, we never say of hear words, we say and hear what is true and false, good and bad, important and unimportant, pleasant and unpleasant, and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology*. That is the way we understand words, and we can respond only to words that engage us behaviorally or ideologically (1973:70).

There are “words” that one considers to be destructive: the most obvious cause in the novel is probably racism. Due to their racism, Willie Conklin and his fire brigade contribute to the deaths of Sarah and Walker as well as indirectly many other injuries and deaths because of Walker’s rampage.

One of Vice-President Sherman’s bodyguards hit Sarah with the butt of his rifle, resulting in her death. Heedlessness motivated by racism is equally recognizable in the officers who take Sarah to the police station and the officer on duty who neglects to immediately take Sarah to a hospital. Her death might have been prevented if she had received medical attention earlier.

However, there are not only “words” that signify hostility. As far as above mentioned causes are concerned, one may conclude that the narrator is indeed critical of individuals like Willie Conklin and J.P. Morgan, but he is equally focused on presenting an ontological model, and does not only take causes into account that indict certain sections of society. In other words,
there are also causes that are not villainous, but which the reader may consider as significant in terms of what the novel conveys.

For example, Schulz (1988:13) observes that immigration to America was motivated by a variety of concerns, ranging from physical need and political oppression to love of adventure and religious idealism. These motivations are possibly indirect causes of Tateh’s and Mother’s marriage. A cause that contributes to the whole is Mother’s compassion. She saves Sarah’s baby’s life and creates a favourable setting for Walker to court Sarah. The narrator juxtaposes Mother’s kindness to the firemen’s racist action and Walker’s persistence in his quest for justice which results in Sarah’s and his own death. This should be seen against the background of Walker’s identity which is explained by Diedrich:

By fusing Michael Kohlhaas, David Walker and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., into a new individuality, he (Doctorow) created a reality which is perhaps, to quote the writer, ‘truer because it didn’t happen’ (1988:121; my parenthesis – PvdM)

Younger Brother’s anarchism, aroused by conviction and combined with disappointed love and desire that lead to his death, is equally credible.

Tateh’s desperate state due to poverty, and the love for his daughter also lead to his material success. He manages to point “his life along the lines of flow of American energy” (R, 102). These causes echo the experience that innumerable people in the past and present had and have.

Contexts are also defined by the kind of rectitude, guilelessness and desperate frame of mind which cause Sarah’s death: “She was, Mother realized, the kind of moral being who understood nothing but goodness. She had no guile and could act only in total and helpless response to what she felt” (R, 142). Sarah therefore goes to petition the United States on Walker’s behalf (R, 143) which ensues in her death.

Harry Houdini, as an escape expert, as well as displaying personal ideals, becomes a representative of characters’ quests or ideals. For example, Father yearns to attain achievement. However, he fails to escape his discontent, and his ambition ultimately results in unfulfilment and death. Walker’s search for justice results in his fiancée’s death and his own death. Houdini’s performance occurs at the same time as Walker’s bombing. The audience mistakes the first as part of the latter. These two quests virtually become one (R, 156).
Similarly, Tateh's search for being allowed to breathe in the new country, and Emma Goldman's search for political liberation for disenfranchised groups, fuse with Houdini's frustration caused by his work, which he perceives as meaningless. Longing for fulfilment changes the nature of Houdini's performances and leads him to reveal fraud seances. Aspiring to obtain enlightenment or spiritual fulfilment also leads J.P. Morgan to travel to Egypt in search of it.

Individuals' desire to influence or direct the sequence of their lives appear quite often. They have a desire to improve or escape the situation in which they are at that moment. This quest includes everybody: from Coalhouse Walker who is regarded as inferior by the community in which he lives, the poor immigrant, Tateh, to the materially prosperous J.P. Morgan. Differences regarding ideals are another illusive form of fragmentation.

Some causes active in The Book of Daniel are also noticeable in Ragtime. One invariably recognizes that the narrators of these novels represent their context as being hostile due to causes like the misuse of power, political division, fear, a combination of heedlessness and lack of insight. However, the narrator does not exclude other more neutral stories and their causes that ensure an objective perspective on how reality functions.

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Doctorow emphasizes the adjacency of disparate social sections within an American context in Ragtime. The representation of context is largely a manipulation which can be seen by the representation of aleatory intersections of characters' lives, consequent causative developments and the interconnectedness thereof.

The narrator has a particular function in Ragtime: he subjectively depicts a context by identifying causes and their consequent developments. Though set against the beginning of the twentieth century the novel does not necessarily reflect this specific era exclusively. Foley points out that the elements of Walker's terrorism are more distinctly reminiscent of the 1960s than of the ragtime era: "Doctorow is commenting upon the age of Wilson by importing a dramatic example from the age of Nixon, and his point is, quite clearly, that the forms of present-day racism have their roots in the past" (1983:167-168).

However, the narrator is also focused on presenting a hypothesis regarding society. The context that is represented is not an "authentic depiction" of the narrator's past. The narrator re-constructs his own past. The text of Ragtime is as such removed twice from "factual"
history. Green compares Doctorow to John Berger, John Fowles and J.G. Farrell: “Derived from a real study of the period, it is truly historical, although the authors take gross liberties with history in the name of art” (1975:841). Kauffmann (1975:21) summarizes this inclination by observing, in brackets, that Doctorow almost seems to have invented history in support of his fiction, rather than the reverse. This is precisely the case. The narrator exploits history as well as the fictional mode in order to present a truthful depiction which demonstrates to us that one should not view a nation or even the world as a totality of fragmented components, but rather as one interacting organism.

If one considers a human life to be a “text”, *Ragtime* seems to suggest that human beings often lack “intertextual” awareness. They fail to recognize their own lives in others, i.e., the connections and similarities between human lives. The narrator emphasizes that there are always inevitable connections among human beings which are effectively depicted through intersections and that we are, despite differences, never too different from one another.
CHAPTER 3

LOON LAKE: AN INDIVIDUAL’S QUEST

In Doctorow’s fifth novel the main character, Joe, leaves his hometown, Paterson, and sets out on a journey to escape the spiritual “meagerness” which accompanies material poverty. He travels to New York, but eventually leaves the city. His next destination is California which figures as a quasi promised land that he never reaches. Joe meets a travelling carnival, subsequently arrives at Loon Lake, the estate of a billionaire, but he also leaves this context and arrives in Jacksontown. He finally returns to Loon Lake and remains there.

This chapter will examine the contexts that Joe encounters as well as his identity in relation to these settings. In doing it, the chapter will explore the “spiritual poverty” which the settings represent versus the concept of “spiritual wealth” represented by Joe’s disappointed ideal to live in an uncorrupted context.

The basic question here concerns the nature of the relationship between Joe and the individual contexts. With respect to the interdependency between causality and context, these focal points imply the question as to why he leaves all the places or contexts, yet returns to the estate.

Like in Ragtime the various settings appear to represent a fragmented world. Barkhausen (1988:130) offers this useful insight into Doctorow’s “social fragmentation” in Loon Lake:

Doctorow himself supplies a rather disturbing explanation of what he calls his ‘rationale for the composition’ of the novel: ‘Eventually in Loon Lake I realized that I was composing the book in a way that might suggest the lake itself – the way the light reflects and refracts and distorts and shimmers, and images are duplicated or broken up into many pieces’. This statement comprises a poetics of bewilderment. And as a ‘rationale’, it implies the paradox of a deliberate staging of chaos. Declaring distortion, fragmentation, and ambiguity to be his intention, Doctorow appears to be joining those postmodern writers who tend to ontologize the seeming discontinuity of the world they experience.

Doctorow’s depiction of the “discontinuity” of the world is indeed an example of the ontological dominant that marks postmodernist fiction (McHale, 1993:10). However, the representation of the diverse settings in Loon Lake is also reminiscent of the fragmented contexts in The Book of Daniel and Ragtime: the consciousness of one persona, for example, a character like Daniel or a narrator like in Ragtime, “unifies” the various aspects of the world in which he lives. The artist composes a world in which one recognizes the real world, yet which eliminates the notion of social boundaries, viz. “fragmentation”.
The contexts in *Loon Lake* are interconnected with one another because of the central character’s experience of the represented spaces. Identity plays a crucial role in establishing the relationship between the various contexts in this novel. It is mainly through Joe’s awareness of his own identity that the similarities between the contexts and the differences between a national context and an individual are foregrounded.

The argument presented here is that Joe’s identity and course are determined by the nature of the particular contexts which he encounters. What distinguishes Joe from other inhabitants of a context like Paterson -- whose identities are also formed by their context -- is that initially Joe does not reject his potential to be spiritually wealthy. The spiritual poverty of Paterson becomes a leitmotif which the reader eventually associates with other contexts in the novel as well. The narrator develops the idea of America as a collection of contexts which forms a unified or national “identity”. One is therefore dealing with two opposing “identities”, i.e., of an individual and a national context.

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Tzvetan Todorov’s 1968 essay “The Quest of Narrative” opens with the idea that “literature must be treated as literature” which he identifies as an established condition, disallowing literature to be “more” (1977:120). He does not disqualify this statement, but points out that the idea has no meaning if it functions as a tautology, i.e., if the junction of subject and the predicate are identical (1977:120). “A narrative” can only be meaningful if it does not signify itself, but another “narrative”.

Focusing on *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, the essay examines a characteristic of medieval literature, namely that there may be more than one version of an event in one text:

The episodes resemble each other (though without ever becoming identical) by having this in common: the signs, like their interpretation, are narratives. The narrative of an adventure signifies another narrative; the spatio-temporal coordinates of the episode change but its very nature does not (Todorov, 1977:123).

Todorov presents the example of Gawain’s dream in which he sees a herd of spotted bulls saying to one another that they should search for a better pasture elsewhere. This refers to the knights of the Round Table who, on the day of Pentecost, said to one another that they should search for the Holy Grail: “Hence there is no difference of nature between the narratives-as-signifier and the narratives-as-signified, since they appear in place of each other” (Todorov, 1977:125). Todorov also points out that every event has a literal and an allegorical meaning (Todorov, 1977:129). Searching for the Grail does not only have the literal meaning of
searching for a material object. It signifies Jesus Christ as well: "The Grail is both at once" (Todorov, 1977:138). In other words, events signify each other. The next step regarding signification is that the search for a better pasture and the search for the Grail are confined not only to signifying each other, i.e., within the boundaries of the text, but also outside of the text.

These insights are helpful in understanding *Loon Lake*. Joe's journey is not merely a journey and an escape, but also a search for his Holy Grail, namely fulfilment or spiritual wealth. The novel can therefore be equated to the medieval text: "This conception of signification is fundamental for *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, and because of it we have difficulty understanding what the Grail is, an entity at once material and spiritual" (Todorov, 1977:129).

A narrative is never conclusive in itself: one can always relate it to another. Joe's journey from place to place may at times seem contrived, but this should be interpreted as a technique to foreground the presence of the consciousness that composes the narrative. Towards the end of the novel, after having fled Loon Lake, having stolen the estate's owner's car and mistress, Joe returns. After a spell in Jacksontown, he is more or less welcomed with open arms and made heir to Loon Lake. The latter is a strategically important part of the novel, yet certainly the least credible. However, Joe's journey is not merely a narrative depicting a physical journey or a succession of events. It should be seen as an allegory. The novel presents the story of Joe's physical journey as well as illustrates the complexity of the choice between spiritual wealth and poverty.

"Joe's journey leads him to Loon Lake" is a statement that means very little when viewed in transrational terms. The estate's exterior is glamorous, but its very essence cannot be divorced from the nature of the other places that Joe is exposed to, namely, Paterson, the carnival which is according to Johnson (1982:144) the ultimate metaphor for private enterprise, and Jacksontown. Loon Lake is not Joe's Grail, but quite the opposite.

One constantly recognizes that "[e]very event has a literal meaning and allegorical meaning" (Todorov, 1977:129). Significant events in the novel occur when Joe leaves one context for another: the occasion when he robs Paterson's church's poor box; Joe's reaction when Fanny, the Fat Lady, a carnival "item", is raped; when Joe is overwhelmed by Clara's beauty and follows her; when he writes his name in Loon Lake's guest book; when Joe and Clara remain in Jacksontown and when Joe returns to Loon Lake. One has to consider Joe's motivation to understand the meaning of the episodes above.
The decisions that Joe takes are always in support of his quest towards fulfilment with the exception of when he finally returns to Loon Lake as Bennett’s heir. The Grail is, in opposition to Loon Lake, something unambiguously good due to its spiritual value. This is also how Loon Lake achieves its meaning. It signifies an unambiguously moral regression due to its lack of spiritual value. Johnson presents an interpretation of Loon Lake:

Loon Lake is ‘a cold black lake’, owned, loons preying on fish there, the shores haunted by the ghosts of dying Indians. It is a reflex of capitalist society and a form of selfish luxury (1982:144).

The estate is thus at the same time concrete and abstract, situated in a novel that represents places and events with symbolic dimensions. The concrete Loon Lake symbolizes the alternative to fulfilment, i.e., material prosperity at the price of spiritual prosperity.

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The first context, Paterson, is the prototype of a lower working class location set in the 1930s Depression, symbolic of a spiritual depression throughout a nation. The person who depicts this environment is Joe, born from two of the inhabitants, i.e., his parents are mill workers of this town. He is by implication part of the conforming masses. If Paterson is the result of the Depression and the Patersonians the products of living in Paterson, the logical deduction would be that a child would resemble his parents or the people in his context. However, the reader is constantly aware of Joe’s conscious discrimination between himself and the people in Paterson as well as in the other contexts. He refuses to conform to the established mentality in Paterson and emerges from spiritual inertia as a rebellious individual.

The basic difference between Joe and the town’s population is that the masses remain in Paterson where they have the security of an income earned by working at a mill, albeit a meager one, in comparison to Joe who leaves Paterson. This difference can be interpreted in terms of metaphorical stasis and kinesis. The stasis of the Patersonians that prompts Joe’s rebellious disposition is not due to the material poverty of his parents and the town, but the spiritual poverty of both. They reduce their total existence to their poor material lives.

The population of Paterson can be divided into four prominent categories. The first three categories are nameless. They are the workers like Joe’s parents and the homeless and unemployed consisting of children, derelicts and gangs. The third category is the church represented by the priest. A characteristic of the Patersonians is that they lack individuality and potential to attain any form of external or inner prosperity. Joe and the Patersonians are
distinguishable from each other because Joe’s fate is not fixed, at least not until he returns to Loon Lake. Every Patersonian is subjected to his or her own seemingly irrevocable personal fate. The lives of Joe’s parents are presented as unchangeable and they lack the capacity to improve their existence. There is no sign of any attempt to enrich their lives. The reader consequently recognizes the bitter acceptance of this impoverished existence.

Joe figures as the fourth category in Paterson who is the only individual with a real identity. Nobody in Paterson belonging to the categories above has a name except for an ultimately nameless derelict dubbed “Saint Garbage”. The Patersonians are all described by either their activities or their appearances. The mill workers are called “the poor dumb hollow-eyed hunkies” (LL, 4). There are the maniacs, the men and women who live on the street, the cops, the gangs, the absent vegetable peddler whose horse Joe stabs with his knife, a “feeb with a watermelon head” whom he stabs as well, a girl whom he forces to take off her clothes by threatening her with a knife, little kids whom he robs and a mad old woman and the priest (LL, 3-6). But there are no real names.

Joe introduces his nameless parents, members of the community of mill workers, as “slightly smoking sticks” (LL, 3). They are mirror images of “anyone else” (LL, 3); “Everybody in Paterson”; “the other suckers” (LL, 4) who inhabit identical houses on Mechanic Street. Joe specifies the similarity between his parents’ existence and that of the other mill workers in a way which epitomizes the general existence in Paterson:

And three blocks away was the mill where everybody in Paterson made the wages to keep up their wonderful life, including my father including my mother they went there together and ate their meals and went to the same bed together (LL, 4).

The routine and belongings that amount to their lives are simply endured. “Meagerness” which reflects the Patersonians’ corrupt stoicism is a word that recurs in Loon Lake. This existence is justified by their own submission to be manipulated by a Patersonian Roman Catholicism. Joe says:

They clung to their miserable lives, held their meager rituals on Sundays going to Mass with the other suckers as if some monumental plan was working out that might be personally painful to them but made Sense because God had to make Sense even if the poor dumb hollow-eyed hunkies didn’t know what it was. And I despised that (LL, 4).

An irrational acceptance of suffering distinguishes the real theology which the church campaigns. Here the acceptance of the workers and the home- and jobless are implicitly compared to little children eating sweet potatoes which Joe describes as follows: “The taking humbly, almost unconsciously of goodness by little kids ... ” (LL, 4). Mid-sentence Joe’s
train of thought changes to cynically reveal what the “sweet” potato really consists of: “... who took it all, the rage of parents, the madness of old women in the dank stairwells, murder, robbery, threat in the sky, the unendurable prison of schoolrooms” (LL, 4-5).

The Christianity in Paterson has lost its ability to serve as a “Holy Grail” which explains Joe’s hostility towards the Christian religion. It is misused as a medium to accommodate a philosophy of acquiescence towards capitalistic exploitation during the Depression. The result is a baleful awareness of destitution that contradicts the principle of Christian love.

The section of Paterson which is not included in this religious organization is one that Joe prefers above the workers. He says: “Only the maniacs were alive ...” (LL, 3). He joins this outcast section of Paterson’s population to distinguish himself from the inert mill workers. However, despite Joe’s estimation of them, i.e., describing them as “alive”, he contextualizes these maniacs referring to them in the same sentence in which he describes to the derelicts of this “society”, thereby equating the maniacs with victimization as well:

Only the maniacs were alive, the men and the women who lived on the street, there was one we called Saint Garbage who went from ash can to ash can collecting what poor people had no use for -- can you imagine? -- ... (LL, 3).

The maniacs are grouped together with the homeless and the epitome of Paterson’s derelicts, “Saint Garbage”, whose “name” fuses the individual with the dregs of a poverty-stricken zone, signifying that he is an invented patron saint of rags, a suffering person living only in a zombie state. He functions as a personified crescendo of a “rag-time”, a duration of poverty, physical and spiritual depression. The conclusion is that Joe does not share an equal status with the maniacs and derelicts of Paterson.

Joe attains dual status: he serves as a double signifier as he does not share the value system of Paterson. He has his own category, reflecting Paterson’s society and he is simultaneously a Patersonian and a non-Patersonian, an imposter in his hometown. Joe is alien to the kind of existence that his parents share with the other mill workers. As a result of this they despise him:

What, after all, was the tragedy in their lives implicit in the profoundly reproachful looks they sent my way? That things hadn’t worked out for them? How did that make them different from anyone else on Mechanic Street, even the houses were the same, two by two, the same asphalt palace over and over, streetcars rang the bell on the whole fucking neighborhood (LL, 3).

Seeing that this acceptance of their fate is not equal to fulfilment, but to angry resignation, it follows then that they are antagonists of a life which Joe embodies: “If I came in early I
distracted them, if I came in late I enraged them, it was my life they resented, the juicy fulness of being they couldn’t abide” (LL, 3).

The antithesis to the Patersonian’s poverty is not represented as a capitalist quest in the form of the American Dream, but to life. Whilst in Paterson, Joe is reminiscent of Daniel when he lived with Aunt Frieda. He is hyperactive and becomes guilty of “petit larceny” (LL, 258). Joe’s criminal tendencies are a means to distinguish himself from the common self-centred Patersonian whose sole objective is to support his or her own existence, albeit a kind of spiritual death.

The difference between the nature of the individual and that of the context causes Joe’s isolation. His chronic alienation due to spiritual poverty leads him to leave Paterson. A feature of Joe’s youth is that he is ultimately homeless despite being naturally associated with Paterson. As in James Joyce’s A Portrait, one of Joe’s first memories is wetting his bed:

... alone at night in the spread of warmth waking to the warm pool of undeniable satisfaction ... and only when it turned cold and chafed my thighs did I admit to being awake, mama, oh, mama, the real sense of catastrophe, he wet the bed again -- alone in that, alone for years in all of that (LL, 5).

A Portrait sets out with the sanctuary of the loving company of his family during early childhood which is subsequently juxtaposed to the harshness of the exterior world as the boy becomes older. The end of Joyce’s novel reverts back to the care of Stephen’s mother. She is concerned about her son’s welfare. This is fundamentally different from Loon Lake in that neglect and Joe’s isolation are emphasized right from the beginning. Like all the other components of their existence, he is merely endured by his parents. He only receives attention from them when he becomes ill. This concern exists solely because of the threat that it poses to them. Joe’s alienation can also be seen when he introduces his parents: “It was their little house, they never let me forget that” (LL, 3).

Nevertheless, Joe is like all the Patersonians corrupted by his context and, like Daniel, not a sympathetic character at all. The difference between Joe’s and other Patersonians’ crimes is his conscious resistance to be controlled by a social order. In the practice of resisting to become a co-victim, he turns into a victimizer. What Barkhausen says about Joe’s origin in this regard is significant:

Another look at the beginning of the novel, taken in the light of some ensuing complications and thus with less innocence, reveals a teleological disposition of the narrator. He distinctly remembers, for instance, those qualities which will enable the boy to become his own present self: an American tycoon (1988:126).
He becomes relentless in his fight against victimization and strives towards superiority. Joe does not want to identify himself with his fellow Patersonians. This is the reason why he robs the church's poor box. It is a renunciation of a corrupt practice of religion, i.e., supporting the oppression of a society instead of encouraging spiritual progress. Fleeing from whatever punishment the robbing of the poor box will have, and further victimization, seems to be an act of divorce.

Like Daniel who has to deal with a context that he did not choose, Paterson is Joe's inheritance due to "one mindless moment" of his parents' lust (LL, 4). He is forced to be part of Paterson and it becomes his conscious choice to reject Paterson as being part of him. One can therefore conclude that Joe's context influences his identity, just as Daniel's context influences his identity.

Fleeing Paterson, abandoning the town's Christianity and attempting to invent a new "Grail" for himself are constructive decisions that resist spiritual poverty. However, Joe also has to deal with the next context, New York, the city which finally proves to be a counterpart of his original context.

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When Joe arrives in New York, he gains the impression that the city is different from Paterson:

I thought, a place where things happened and where everyone was important even streetsweepers just from being there not like Paterson where nothing mattered because it was Paterson where nothing important could happen where even death was unimportant (LL, 6).

However, New York has a double signification as well. Joe is disillusioned by New York which initially presents itself to Joe as an antithesis to Paterson: "It seemed to me at first an incredibly clean place with well-dressed people and washed cars and bright-painted red-and-yellow streetcars and white buildings" (LL, 6). Joe believes at first that this prosperity fosters humanity as a whole. The illusion that New York creates on the surface, is that it is focused on creating a harmonious context for all its inhabitants. Sanitation men, men cleaning Central Park and even streetsweepers seem to be not merely endured, but essential (LL, 6).

The city provides "humanitarian services". There are mission houses where derelicts could sleep, be fumigated and welfare shelters where they are provided with food. The true philosophy of the city is that the workers, like the sanitation men and streetsweepers are
indeed essential. However, the irony is that the city government is not concerned about the individuals who need to earn a living. They are only used in the interest of those who already have the benefits and dignity that material security can offer. The workers are easily replaceable. They are reduced to mere instruments and New York and its charitable services are only a translation of Paterson whose ill-favoured citizens are merely endured. The wealthy New Yorkers are similar to Joe’s parents who are concerned when Joe is ill, not because of his discomfort, but because of the threat that the illness bears towards them. Now one interprets the fumigation, beds and food for its down-and-outs in a different light. These things are intended to reduce vagrancy, thereby preventing the city from having an indigent appearance, but self-empowerment for its unemployed citizens is not promoted.

In agreement with the city’s false kindness, Joe finds it impossible to find work. This has the implication that the city does not embrace his presence:

But I looked for work, I tried to stay clean and present myself at employment agencies. Crowds of pushing shoving men staring at jobs described in chalk on blackboards at employment agencies it was very difficult to persuade yourself you and not any of a hundred others were the man for the job (LL, 7).

The compassionless implication is that he is not essential. The city is a context in which the individual human per se is not important.

Joe’s failure to obtain work legally forces him to follow his Patersonian course of action: “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 … ” (LL, 4). He plays according to the rules as long as the illusion of a friendly New York remains, but is once again faced with the choices between either acquiescing to a hostile reality or asserting himself in any way he can.

Stealing a cart from a delivery boy, taking over his job by completing the deliveries, returning the cart and the money to the boy’s employer in order to win the greengrocer’s trust are actions representative of Joe’s cunning personality. The description of how he steals the cart links him to Charlie Chaplin’s movie character, the tramp, that made him famous. Also, Joe is like Chaplin himself of low birth, a “worthless” person -- a scamp. This is illustrated with images when he absconds with the cart which bears an obvious resemblance to the early Chaplin films and reminds one of Harry Houdini’s determination to escape:

I raced down the street clattering the cart over the cobblestones, I tore round the corner, I went down a side street made dark by the gridwork shadows of industrial firescapes and dark green iron fronts, I felt like Charlie Chaplin, turning one way, braking, doing an about face, scooting off another way, I think I was laughing, imagining a squad of
Keystone Kops piling up behind me, I thought of the fat kid’s face, even if he knew where to look he couldn’t catch me (LL, 7).

Charlie Chaplin is an appropriate counterpart to Joe. Born in poverty, Chaplin rises to success. In the novel the person Chaplin, his film character and Joe virtually become one, similar to how Leo Czolgosz and Mother’s Younger Brother merge in *Ragtime*. Their shared identity can also be related to the identity of a “loon”. The image of the gull with its connotation of being a scavenger connotes a being that has freedom which is then connected to the fighting spirit of youth. Joe maintains that adulthood equals resignation:

> Adults were in one way or another the ones who were done finished, living past their hope or their purpose. Even the gulls sitting on the tops of the pilings had more class. The gulls lifting in the wind and spreading their wings over the Hudson (LL, 9).

The word “loon” has, in fact, a range of possible meanings that should be viewed alongside Johnson’s explanation of the metaphoric meaning of Loon Lake. The word suggests like “scamp” a person of low origin. It can refer to a person who is “loony” which manifests itself in Joe’s frenzied determination to “make his life work” (LL, 4). The most obvious meaning is that a “loon” refers to a bird which looks from above at what it needs, targets, and retrieves it. New York sustains a capitalistic cycle in which the biggest “scavengers” are at the top. Joe is, metaphorically speaking, a gull or loon, a scavenger due to the nature of his context. He has to exploit the people around him and disregard others’ identities in order to survive in the city. Joe has a relentless ambition:

> I distinguished myself from whomever I looked at when I felt the need to, which was often, I felt I could get by make my way whatever the circumstances. I would sell pencils on the sidewalk in front of the department stores I would be a newsboy I would steal kill use all my cunning but never would I lose the look of the living spirit, or give up till that silent secret presence grew out to the edges of me and I was the same as he, imposed upon myself in full completion, the same man with all men, the one man in all events — (LL, 9).

He loathes the effects that capitalism has on his life, but nevertheless becomes a representative of the context of capitalism himself. For example, Joe cannot remember the Scandinavian woman’s name: “I don’t remember her name Hilda Bertha something like that” (LL, 8). She is to him nothing more than a Patersonian, i.e., without identity. He uses her and has a relationship with her which verges on prostitution: “She was very decent really and for my love gave me little presents, castoff sweaters and shoes, food sometimes. I tried to save as much of my wages as I could” (LL, 8). Joe also exploits Graeber by not committing himself honestly to him, but acting the part of the “honest young fellow who wanted to make something of himself” (LL, 8). Only the latter part is true. He takes the exploitation one step
too far when he steals the Scandinavian woman's silver dining-room articles. This costs him his delivery job. On the morning following the theft he sees "... in Graeber's Groceries Fancy Fruits and Vegetables an officer of the law in earnest conversation with my employer" (LL, 10). Joe subsequently flees and becomes part of New York's homeless community.

As a derelict Joe does not only see people who are materially and spiritually poor, but also materially rich people that are spiritually barren:

But down on the docks men slept in the open pulled up like babies on beds of newspapers, hands palm on palm for a pillow. *Not their dereliction, that wasn't the point, but their meagerness*, for I saw this too as I stood at the piers and watched the ocean liners sail. I watched the well-dressed men and women going up the gangways, ... I saw their exhaustion, their pretense, their terror, and *in these too, the lucky ones, I understood the meagerness of the adult world*. It was an important bit of knowledge and no shock at all for a Paterson mill kid (LL, 9; my emphasis -- PvdM).

Joe's identity is that of a materially poor individual, a gull who has a "bird's eye view" and sees people for what they are, namely spiritually poor, irrespective of whether they are financially poor or wealthy:

It was a matter of the distance you took, if you went to the top of the Empire State Building as I liked to do seeing it all was thrilling you had to admire the human race its encampment like this I could hear the sound of traffic rising like some song to God and love His Genius for shining the sun on it (LL, 9).

Joe is aware of his freedom in opposition to those imprisoned by their context. He still wants to attain his dream by going to a place that will not disappoint him, but he does not know how to reach such a place and confuses a mental destination with a geographical location. Among the down-and-outs in New York, he appreciates the kind of man who would say "why things were the way they were" (LL, 10). Such an attitude would not deny the harsh reality of any context that he has encountered. Joe is, unlike Daniel, nevertheless not exempt from self-deception. He hears from the homeless that California is exquisite, New York's complete antithesis. A cycle becomes recognizable and the reader anticipates another disillusionment. But it is also his dream, naive as it may be, that keeps him spiritually alive.

In New York Joe learns that individuals are essentially prisoners of their own contexts, i.e., they over-identify themselves with the contexts that they are part of and are unable to have a discerning perspective. Joe's bird's eye view enables him to see that there is no distinction between the materially wealthy and the poor with regard to personal fulfilment.

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One may infer that California disillusioned Joe before he even reaches it. After having left New York, Joe does not arrive in California and it remains a phantom context. While departing from New York by train and planning to travel to California, he discovers that he is not the only tramp in an empty carriage. He sees that the youths with whom he shares the train car also hope to reach California. This prompts him to disembark the train due to the thought that if California would include these individuals it would suggest that this Canaan might not be as idyllic as he had suspected:

I let it go. All my gaunt brothers in my own rags carrying my roped valise hopped the freight. I watched it go. I put my collar pulled my cap down on my head stuck my hands in my pockets and headed north up the road (LL, 12).

The phrases "I let it go" and "I watched it go" refer to the train containing the individuals with whom he does not want to identify himself. They also refer to the fact that he abandons his dream to make California his destination. However, he still does not relinquish hope.

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The carnival is yet another illusion of an auspicious context. When Joe sees the carnival he does not think in terms of material gain, but youth, self-actualization and purpose -- elements that are an integral part of his personality:

Ah, what I felt standing there in the sun! A broken-down carnival -- a few acts, a few rides and a contingent of freaks. But the sight of it made me a boy again. ... I knew it was for me as sure as I knew my own face in the mirror (LL, 17).

Joe is entranced by the fictionality of the carnival. The initial excitement that the carnival arouses in him is parallel to how he perceived New York when he first arrived there. However, the carnival and the dark reality of the city bear similarities.

The fictionality of the carnival world eventually collapses. Joe realizes that the context of the carnival is neither exotic nor magical. The carnival workers are mostly immigrants: "... the same people but with a twist who worked for pennies in the sawmills or stood on the bread lines" (LL, 126). The carnival workers belong to the same cultural group as Joe and his parents. They have the surname Korzeniowski which carries, as Barkhausen (1988:143) says, the stigma of the (poor) Polish immigrant. Giving Joe Joseph Conrad's Polish name could signify Conrad as a symbol among Patersonians and New York East European immigrants. The writer's identity conveys the idea that an individual like Joe may, in fact, be exceptional and has the capacity to be successful.
Potentiality is, however, not detectable among the carnival workers. They appear to be “ordinary” people: “The freaks read the papers and talked about Roosevelt, just like everyone else in the country” (LL, 21). However, eventually it becomes evident that they are morally even less. They as well as the people that they entertain resemble Patersonians:

... I saw how money was made from the poor. They drifted in, appearing starved and sucked dry, but holding in their palms the nickels and dimes that would give them a view of Wolf Woman, Lizard Man, the Living Oyster, the Fingerling Family and in fact the whole Hearn Bros. bestiary of human virtue and excellence (LL, 18).

The carnival workers are, like the Patersonians, prisoners of an aberrant context: “But with all of that they lived invalid lives, as someone in the pain of constant hopeless bad health, and so their dispositions were seldom sunny” (LL, 21). The carnival workers exhibit the same spiritual poverty as the Patersonians. They do not care for anything or anyone and have no ambition. The “meagerness” of the carnival people, due to the lack of their commitment to their context after the season has ended, upsets Joe. It angers him that people “would walk away as if Hearn Bros. had no more distinction than a mission flop house” (LL, 125). This lack of commitment should be viewed against the background of Joe’s fear at night in the woods after leaving New York. He thinks: “Lying in a city mission flop in the great stink of mankind was worse. Arraigned in the ranks of the self-deluding in their bunkbeds was worse” (LL, 16). The carnival is like Paterson a place where nothing matters. It loses, because of this disposition of the carnival workers, all distinction it might have had for Joe.

The carnival disappoints Joe in terms of his ambition and identity. Joe is in search of a place to settle down where his existence will be acknowledged. He is guilty of the self-deception of thinking that he is essential there: “I thought the Hearn Bros. were lucky to have me” (LL, 18). These words are an echo of the Scandinavian maid’s impression of the relationship with him: “For Hilda the maid I was the boy who thought he was lucky to have her” (LL, 8-9). He is completely disregarded and exploited like a common Patersonian. It also angers him that the affair between himself and Magda Hearn (which resembles the relationship with the maid as she also gives him presents) is not noticed by her husband, Sim Hearn: “Then I wouldn’t be some nameless creature so low as to be beneath his line of vision” (LL, 125; my emphasis -- PvdM). This supports the notion that Joe’s presence at the carnival neither makes any difference nor signifies anything valuable. He has to take an alternative route in search for his Grail. Joe needs to somehow make his life meaningful. However, he is more aware of his anger towards the members of the carnival at the time of his departure rather than focusing on his own ambitions.
The climax of the disinterested approach of the carnival people coincides with the final exploitation of one of the freaks, Fanny the Fat Lady. The carnival becomes a metaphor for movement, however, not one that signifies a hopeful search as Joe’s movement does, but one of astounding moral regression. Fanny is a retarded woman who is used as a prostitute by Sim Hearn. Her prostitution is taken to a height at the end of the season when Sim Hearn organizes an event that is a stupendous gang rape: “In his total absorption with the pursuit of profit, the carnival-owner is simply another calculating entrepreneur and cold-eyed employer” (Levine, 1985:68). The rape has a major impact on Joe’s state of mind. He clearly has moved away from his rebellious and oppressing Paterson identity where he himself abused “freaks” and/or defenseless individuals. The effect of the disillusionments that New York and the carnival brought about for Joe is that he has matured.

For Joe, Fanny is in a sense an antithesis of the prototype spiritually meager individual. He experiences her as an extraordinary benevolent presence: “She was truly sensitive to men, she had a real affection for them. She didn’t know she was making money, she never saw the money” (LL, 20). When he witnesses her conventional prostitution he says:

I decided that between this retarded whore freak and the riffraff who stood in line to fuck her some really important sacrament was taken, some means of continuing hope, a ritual oath of life which did not wear away but grew in the memory of her around the bars and taverns of the mountains, catching her image in the sawdust flying up through the sunlight in the mill yards or lying like the mist of the morning over the clear lakes (LL, 20).

Fanny is a person marked not only by an anomalous appearance and lack of intelligence, but also a sincere affection for people. She becomes a martyr who suffers the consequences of not her own, but others’ spiritual bankruptcy. The purity of Fanny’s love is violated and she is repulsively reduced to a lucrative object: “The people know Hearn -- he gives something special at the end of the summer, a grand finale ...” (LL, 129). This causes Joe to leave the carnival, but first he avenges her death.

Joe sees in Magda Hearn an accomplice to Fanny’s death. He duplicates the rape of Fanny with vengeance when he and Magda have sex. This occurs after they have left the carnival with the money that Fanny’s affliction has generated:

She had no idea I had actually caught evil as one catches a fever, she didn’t understand this, she thought my passion matched hers. I wanted to do to her what had been done to the Fat Lady, I wanted the force of a hundred men in unholy fellowship, I went at her like a murderous drunkard (LL, 130-131).
By way of paying respect to Fanny, Joe leaves Magda and throws the money away: "With all my might I reared back and threw the bills into the wind. I thought of them as the Fat Lady's ashes" (LL, 131). Rejecting the money is an anti-capitalistic action which signifies his respect for Fanny, the human being. It takes priority over the profits that he could have benefited from by stealing the money.

Following the episode with Sim Hearn's wife, Joe spends a night in the woods where he finds the railroad that eventually leads him to Loon Lake. Joe says: "I had no idea where I was going. It didn't particularly matter. I ran to get warm. I ran into the woods as to another world" (LL, 132). The narrator uses Fanny's fate to lead Joe not only away from the carnival, but towards Clara who impacts his life decisively.

The beginning and end of the carnival episode represent the height of Joe's morality. At first he devotes himself fully to the "magic world" of the carnival and when he leaves, he does so because he cannot bear it that a fellow human being is brutally sacrificed for money. He recognizes that the carnival is similar to Paterson in the sense that its members have no Grail.

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After the carnival experience, Joe's path intersects with that of a character who is the direct cause for the further development of his existence.

Joe lives as a vagrant for a while and encounters a railroad line. During one night a train passes him and he sees the contents of train cars swiftly passing him by. Everything in the series of cars is marked by extraordinary wealth. The last image is that of a naked girl in front of a mirror holding up a white dress in front of her. The impact which this has on Joe may be attributed to it being, in aesthetic terms, an antithesis to the hideous rape which Joe had witnessed.

This encounter provokes a number of reactions from the moment it occurs. In a confused state Joe thinks that the train is going to hit him: "Suddenly I was blinded by a powerful light, as if I had looked into the sun. I dropped to my knees. The beam swung away from me ..." (LL, 31). He then observes the contents of the cars and the girl in front of the mirror. These images invoke contradictory reactions. They terrify and depress him. He experiences feelings of dereliction, loneliness, hopelessness and absence of self-regard. However, at the same time they dazzle, inspire and delight him. Joe proceeds to build a bonfire, but it is a confused celebration. He says: "I wanted to get in it" (LL, 32). He is thus in an exhilarated,
yet suicidal state. The lasting effect is that he takes the decision to follow the train: "At the first light of morning I climbed the embankment and set out down the tracks in the direction the train had gone" (LL, 32).

The appearance of the girl, i.e., the sudden introduction of an "incandescent vision of splendor" (LL, 31-32) surrounded by grandeur, functions as a distinct causative influence on Joe’s life:

Thinking about that girl standing in front of the mirror and holding up the white dress on the train gliding past me out of sight, I came along the track before I even knew it into the main street of a mountain village (LL, 41).

Joe does not know where the girl is or how to find her. He is confused and his uncertainty returns, but he does find Clara which is probably more attributable to the writer’s manipulation than the pretext of “instinct” (LL, 42).

At this stage one realizes that the novel is a symbolic representation of an individual’s journey towards the antithesis of the Grail. The novel presents a capitalist’s, namely Joe’s struggle with issues such as ambition, morality, material wealth and the presence of a woman in his life.

Parks says: "Clara is the alluring golden girl who literally draws the poor Joe along the track to success" (1991a:76). The concrete realized event, i.e., Joe’s arrival at Loon Lake, is surrounded by if-situations, yet is irrevocable. The causative process could have taken a completely different turn if he had carried out a decision to return the way he came which he contemplated. But the result of the intersection is already decided even before Joe arrives at Loon Lake. Following the one road from the state which runs uphill into the woods, Joe is lead unknowingly (by the novelist’s representation of chance) towards Loon Lake.

Although the element of chance involved here may be far-fetched and should retrospectively be understood on a metaphoric level, the depiction of human nature is convincing on a “concrete” level. Joe says: “I was not already in love with her but in her field of force, what I thought felt like was some stray dog following the first human being it happened to see” (LL, 41-42). He discovers the railroad car at a mountain village’s station, enters the train, now empty of people, and investigates the interior. The Paterson mill kid concludes: “Everything in this room, unlit and still, seems more awesome than from the distance of the night, for it was quite clearly owned” (LL, 42). This emphasizes the incompatibility of Joe’s and the girl’s worlds. Joe’s freedom and the girl’s confinement due to being “owned” like the other
material possessions in the car are juxtaposed. At this point Joe does not recognize the causality which this incident/intersection will bear. The effect which this incident has on him at this stage is merely vexation: "I was so blue. I was sorry I'd found the car, if I hadn't found it I could have thought about it for the rest of my life. If any. But now I felt let-down stupid at a loss what to do" (LL, 42).

Barkhausen (1988:139) says that Bennett’s luxurious private train carriage inscribes into Joe’s mind two indelible and conflicting ideas: the image of a pure woman as the absolute object of erotic desire, and the idea of exclusive ownership of luxurious property. One should therefore understand Joe’s obsession in terms of his search for a Grail which is motivated by principles that are represented by his two “spiritual fathers”, namely the tycoon William Bennett, owner of Loon Lake, and the poet, Warren Penfield, the estate’s poet in residence. Fowler remarks that “[t]he reader finds Penfield’s synchronicity with Joe’s life, for the novel shows us now Warren’s life, now Joe’s, with images from one life hauntingly resembling images from the other ...” (1992:101). Penfield says in a letter to Joe: “You are what I would want my son to be. More’s the pity. But who can tell, perhaps we all reappear, perhaps all our lives are impositions one on another” (LL, 177). Morris lists the correspondences between them:

The hypothesis of the ultimate joint identity of Joe and Penfield, at least, gains added credence by the many parallels between them: as children, each observes a woman holding up her infant daughter to urinate; later, each flees his working-class background; each suffers from the economic exploitation of Bennett’s businesses; on separate arrivals at Loon Lake, each is attacked by dogs; each loves Clara; each flees Loon Lake with a woman Bennett prizes; each wants to kill Bennett but does not (1991a:118).

Clara does represent wealth and ownership which add to her attraction. However, Joe is not consciously aware of this and it is his Penfield-like sensibility which motivates his love for her. It is not a capitalistic wish to improve the quality of his life, but a sincere longing to attain spiritual fulfilment. King describes the correspondence between Penfield and Joe in terms of a woman as follows:

It is first of all a romantic quest for the ideal woman, the golden girl. Warren Penfield, a generous but lugubrious poet of romantic sensibilities, and Joe of Paterson, a young working-class roustabout, are in pursuit of a vision of femininity to which each was exposed as a young boy (1981:342).

Because Joe is also Penfield’s spiritual son, he is distinguishable from the other barren, lifeless Patersonians. Harter and Thompson introduce an optimistic perception, namely that Joe does not sacrifice being the son of Penfield, his poetic vitality, by becoming Bennett’s son:
For the man who has created this narrative has developed parallel lives somewhat akin to Wallace Steven’s public life as an insurance executive and his private life as a remarkably sensuous poet. Here, Joseph Bennett has assumed the dualistic persona of his two spiritual fathers: his public and professional life replicates and extends F.W. Bennett’s; his personal, very private life, manifests the artistic legacy of Warren Penfield (1990:80).

Bennett and Penfield are two aspects of Joe’s personality. “The poet” and “the capitalist” are also two aspects of Bennett’s identity that fight to be dominant, but it is of course the latter which triumphs. Parks gives an applicable summary to what Bennett, in opposition to Penfield, means to Joe:

Joe is drawn to images of freedom, of autonomy, of self-sufficiency. That is what impresses him about the aloof Sim Hearn and what draws him to the magisterial F.W. Bennett ... But what is it that draws him to the figure of Warren Penfield ...? Penfield’s freedom is of a different order. ... Joe sees in Penfield a man who in many respects has fulfilled his self-project. Penfield possesses the power of words, of composition, of the imagination that created and destroys worlds ... Listening to his poetry, to his life, Joe feels more alive than he has ever felt (1991a:81).

However, when finally romantic love does not appear to be what Joe had hoped for, he returns to his capitalistic ways. King says: “The son of the working class, Joe, denies his paternity and hits the road in search of his ‘real’ father” (1981:343). Harter and Thompson (1990:80) say that Joe’s public life flows over into his private life by using the computer to embody the mechanistic values of modern capitalist society. It is clear that Joe’s life would have had a different course if he had not suffered unrequited love. Joe is obsessed with Clara: ascertaining her name distinguishes her as someone with an identity which is of utmost importance to him. The vast difference between the Scandinavian maid and Clara can be seen in terms of their names. Joe says: “I thought even having her name was an enormous inroad of intelligence” (LL, 79). Ironically, she is not that much different from Joe. Parks says:

She herself is a working-class girl in flight from her origins, bartering her sexual gifts for a good life. Like Fitzgerald’s ‘golden girl’, Clara disappoints and her own emptiness cannot fill her quester’s dreams (1991a:76).

Clara, like Fanny and Lucinda Bennett, belongs to a context in which she is forced to be a prostitute. Her life is also representative of a theme in the novel, namely that contexts determine the fate of individuals. Joe is therefore not only an alter ego of Penfield and Bennett, but also of Fanny, Lucinda and Clara. The way she lives connotes a “reappearance” of Joe’s life. For example, her prostitution approximates Joe’s relationship with the Scandinavian woman and Sim Hearn’s wife, Magda. Their behaviour can be seen as desperate attempts to somehow move forward.
However, Joe falls in love with Clara due to a misconception. He wants to be the counterpart of a self-actualized individual. The irony is that in his unfilled, yet searching state he is already her counterpart: “Her (telling) name is Clara, and her social background, age, experiences and unconditional desire for life make her Joe’s female equivalent” (Barkhausen, 1988:138).

Clara dominates Joe’s consciousness because she appears to be a personification of the antithesis to Paterson, i.e., she is the embodiment of an illusory haven similar to the fictional construction of California. As Penfield’s spiritual son, sincere love and admiration make her the object of Joe’s desire. Yet, Clara is also associated with material wealth and Joe loves her for this reason as well. However, he does not understand the shallow nature of her trophy identity.

Joe, Penfield, Bennett and Clara all share a sense of being unfulfilled. As Todorov explains, the stories of what happens to these characters are “narratives” that signify each other. Joe reflects longing for fulfilment and Clara appears to exemplify an aesthetic beauty indicative of inner harmony or self-actualization. This is, however, a deceptive façade as Clara is, in fact, in the spiritual sense a Patersonian.

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When Joe arrives at Loon Lake, he is attacked by wild dogs and admitted to Loon Lake’s infirmary. His concentration drifts away from the girl who inspired him to follow the railroad track which ultimately brought him to the estate. He assumes that she was a visitor who has already left. There is no specific reason to remain at Loon Lake, but at the same time no haste to leave.

Of central concern at this stage is Joe’s disposition with regard to individuality. He feels justified to remain at Loon Lake because of the attack:

*The force of self-distinguishing which I found so foolish among the stiffs and hobos was what I ran on. When you are nobody and have nothing, you depend on your troubles for self-respect. I have paid heavily for the bed and board. I wasn’t one of them (the workers), I was a paying guest (LL, 76-77; my parenthesis -- PvdM).*

Libby, a girl that nurses him, tells him about the important guests that visit Loon Lake and informs him of a guest book which some of them sign. This triggers Joe’s preoccupation with identity, and the relationship between Joe and Chaplin reappears. Here one sees Chaplin as a distinguished visitor and Joe still as a scamp. Joe repeats in a modified version Chaplin’s
inscription in the guest book of Loon Lake. Chaplin’s comment next to his name is: “Splendid weekend! Gay company” (LL, 69). He follows Chaplin’s inscription’s structure, a two-part praise, but applying his own situation, i.e., taking the wild dogs’ attack on him into account and thus changing Chaplin’s casual sincerity to sarcasm: “Joe’, I wrote. ‘Of Paterson. Splendid dogs. Swell company’” (LL, 71). Joe commits a type of gatecrashing by writing his name in the book. This is provoked by Libby’s comment that not “just anyone” (LL, 71) is invited to sign the book. This shows once again that identity and names are a crucial factor in Loon Lake as to the development of individuals’ lives.

Contemplating the famous names he only vaguely recognizes (LL, 69-70), Joe says:

I felt I could learn something, that there was something here, some powerful knowledge I could use. But it was in code! ... It was some mysterious system of legalities and caste and extended brilliant endeavor — all abbreviated into these names and dates of proud people from all over the world who had come here to this secret place in the mountains (LL, 70).

When he reads the names of Loon Lake’s guest book it appears to Joe that the being does not precede the name, but the name the being. The name is from the very beginning either a reflection of the individual’s life, an explanation of the being or a reflection of an empowering personal context. He rebels against his inability to understand the “codes” that the names present and angered by being manipulated by the name, Joe of Paterson, he signs the book.

If Joe had not signed the book he would have equated himself with “anyone” which would have implied the Patersonians. Joe therefore distinguishes himself as being on par with Chaplin, yet at the same time mocks the affluent when he signs his name. Consequently, Joe’s exclusion by Loon Lake’s workers and their community eventually gives rise to his decision to leave Bennett’s estate: “I’d be damned if I’d lift a rake or anything else. What could they do, fire me? I stood on the porch and thought about leaving right away, immediately” (LL, 77). This is the preamble before he encounters Clara a second time.

When he sees her on the estate, he is immediately humbled and willing to be a worker, i.e., sacrificing his identity: “I headed back to the staff house, from one moment to the next, a worried probationary in my dark green shirt and pants no thought further from my mind than leaving” (LL, 78). Clara’s causative impact on his life continues and at this point he again becomes part of the cycle of hoping to find fulfilment.

Referring to himself as a “probationary” emphasizes that Clara causes Joe to become “imprisoned” by her and her context. For the first time he becomes imprisoned by Loon Lake
because of his obsession with her. Important to note is that the difference between this “imprisonment” and the experiences in Paterson, New York, at the carnival and at Loon Lake is that he does not want to escape the latter. Joe says: “I didn’t know what would happen in my life but I knew whatever it was it would have to do with her, with Clara” (LL, 79). This is a chosen willingness to do anything and be anything to know her and know about her (LL, 79). He is aware that in order to do this, he must remain at Loon Lake and he would only be allowed to remain if he were an asset to the Loon Lake estate: “How much time did I have? Only until the big man arrived, I had only that time to prove that I shouldn’t be thrown out on my ass” (LL, 79). This is ironic because a worker is in all of the contexts in Loon Lake always replaceable. Joe is preparing a context for himself in which it will be possible to be manipulated by Clara.

Ironically, Clara only becomes really interested in Joe when he is able to offer her in a capitalistic fashion what she has lost, namely her freedom. She is the girlfriend of Tommy Crapo, one of Bennett’s employees. But Clara is also Bennett’s mistress and wishes to flee from Bennett as well as Crapo. Her wish to escape is directly determined by Lucinda Bennett’s return: “Clara would leave because she was dislodged by the returning wife, Clara would leave because with unforgivable haste she’d been removed from the cozy confidences of Loon Lake’s master bedroom” (LL, 112). She therefore exploits Joe in ways similar to how he exploited people in the past. Comparable to Joe, she is “faithful to nothing but her own life” (LL, 96).

Joe’s departure from Loon Lake is thus wholly determined by Clara. Her enticing beauty seems to be the cause of his offer to help her escape:

I had never in my life seen a woman more beautiful. ‘This place is getting on my nerves,’ she said. ‘How do I get out of here?’ ‘I’ll take care of it, leave it to me,’ I said without a moment’s hesitation (LL, 104).

Clara’s acceptance makes Joe euphoric, but also forces him to see that if he wants to succeed he has to believe in his “brazen hopes” (LL, 32), to be audacious and to soberly make preparations in order to construct a life for himself that would be “no more than he deserved” (LL, 104).

However, a life with Clara does not have the makings of a spiritually fulfilled life. A transaction is implied, but Joe is unable to offer her absolute freedom as she is unable to offer him the spiritual fulfilment with the attractive gloss of materialism. One also becomes aware of the ambiguous state of Joe’s perception of Clara. Her presence in his life is motivated not
only by love, but also by materialism. Joe refers to the improved state in which he leaves Loon Lake:

... I was leaving Loon Lake in somewhat better condition than I had come. Calculating, heedless, and without gratitude, I accepted every circumstance that had put me there, only gunning my mind to the future, wanting more, expecting more, too intent on what was ahead to sit back and give thanks or to laugh or to feel bad (LL, 120).

Moreover, the implication of taking Clara with him is that Joe is able to leave Loon Lake because of his revived ideal to find a fulfilling context.

Joe becomes aware of his ambitions or ideals during his first spell at Loon Lake: to be respected and regarded as important. Although he finally chooses wealth as a second-rate alternative, he knows from his experience in New York that wealth alone is not a prerequisite for the distinction of being spiritually fulfilled. He therefore does not hesitate to leave Loon Lake with Clara in search of recognition and inner wealth, but the enticement of materialism is not completely absent as a motivation. Joe subsequently combines the dream to live with his ideal woman with another old fantasy that flares up a second time, namely to go to California. He only takes the decision to become Bennett’s successor when the ideal to live with Clara (and eventually in California) shatters.

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Joe and Clara do not reach California, but Jacksontown, and consequently never really leave Loon Lake. Jacksontown and Loon Lake may be geographically two entities, but they are economically one organization. They flee from Loon Lake with one of Bennett’s cars which Joe then sells to buy a less conspicuous one. Their money is depleted by the time they reach Jacksontown and Joe is forced to obtain work. Ironically he finds work at a autobody factory which belongs to William Bennett. This does not only have the function of Joe “taking money” from Bennett, but it is also a deliberate method of the writer to make connections between Jacksontown, Loon Lake and Paterson.

It is strange that Joe is willing to work in Bennett’s factory, taking his stance on identity into account. Joe becomes a co-worker of nameless inhabitants of a town that resembles Paterson. He literally sacrifices his identity for Clara’s sake:

The line was a complex society with standards of conduct honor serious moral judgement ... Yet none of this was visible when we pressed through the gates in the evening, a nameless faceless surge of men in soft caps in full flight (LL, 165).
The similarity between Jacksontown and Paterson is remarkable and it seems that a circle has been completed. The lives of Joe and Clara appear to have become duplications of his parents’ existence:

Clara and I lived on Railroad, the street of the endless two-family bungalows (LL, 165).

How did that make them different from anyone else on Mechanic Street, even the houses were the same, two by two, the same asphalt palace over and over ... (LL, 3).

Clara becomes like Joe’s parents and gives their existence in Jacksontown “her deference” (LL, 166). She becomes indifferent towards Joe which implies their incongruous hopes. There is a certain animosity between them and although they become a couple, sex between them is not presented as romantic, but as clinical, mechanical and comparable to routine exercise (LL, 140-150). This is significant in Jacksontown’s capitalistic context and Johnson’s remark that all the sexual relationships in the novel involve money and that they are all developed in sadistic and economic terms (1982:144).

There are, however, differences between Joe and his parents. He is still, despite his materialism, vigorously trying to realize his dream of a fulfilled life with Clara and considers their stay in Jacksontown as temporary. Whilst trying to save money to bring him and Clara to California, Joe also attempts to be attentive to her needs. In short, he is in love with Clara and says to her:

I have these godawful longings to support you, to make a life with you, I want us to live together in one place. I don’t care where, I’ll keep you in bonbons and French novels, Clara, and it’s all your fault (LL, 156-157).

Joe’s history shows that he is not obsessed with material wealth, but he cannot avoid capitalistic traps, for example, having to steal a job in New York, having to steal a car from Bennett because of his obsession with Clara and having to work in Jacksontown.

The importance of fighting spiritual poverty enables him to remain in Jacksontown even though he acknowledges to Clara: “All right, this is the worst shithole in the frozenest fucking country there is I can’t believe how cold it is” (LL, 156). He is prepared to live under unfavourable conditions because of his hope that his love for Clara will lead to fulfilment. Clara, however, rejects his declaration of love by saying: “Oh Jesus, he’s crazy, this boy is crazy” (LL, 157). The irony is that Joe is indeed “crazy”. By being in love with Clara he really becomes a “loon”. Now “loon” does not present freedom and having perspective anymore. It represents foolishness. This “craziness” leads to his loss of freedom.
Joe consistently rebels against being identified with his physical contexts. But Clara appears to him as “heavenly” when he sees her for the first time. This is reminiscent of his impression of California when he is in New York. It is a phantom context with which he wishes to identify himself. She ultimately also disappoints him and is quite similar to him. Like Joe she is “taking each day as it comes” (LL, 89), a comparison which Penfield brings to her attention.

Clara becomes physically less attractive in Jacksontown and her identity as Joe’s “Holy Grail” begins to fade. Yet, he tries to revive his dream self-deceptively by remembering the person in the lap of luxury: “All of it was all right with me. I still couldn’t take my eyes off her. I tried to remember the insolent girl with the wineglass in her hand and the firelight in her eyes” (LL, 166). This memory reflects Joe’s hope to be acknowledged and loved by a person who is formed by material wealth. Whilst in Jacksontown, Clara is ironically reduced to a “souvenir”. She is and simultaneously is not his trophy.

A further development that eventually shatters Joe’s dreams and leads to his return to Loon Lake is the coincidence that Joe and Clara have Lyle “Red” James, a spy for Crapo Industrial Services, and, Sandy, his teenage wife, as neighbours. James, undercover as a workers’ union fanatic, is killed according to Parks (1991a:83) not by his betrayed fellow workers, but by Crapo’s agents who have no more use for him. Crapo Services also suspect Joe, having been friends with James who pretended quite convincingly to be a union leader. As a prisoner Joe produces a private telephone number which Bennett has given him and he says it should be confirmed that he is Bennett’s son. Joe is released when the voice at the other end of the line confirms his “identity”. This signifies a decision that Joe makes. He lets his own identity merge with that of a capitalist.

Clara returns to Crapo when he finds her and Joe decides to make a life with James’s widow, but changes his decision when he reads a newspaper article that tells of the disappearance of Lucinda Bennett’s plane at sea. A photograph of Lucinda Bennett and Penfield next to the plane accompanies the article.

In Jacksontown, Joe suffers yet another disappointment, but this time it is not because of the place and its people. He seems to be less upset by the physical context of Jacksontown because of his belief that he and Clara would only be staying there temporarily. The real disappointment is his decision to submit to capitalism. He becomes Bennett’s son by simply declaring it. Another dramatic disappointment is the ease with which Clara returns to Crapo.
The implication is that she does not find Joe to be important. This equals the nature of namelessness, i.e., not being considered significant as it appears in the many contexts that Joe encounters. He briefly considers once again to go to California, but then doubts whether he would really find fulfilment there after he had lost Clara: “I wondered if this wasn’t really the last stop, if California was like heaven, unproven” (LL, 243).

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The implication of Joe’s return to Loon Lake is that he completes a cycle. Bennett is a person who sustains the kind of relationship that exists between Paterson and Loon Lake. Paterson’s reality is indirectly determined by Bennett’s contribution to the creation of contexts within society. Joe becomes the heir to a legacy that will support the kind of context of which Joe had been a victim as a child.

Why does Joe support this cycle that formed his parents’ lives? One finds the concept that the poor perpetuate the economic system through their dreams in *Ragtime* when Goldman writes to Evelyn Nesbit:

> I am often asked the question How can the masses permit themselves to be exploited by the few. The answer is By being persuaded to identify with them. Carrying his newspapers with your picture the laborer goes home to his wife, an exhausted workhorse with the veins standing out in her legs, and he dreams not of justice but of being rich (R, 69).

Joe has to decide between the life style of searching and one that endows external power. When Clara rejects Joe out of fear for her returning boyfriend, Tommy Crapo, his willingness to endure material poverty gives way to accepting material wealth at the price of the possibility of finding spiritual wealth.

His decision to return to Loon Lake on his way to California with Sandy signifies a belief that he will be disappointed again. Joe finally believes that spiritual fulfilment does not exist, but material fulfilment which Loon Lake represents and offers, does.

In the custom of Doctorow’s fiction, *Loon Lake* emphasizes that material wealth does not safeguard spiritual wealth — and Joe knows this very well. He sees freedom as the real source of wealth, but also as unobtainable.

While in New York, Joe is content with his meager earnings that he receives for working at Graeber’s store: “When I went along after work with my tips in my pocket I was John D. Rockefeller” (LL, 9). The name “Rockefeller” here signifies exhilaration and contentment.
Ironically, the narrator in *Ragtime* tells when describing J.P. Morgan’s dinner party with the richest men and their spouses that

Rockefeller startled him (*J.P. Morgan*) with the news that he was chronically constipated and did a lot of his thinking on the toilet ... Without exception the dozen most powerful men in America looked like horses’ asses. Not one of the women thought to laugh. They were hags. ... Not a light in their eyes. They were the loyal wives of great men and the hard pull of rampant achievement had sucked the life out of their flesh (R, 107; my parenthesis -- PvdM).

Joe only “acquiesces” to material wealth when he stops his journey after he has lost Clara and was disappointed by her. He is not quite the same kind of spiritually poor capitalist as the above mentioned people.

His initial instinctive quest to resist spiritual poverty by leaving Paterson as a common mill kid, becoming a delivery boy, a derelict, a carnival roustabout, a factory worker like his parents before he returns to Loon Lake is a hopeful journey. However, it ends in spiritual regression because he decides to quit being a social being. Like Susan in *The Book of Daniel* he feels that he cannot be content as a member of society without the opposite of Paterson, i.e., whether it appears as a geographical location or a person.

Being the son of F.W. Bennett can be linked to the meaning of Loon Lake. Joe asks himself what he would do if he had money: “Would I purchase isolation, as this man had? Was that what money was for, to put a distance of fifty thousand acres of mountain terrain between you and the boondocks of the world?” (LL, 76). Spiritual poverty therefore creates a context that denies social interaction as has been seen in *The Book of Daniel*. The individual abandons his/her social identity and becomes “a starfish”.

The way Bennett acquires his wealth is in this sense ironic: “The man made automobile bodies, and they were for connection, cars were democracy we had been told” (LL, 76). Bennett misuses society and democracy in order to obtain luxury which separates him from the contexts like Jacksontown which he creates. This is reminiscent of the controversial figure Howard Hughes who isolated himself towards the end of his life and became mentally unstable, a “loon”. King (1981:344) points out that

[n]ear the end of the novel, the narrator wonders what the point of wealth is, why a man such as Bennett secludes himself in such a mountain retreat. He concluded that it is ‘the desire for isolation’, an explanation resonant with the fate of more recent figures such as Howard Hughes.
Being isolated as well as establishing and exploiting contexts like Jacksontown, Bennett is not the antithesis of Joe’s parents. Bennett, and by implication, Joe as well become the subjects for criticism against the rich that can be seen in *Ragtime*: “... these experiences are not the sole prerogative of the poor poverty is not a moral endowment and a man who had the strength himself can help others ...” (LL, 161). But Bennett says: “I’ve never understood how a man could give up his life ...” (LL, 111). This is ironically what Bennett does as well. Although not a humanist, the “Master of Loon Lake” is human like anyone else and Joe declares that Bennett embodies “the fullness of the perplexity of living” (LL, 161). Lucinda signifies for Bennett what Clara signifies for Joe. Like Clara, Lucinda also fails in an attempt to achieve fulfilment, metaphorically presented by flying:

Lucinda Bennett’s plane, like a loon, circles and then lands in the lake. Her quest for higher, purer altitudes corresponds to Penfield’s search for the ineffable in Zen; they become companions, and he joins her on her final flight and plunge (Towers, 1980:47).

Bennett is also a human being without the ability to attain spiritual fulfilment or the belief that it exists.

Barkhausen writes about Joe’s reduction of values when he returns to Loon Lake:

For on the one side it implies his decision against the moral impulses of his past and for the implications of wealth whose ‘greatest achievement is isolation, its godliness is in its isolation’ (p. 238), while on the other side it denotes the death of Joe’s original ‘juicy fullness of being’ (p. 7). ... No doubt, in reviewing his life Joe comes to the conclusion that the beginning of his career marked the death of the substance of his life (1988:135).

Looking at the elements of Joe’s identity that Barkhausen identifies, one recognizes that they do not only distinguish him as a promising capitalist:

The reproduction of capitalism depends on the validity of principle, not of desire, and therefore Joe, the capitalist-to-be, has to prove his eligibility by displaying the principal qualities which make the master: cunning, immorality, selfishness, determination, freedom from desire (1988:136).

And as Morris (1991a:129) points out:

Joe’s epiphany compensates for the loss of Clara ... This discovery on Joe’s part aligns his joyful ‘wisdom’ with Bennett’s and with the Nietzschean idea of the Übermensch. At the end of the novel, both characters embody values similar to those of J.P. Morgan in *Ragtime* ...

If Joe would have found wealth, it would have been as a rebellious Joe of Paterson. But in 1941 Joe changes his name legally: he becomes Joseph Paterson Bennett (LL, 258) and modifies his identity and consequently loses his freedom to mature as he had when he left the carnival. Burgess (1980:66) says that the name change symbolizes fulfilment of the
American Dream. One can therefore conclude that Doctorow relativizes the validity of the American Dream. Barkhausen says:

Leaving no doubt that the inherent barrenness and narcissism of the capitalist hierarchy are the historical conditions of his career, Joe’s autobiography will have to be read not as a half-hearted, emphatic apology for, but as an incisive indictment of the capitalist’s life which is especially poignant for its being a self-indictment. (1988:137).

The centre of Joe’s idealism is partly represented by a fiction he created out of Clara, i.e., by what he as the spiritual son of Penfield the poet thinks he sees in her. Clara is ultimately just another attempt in trying to find his Grail, a “context” that could be fulfilling. However, just like his hopes in New York, his desire to reach California, longing for a life with the carnival and being accepted by Clara end in disappointment.

Joe’s realization that he cannot escape spiritual poverty and his concomitant disillusionment induce his resignation. He gives up by choosing Loon Lake as his home: the metaphorical residence of the powerful who control towns and cities. Paterson, New York, Jacksonstown, et cetera, are synonymous with one another and although geographically detached from the estate, they form a unity with Loon Lake.