



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza

## Trabajo Fin de Máster

From Gender to Trauma: Representations of  
Trauma and the Female in

E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*

Author

María Ferrández San Miguel

Director

Francisco Collado Rodríguez

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

2011/2012

## RESUMEN

El estudio llevado a cabo en esta tesis de fin de máster se ha centrado en el análisis de *El Libro de Daniel*, la novela escrita por el norteamericano E. L. Doctorow en 1971 que narra la historia de la detención y ejecución de los Isaacson desde el punto de vista de Daniel, el mayor de sus dos hijos. La trama está basada en el caso Rosenberg, el matrimonio de comunistas neoyorquinos que fueron condenados y ejecutados en 1953 por espionaje.

El estudio de la novela se ha llevado a cabo a través de un enfoque multidimensional. Así pues, *El Libro de Daniel* ha sido analizado desde el marco de los estudios de trauma y desde el punto de vista de la crítica literaria feminista. Ambos enfoques han sido complementados además con el método de análisis narratológico.

El objetivo de esta tesis de fin de máster ha sido analizar el par masculino/femenino y la representación de la relación entre ambos sexos. Esta relación toma la forma de tensión o incluso violencia en la novela como resultado de las experiencias traumáticas sufridas por el protagonista en su infancia. Así pues, este estudio ha buscado analizar los síntomas traumáticos del protagonista y la relación existente entre estos y la representación y el trato que reciben los personajes femeninos en la novela. Además, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis narratológico con el fin determinar qué estrategias y técnicas ha empleado el autor para representar dichos aspectos.

En la primera parte de esta tesis de fin de máster, *El Libro de Daniel* se ha analizado como una narrativa de trauma. Se ha considerado el estado del protagonista, exponiendo la idea de que sufre los síntomas asociados al síndrome de estrés post-traumático y a la anhedonia. Se ha analizado también el estado de su memoria y se ha evaluado la posibilidad de cura mediante la narración, determinando que la recuperación completa es imposible en el caso del protagonista. Este análisis ha permitido concluir que la novela tiene como objetivo representar el trauma individual como sintomático del trauma colectivo histórico que se halla en la base de la sociedad norteamericana. La novela también constituye una denuncia de aquellas estructuras legales, políticas y económicas que generan situaciones traumáticas y de victimización. Asimismo busca concienciar a los lectores de los efectos del trauma, del sufrimiento de las víctimas y de la importancia de ser testigos empáticos.

En la segunda sección, la novela ha sido analizada desde un punto de vista feminista. El análisis se ha centrado en la actitud violenta y controladora que el protagonista muestra hacia los personajes femeninos y en el trato que estos reciben. También se ha considerado la

posición del protagonista con respecto a la otredad femenina, prestando especial atención a la lucha por el control narrativo y a la ausencia de diálogo entre géneros. Por último, se han examinado los papeles asignados a los personajes femeninos en la novela, argumentando que estos corresponden en general a aquellos asignados tradicionalmente a las mujeres. Este análisis ha permitido concluir que la novela constituye una defensa de algunas de las inquietudes feministas y una sofisticada crítica del patriarcado. Asimismo, la novela reflexiona sobre el papel que juega la representación del trauma en la dicotomización de ambos sexos, ya que demuestra que la categoría de víctima no puede ser reservada exclusivamente para las mujeres y que la distinción entre víctima y verdugo no está tan clara en la sociedad contemporánea.

La última parte del análisis ha empleado las herramientas proporcionadas por el método narratológico. Se han examinado la voz narrativa, la perspectiva, el tiempo y el nivel narrativos, así como el narratario, el autor y lector implícito de la novela. Además, se han analizado las estrategias formales empleadas para la representación formal del trauma y se han considerado los aspectos más experimentales de la novela, principalmente sus características metaficcionales y su intertextualidad. Este análisis ha permitido concluir que *El Libro de Daniel* es una obra maestra desde el punto de vista narratológico, y que la habilidad narrativa de Doctorow como escritor postmoderno es incuestionable. El autor norteamericano ha sido capaz de crear una novela en la que forma y contenido se complementan de forma perfecta para desarrollar el proyecto literario del autor.

Tras el análisis temático, ideológico y formal de *El Libro de Daniel*, se han alcanzado una serie de conclusiones generales que permiten definir el objetivo de la novela y el grado en que la misma es una pieza importantísima en el proyecto literario de Doctorow. Así pues, la novela permite al autor denunciar una serie de valores y construcciones culturales de la sociedad norteamericana que carecen de validez ética. Además, la novela permite a Doctorow representar los aspectos más negativos de la sociedad norteamericana, destruyendo así importantes mitos norteamericanos. Asimismo, Doctorow busca mediante esta novela exponer ciertas estructuras sociales, económicas y políticas y denunciar su influencia como mecanismos de control y alienación. Por último, la novela demuestra y defiende el importante papel que la narrativa puede desempeñar como herramienta para concienciar a la sociedad de algunos problemas éticos que afectan al comportamiento del ser humano en la sociedad contemporánea. En definitiva, la novela forma parte del proyecto de revelar e interpretar las fuerzas socio-históricas que dan forma a la sociedad norteamericana con el fin de mejorarla mediante una llamada al pensamiento crítico y a la empatía de los lectores.

## INDEX

<b>1. Introduction: Literature Review, Frameworks and Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. <i>The Book of Daniel</i> as a Trauma Novel</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>“Daniel’s Book:” A False Document written by a Little Criminal of</b>	
<b>Perception</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3. <i>The Book of Daniel</i> as a Site for Feminist Discussion</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Hermeneutics of Suspicion: The Urgent Truth of “Daniel’s Book”</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>4. <i>The Book of Daniel</i> from the Perspective of Narratology</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Narrating Instance, Aesthetics of Trauma and Metafiction in</b>	
<b><i>The Book of Daniel</i></b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>6. Works Cited</b>	<b>68</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION: LITERATURE REVIEW, FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGY

Beginnings are always hard, and when E. L. Doctorow began his career as a writer, back in the 1960s, not many critics expected that he would become one of the most relevant novelists in North America. In fact, his first novels tended to be praised by reviewers,<sup>1</sup> but they were generally disregarded by academic critics (Williams, 1996: 60). Things started to change with the astonishing critical and commercial success of *Ragtime* (1975), Doctorow's fourth novel. Its popularity and the subsequent interest that it elicited among academic critics for its peculiar treatment of history led to a reexamination of his previous novels. Thus, the new decade witnessed what John Williams has referred to as the "canonization" of Doctorow's previous novels, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) and *The Book of Daniel* (1971) (1996: 60). As a result, with Doctorow's admission into the contemporary literary canon, a large amount of scholars started to devote their time and efforts to analyze the works of the prolific Jewish-American fabulator.

Several book-length critical analyses dealing with Doctorow's oeuvre have been published over the last two decades. First, there have been a number of anthologies of criticism which compiled the most important scholarly articles written on Doctorow's fiction (Trenner, 1983; Friedl & Schulz, 1988; Morris, 1999; Siegel, 2000; Bloom, 2002). Two of them also include interviews to the author in which Doctorow reflects on the themes of his work and his literary style. In addition, one of the anthologies also includes a large number of reviews (Trenner, 1983; Morris, 1999). The articles in these

---

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of *Big as Life* (1966), Doctorow's second novel, which reviewers and Doctorow himself agreed to be a failure. In fact, the writer did not allow it to be reissued (Williams, 1996: 20).

anthologies approach the writer's corpus from perspectives as varied as historiography, feminism, sociology, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist criticism. Taken together, these five volumes trace the critical reputation of E. L. Doctorow's literary works and identify a number of important themes in them. Secondly, several introductory books have been published, which constitute comprehensive academic introductions to Doctorow's oeuvre (Levine, 1985; Harter & Thompson, 1990; Parks, 1991; Fowler, 1992). These works follow a survey approach and offer summaries and critical readings of Doctorow's novels and short stories which consolidate and extend issues and themes already explored in scholarly essay format. Finally, there have been some monographs which have approached Doctorow's corpus from a specific framework, namely deconstruction (Morris, 1991) and cultural theory (Tokarczyk, 2000). To these book-length analyses, a large number of independent academic articles published in international journals must be added, which have been devoted to one or several of Doctorow's works, providing readings within many different frameworks and approaches.

Among Doctorow's corpus, a novel which has been generally praised and extensively dealt with by the critics is *The Book of Daniel*. Published in 1971, it eventually achieved an enormous success, becoming finalist for the National Book Award for fiction. At its simplest, the novel is the fictional rendering of the conviction and execution of the Isaacsons from the viewpoint of their surviving son. The plot is loosely based on the actual trial and execution of the Rosenbergs, the New York communists who were convicted and executed in 1953 for conspiracy to commit espionage leading to the development of the Soviet nuclear program. However, as John Parks has noted, *The Book of Daniel* is many stories at once (1991: 456). It is a *Bildungsroman*, since it tells the story of Daniel Isaacson's struggles as he grows up

with his grief and guilt; it is also a *Künstlerroman*, since it concerns itself with Daniel as a writer who tries to discover his own identity and his relationship to society; it is the tale of a survivor, since it narrates Daniel's struggles to find a narrative that will reconcile him with his traumatic past; it is a revenge story, since it deals with a son's duty to clear his parents' names; it is a clever political critique, since it condemns the conservatism of a very specific historical period—McCarthyism and the Red Scare—while at the same time questioning and criticizing the Old Left of the 1930s and 40s and the New Left of the 1960s. And finally, it is the story of a history graduate student who struggles to write his dissertation. What is more, the novel manages to tell all these stories at once in a highly crafted metafictional and experimental style, in a fragmented hybrid narrative that escapes linearity, mixes homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration, and combines autobiography and personal memoir with passages of historical description, sociology and political theory, while reflecting on its own status as a (fictional) text.

Despite its obvious literary merits, the reception of *The Book of Daniel* was rather ambiguous at first. On the one hand a reviewer praised it as “the political novel of our age,” and Joyce Carol Oates went so far as to call the book a “nearly perfect work of art” (Williams, 1996: 21–22). However, it was virtually ignored by the academia for almost ten years. The first readings of the novel by reviewers tended to either celebrate it or condemn it on the basis of its political content, but their fixation with the novel's politics blinded them to the richness of content, theme, and style that it displays. However, with the passing of time, *The Book of Daniel* gradually received the critical attention from the academia that it undoubtedly deserves, and it increasingly became the object of scholarly analyses which have contributed to uncovering Doctorow's craft.

Textual analyses, interpretations and readings of *The Book of Daniel* have been included in all the introductions and monographs mentioned above. In these volumes, the novel has been read and analyzed from many different perspectives and within approaches as varied as historiographic metafiction, political theory, psychoanalysis, Marxist criticism, postmodern criticism, and psychology. To the book-length critical works, a wide number of scholarly articles must be added. Some of them have analyzed the novel as a Künstlerroman, considering the conflict between art and the artist (Lorsch, 1982); from the perspective of its religious analogies and content (Dillon, 1999); from the perspective of media theory (Wutz, 2003); from a political/historicist perspective (Estrin, 1975; Cooper, 1993; Irom, 2012); from the perspective of postmodern criticism (Harpham, 1985; Parks, 1991; Reed, 1992); and from a psychological perspective (Stark, 1975; Tokarczyk, 1987; DeRosa, 2009; Rasmussen, 2011). Others have referred to the novel as a tool to place Doctorow in the tradition of radical Jewish humanism (Clayton, 1983; Girgus, 1984). Other critics have provided a psychoanalytic reading of the novel (Forrey, 1982; Morgenstern, 2003). Finally, others have considered the book within the framework of feminist criticism (Culp, 1982).

Once reviewed the above-mentioned bibliographical sources, it seemed that the critical perspectives provided by feminism and by trauma theory, and the textual analysis developed by narratology might provide a new angle to further, in this MA dissertation, the critical interpretation of *The Book of Daniel*. First of all, it should be considered that the impact of feminism on literary criticism was already obvious at the time the novel was released. Feminism was by then already engaged in a critical process to alter the literary canon and, more significantly for the purposes of the present project, it had succeeded in setting a new agenda for analysis (Plain & Seller, 2007: 1). Ever since its birth in the 1960s, the ever-expanding field of feminist criticism has been



shaped and defined by a number of thinkers whose work has allowed for the formulation of new and different kinds of critical and theoretical approaches to the study of woman and, more specifically, literary texts, from the classics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellmann and Kate Millet, to Anglo-American second-wave literary critics like Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, through the French feminists Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, to contemporary theorists such as Toril Moi, and up to feminist literary critics informed by postcolonial studies, queer theory, and cybernetics, among others.

Secondly, trauma studies has also acquired great relevance for cultural and literary studies in recent times, achieving the status of a solid theoretical framework for the study of literary texts. Issues of trauma started to receive prominent critical attention among cultural critics in the 1990s, after the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged the phenomenon of trauma and stressed the importance of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes (Caruth, 1995: 3). Critics such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Judith Herman produced groundbreaking studies of the effects of trauma in war survivors, victims of the Holocaust, and victims of childhood traumatic experiences. The field would develop quickly thanks to work generated from the perspectives of neurology, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, history, and literature, including that of Bessel A. van der Kolk, Robert J. Lifton, Abraham and Torok, Kai Erikson, Dominick LaCapra, Anne Whitehead and many others.

Finally, the study of narrative from a formal perspective is almost as old as creative literature itself. Narratology, as a prominent method of textual analysis, has

developed from the early prescriptive poetics of specific genres, whose first instances are to be found in classical times, through formal and structural analysis, to recent trends which stress the relationship between representation and specific ideological or cultural forms (Onega & García, 1996: 12). The field has developed thanks to the work of important theorists such as Gerard Genette, Roland Barthes, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and Franz K. Stanzel.

The relevance of these two frameworks and the narratological method of textual analysis in today's critical grounds, together with the contemporary emphasis on, and interest in interdisciplinary approaches opens a door for a multidimensional analysis that may bring about innovative readings of literary texts. This possibility seems particularly appropriate for a novelist like E. L. Doctorow for several reasons. His Jewish heritage, as well as his own condition as leftist writer in a country where the Left never seems to have been very welcome may call for a revision of his works from the perspective of trauma studies. In addition, he has proclaimed himself a supporter of feminist concerns, and yet, in his literary depiction of North-America, he may have attributed a rather limited role to woman. Finally, his books display a highly experimental narrative style whose examination is vital for an understanding of the issues and themes dealt with in his fiction, and more importantly, for how these issues and themes are presented and addressed there.

More specifically, the multidimensional approach suggested above seems particularly appropriate for a novel like *The Book of Daniel*. As indicated earlier, the novel is, among many other things, the tale of a survivor; the protagonist is traumatized by the execution of his parents and the later suicide attempt and eventual death of his sister, events which he struggles to come to terms with. On the other hand, the protagonist and main narrator and focalizer of the story is a man, but his life is peopled

and strongly influenced by a number of female characters, whose voices are seldom allowed to be heard in an unmediated way, and whose treatment by the protagonist requires minute examination. Finally, the novel displays an experimental postmodern narrative style which is, furthermore, directly connected to trauma aesthetics and which raises important questions for feminist literary criticism.

Therefore, the focus of study of this master dissertation will be the binary feminine/masculine and the representation of the relationship between the two sexes, which is shaped in the novel by tension or even violence that results directly from the male protagonist's traumatic experiences. The main aim of the project is to consider the relationship between ideology and representation with reference to woman and to the psychological affliction that may derive from the suffering of traumatic events. With this aim in mind, this dissertation will analyze the traumatic symptoms of the protagonist and their connection to the representation and treatment of woman. In that sense, this project will attempt to determine the position of the male protagonist with regard to female otherness and to assess the existence of gender dialogue. This analysis will attempt to provide a better understanding of the role that the representation of trauma plays in the dichotomization of the two genders. Additionally, a narratological analysis will be conducted in order to determine the narrative strategies and techniques used to represent these issues, paying special attention to notions of focalization and voice, to the aesthetics of trauma, and to the metafictional characteristics of the novel. This dissertation will further seek to analyze the role of the female characters in the development of the narrative process. To carry out this combined approach, the project will rely on the works and theories of critics such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Bessel Van der Kolk, Ronald Granofsky, Anne Whitehead, Laurie Vickroy, Toril Moi, Elaine Showalter, Annette Kolodny, Gerard Genette, and Mieke Bal, among others.

## 2. THE BOOK OF DANIEL AS A TRAUMA NOVEL

“In the trauma novel, the very humanness of humanity  
is questioned in a genre which is broadly human.”

(Granofsky, 1995: 9-10)

### *Introduction*

Daniel Isaacson Lewin is a traumatized man, and *The Book of Daniel*, his tale of trauma—later on renamed by himself as “Daniel’s Book” (2006: 368)<sup>2</sup>—is unequivocally what Ronald Granofsky has termed a “trauma novel” (1995: 5). However, before an in-depth analysis can be carried out of the traumatic events and consequences for the protagonist, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed with regard to the novel’s status as a trauma novel.

On the one hand, it is worth considering the debate over what a traumatic event is and who may suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. Ever since its birth in the 1990s, trauma studies has tended to concentrate on the analysis of traumatic events and their consequences on war veterans, Holocaust survivors, and formerly enslaved communities from the perspective of cultural criticism.<sup>3</sup> These experiences unproblematically match the first definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) provided by the American Association of Psychiatry, first included in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. According to the manual,

---

<sup>2</sup> Further references to the novel will be to the Penguin Modern Classics edition, published in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Trauma had been studied from a strictly psychiatric perspective for years, starting with the research in the field of dissociation and traumatic memory of the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet and with Freud’s traumatic theory of neurosis, and culminating in the 1980s with the acknowledgement of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by the American Psychiatric Association.

this psychic pathology is the delayed response to an overwhelming, life-threatening event that is outside the range of human experience (DSM-III, 1980: 236).

This definition, however, has been challenged by a number of medical professionals, who argue that events such as rape, incest, or child molestation are regrettably too frequent experiences so as to be considered outside the range of human experience, and yet the victims' symptoms are the same as those experienced by Holocaust survivors and war veterans (Brown, 1995: 101). Psychologist Laura S. Brown, who has analyzed trauma from a feminist perspective, has warned against a narrow definition of trauma that is constructed within the experiences and realities of the dominant group. She has advocated that “*real* trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma” (1995: 102; emphasis added). The realization that the first definition of PTSD was somewhat narrow has led critics such as Kai T. Erikson (1995: 184) and Cathy Caruth (1995: 4) to support an understanding of the traumatic event as owing its traumatic quality not to its nature, but to the person's reaction to it. Consequently, the fourth edition to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR, 2000: 463-68) has echoed the debate over this issue, and has been modified to rely more upon the person's subjective perceptions of fear, threat, or helplessness and on the effects of witnessing as much as suffering the overwhelming event.

This debate is remarkably relevant for the analysis of *The Book of Daniel*, since there is no suggestion in the novel that the protagonist has suffered a terrifying, life-threatening experience that is “outside the range of usual human experience,” as DSM III's diagnosis guidelines phrased it (1980: 236). In fact, not few have had to face the conviction or even the execution of close relatives. And yet, the death of Daniel's

parents is not ordinary; there are a large number of complicating circumstances that will be discussed later and which contribute to turning the not-uncommon event of a parent's death into a deeply traumatizing event for the protagonist and his sister. Therefore, even though the traumatic quality and power of a tremendous historical trauma such as the Holocaust cannot possibly be compared to the conviction and execution of two individuals, there is no doubt that *The Book of Daniel* can be read as a trauma narrative. Furthermore, we should not forget E. L. Doctorow's knowledge and appreciation of Sigmund Freud's theories, as explicitly shown in, for example, *Ragtime*. Very likely, the New York writer was acquainted with early notions of trauma.

A further issue which requires consideration because of its controversial nature and its relevance for the purposes of the present dissertation is the right to "write (about) trauma" (LaCapra, 2001: 186). The amount of literature written after World War II whose fictional world circles around trauma has led to an obvious and yet complex debate. Scholars Lawrence Langer and Kalí Tal, who have worked extensively with survivor testimony, have put forward the idea that survivor accounts are the only acceptable form of trauma testimony. They object to the "wrongful" appropriation of trauma by secondary witnesses or non-survivors, fearing hidden agendas and attempts to fit the trauma experience into literary conventions such as chronology, description, characterization, and the invention of a narrative voice (qtd. in Uytterschout, 2008: 64). Most scholars and critics, however, think that trauma is nowadays not only the silent psychic response of an individual to an overwhelmingly painful or terrifying event. They have understood the enormous influence of trauma as a symbol of horror in contemporary society, a society that is possessed by the angst of having finally understood the horror which human beings are capable of doing (Granofsky, 1995: 2). Thus, these critics are willing to welcome narratives that seek to confront contemporary

readers with a reality in which social, economic and political structures create and perpetuate trauma (Vickroy, 2002: 4).

Seen in light of this debate, the following questions about *The Book of Daniel* arise: is E.L. Doctorow entitled to create a trauma narrative if he was not himself a primary witness to the traumatic events that lie at the center of his narrative? Is the novel's voice a dubious appropriation of the most dramatic dimension of the Rosenberg case—the fate of the Rosenberg children—that seeks to pursue a political agenda? E.L. Doctorow is a Jew of Russian origin, well known for his left-wing political orientation, whose political ideology was developing at the time in which he wrote *The Book of Daniel*, when the New Left was at its strongest in the USA. The possibility of having appropriated the most infamous outcome of McCarthyism has been widely explored by a number of earlier reviewers and critics of Doctorow's fiction, who, depending of their own political inclinations, either praised or condemned the novel as a piece of political propaganda (see for example Estrin, 1975; Cooper, 1993; and Irom, 2012). However, limiting the analysis of *The Book of Daniel* as subservient to such role has been proved extremely reductive by most scholars engaging with the writer's oeuvre in general and *The Book of Daniel* in particular, as this dissertation will attempt to show.

In spite of the obvious criticism intended by the author of both the hysteria of McCarthyism and the Old and New Left, it is possible to argue that E. L. Doctorow had a much more transcendent aim in mind, which may in fact be considered to be part of his literary project. In this sense, the writer's masterly depiction of Daniel's traumatized condition opens the way to larger social implications.

***“Daniel’s Book:” A False Document written by a Little Criminal of Perception***<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned above, *The Book of Daniel* is the tale of a survivor<sup>5</sup>, a tale of horror and guilt for staying alive while Daniel’s whole family—first his parents and later on his sister—dies without his being able to avoid it. *The Book of Daniel* is also the account which results from the protagonist’s determination to turn the traumatic memory of his parents’ death into narrative memory<sup>6</sup> by giving testimony of the traumatizing events of his childhood. These terrifying memories have returned to haunt him, triggered by his sister’s suicide attempt fifteen years after their parents’ execution.<sup>7</sup> It is precisely

---

<sup>4</sup> The title of this section requires further explanation: “Daniel’s Book” (268) is the name that Daniel gives to his own narration in its last page, providing the novel with a circular structure by finishing where it starts; “false documents” points to perhaps the most celebrated essay by E.L. Doctorow (1977), in which he argues that factual writings of all kinds, including historiographic texts, share the same status with fictional texts. *The Book of Daniel* is a false document for two reasons: on the one hand, its fictional treatment of trauma could well pass for autobiographical writing by a primary witness, and yet, his choice of a well known topic such as the Rosenberg case effectively cancels this possibility and points to the fictional quality of all texts; on the other hand, its presentation of trauma narratives as constructed from fragmented memories and invented sections points to the impossibility to provide an objective account of a traumatic event. Finally, “little criminal of perception” is the term that the protagonist uses to refer to himself, and it indicates his own awareness that witnessing and, later on, attempting to transmit it is a “criminal act” since it is impossible to describe the past objectively.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel’s status as traumatized survivor has already been a subject of critical inquiry (see Tokarczyk, 1987; Morgenstern, 2003; and DeRosa, 2009). However, these accounts do not go far enough in analyzing the complex nature of Daniel’s condition and they fail to reflect on the status of his memories.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of *narrative memory* was developed by the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, as the counterpart to the concept of *traumatic memory*, to refer to the mental constructs that people use to make sense out of experience (see Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995: 160).

<sup>7</sup> Neurobiologists Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart have worked extensively on memory and on how traumatic events are stored in the brain, and their research has led them to acknowledge that traumatic memories are reactivated when a person is exposed to a situation or is in a somatic state that is reminiscent of the one when the original memory was stored (1995: 174). In that sense, it is possible to argue that the feeling of helplessness that Daniel feels after his sister’s attempt to commit suicide recalls a previous time in which he also felt helpless: when his mother and father were executed without him being able to save them—the original traumatic event that generated Daniel’s traumatic condition.



Susan's attempt to end her life that works as "a summons" for Daniel (36) and prompts him to write "Daniel's book" (368).

First of all, it is worth considering that Daniel's traumatic condition does not result from a single overwhelmingly painful and terrifying event. The origin of his mental disorder does lie at the exposure to his parents' conviction and execution, which is, after all, "an event that involves death, injury, or a threat," and also at "learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member" (DSM IV-TR, 2000: 463). However, Daniel's psychological devastation is worsened by "a constellation of life experiences," (Erikson, 1995: 185); he struggles all through his childhood as he grows up in poverty and terrorized by his insane, cursing grandmother, he sees his father being beaten up by right-wing fanatics in a concert, he witnesses his parents' arrest and the search and dismantling of his home, he wanders from hand to hand—from a repulsive aunt, to a shelter for orphan children and an unloving foster family who are only interested in him and his sister as propaganda for the Communist Party—and he suffers humiliating visits to his parents in jail, until he finally finds himself an orphan after his parents' execution, which, not having witnessed, he is left only to imagine in terror.

Daniel's traumatic condition is also aggravated by further determining circumstances. On the one hand, Rochelle and Paul Isaacson are convicted and executed by the state for a crime that they may or may not have committed, which for Daniel sums to the traumatic quality of their death for two main reasons. First, the traumatic event results from human design, that is, death does not come out of natural causes; human agency is acknowledged by specialists involved in the treatment of trauma to bring feelings of injury and outrage from which it is difficult to recover, and to make the disorder particularly severe or long-lasting (Erikson, 1995: 192; DSM IV-TR, 2000:

464). Secondly, his parents' death denies Daniel any possibility of ever achieving moral closure since he cannot be certain of his parents' guilt: "I have put down everything I can remember of their actions and conversations in this period prior to their arrests. Or I think I have. Sifted it through my hands. I find no clues either to their guilt or innocence" (159). On the other hand, the arrest, conviction, and execution leave Daniel helpless and disempowered. He cannot do anything to change the outcome of events, just as he cannot later on save his sister Susan after her attempt to commit suicide.<sup>8</sup> It has been proved that helplessness is vital to making an experience traumatic (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995: 175; DSM IV, 2000: 463). Finally, it is also worth highlighting the fact that Daniel was very young when his mother and father were arrested, convicted and executed. As Laurie Vickroy has noted, children are particularly vulnerable to trauma, because it affects the way their psyche develops, it impairs their life coping skills and determines their future way of relating to other people (2002: 14).

Therefore, by the time Daniel and his sister are officially adopted by the loving and nurturing Lewins—two years after having been deprived of their mother and father—an irreparable harm has been inflicted on him. This psychological damage takes the shape of posttraumatic stress disorder, since Daniel's narrative reveals that he has suffered and still suffers from many of the symptoms associated to PTSD as described in the DSM IV-TR (2000: 463-68).

First of all, Daniel persistently re-experiences the traumatic events in several ways throughout his life. When he was a young boy he would suffer recurrent dreams:

---

<sup>8</sup> Hence Daniel's own tendency to associate or compare himself to the Biblical Daniel, an intertext of the novel which is pointed at by the title of the novel and which has been discussed as a symbol of Daniel's inability to save his sister Susan—as opposed to the Biblical Daniel's success in saving Susannah from execution (see Dillon, 1999 and DeRosa, 2009). This issue will be further explored in the last section.

“I was afraid to go to sleep. I had terrible nightmares which I couldn’t remember except in waking from them in terror and suffocation” (134). Later in his life, the nightmares seem to have given way to a more general obsession with images— “awful visions of his head” (250)—and thoughts that recall his parents’ execution. Among this, a few stand out: his constant symbolic references to electricity<sup>9</sup>—his Father described as tireless and “full of electricity” (59), Grandma’s hair like “electric wire” (83), his electricity pseudo-poem with “ohm,” the measure of electrical resistance, as its main image (257), the smearing of “electrons on the cellblock” (229). There is also his repeated recalling of Susan’s last words before she enters into a sort of self-inflicted comma: “They are still fucking us. Goodbye, Daniel. You get the picture” (10); “You get the picture. Good boy, Daniel” (82); THEY ARE STILL FUCKING US. [...] YOU GET THE PICTURE. GOODBYE, DANIEL” (189). To the other symptoms, his frequent preoccupation with the heart and his fixation with different means of execution can be added. Furthermore, his narrative is frequently interrupted by historiographic interludes,<sup>10</sup> in which he deals with issues such as Soviet politics, the Cold War, treason and tyranny, traitors and the law, astrology, failed heart transplants and forms of execution. These last are the most recurrent ones, which together with the obsession with electricity, point to the fact that he is possessed by the image of his parents’

---

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Harpham (1985), who inaugurated a move away from the debate over history and politics in Doctorow’s works to an emphasis on narrative technique, has argued that the master principle of the narrative is in fact electricity, and Daniel’s fractured story builds to a recreation of his parents’ execution. Issues of narrative technique will be discussed later on, but it is worth mentioning Harpham’s contention here, since it supports the idea that Daniel’s mind is absolutely possessed by the not-witnessed event of his parents’ execution by electrocution.

<sup>10</sup> With regard to the historiographic interludes, it is also worth adding that they seem to play a role of emotional relief, since they frequently interrupt the narrative at times in which writing seems to become too painful for Daniel to continue. They are used as a sort of distraction tool by Daniel, who employs them to escape the pain of his own narration. This issue will also be considered later on.

execution, by the unseen image of their bodies “frying” in the chair (193), an image which is not “fully owned” because it was “not assimilated at the time, only belatedly, in its repeated possession” (Caruth, 1995: 4-5). As he puts it, “there were at least a couple of years, a couple of good years, when none of it had happened” (77). Daniel also re-experiences the traumatic events and suffers intense psychological distress as a response to cues that resemble his parents’ execution. And so, he is strongly disturbed and reacts with extreme violence when it is suggested that Susan’s psychiatrist is going to use shock therapy on her (251). In the same way, he somatizes his traumatic condition when exposed to an event which resembles, or reminds him of, the traumatic event. When that happens, he shows breathing difficulties: “I often had spells of difficult breathing. These frightened me. I found that if I ran around and waved my arms like a windmill, I could breathe better for a moment” (195).

Secondly, it is obvious from his narration that before Susan “summoned” him to write, Daniel persistently avoided stimuli associated with the trauma and preferred to bury the haunting traumatic memories into his heart. And so, he used to avoid thinking about his parents’ execution or talking about it, numbing himself and refusing to feel anything: “when the real life of his childhood, that had become a dream, became real again, he tried to make contact with Susan. [...] We should have talked, we always should have talked” (78). Similarly, Daniel shows throughout the whole narrative a feeling of detachment from others and a very restricted range of affect: he is worried about “establish[ing] sympathy” (8) and he acknowledges that “heart rejection is a problem” (356), while at the same time his behavior proves that he is unable to feel real love for anyone other than his sister Susan, not even for his wife and baby. His attitude is one of absolute disrespect for anyone’s feelings, to an extent that he appears to enjoy

hurting his adoptive parents and physically and psychologically torturing his wife.<sup>11</sup> And yet, he constantly admits feeling guilty and ashamed of his behavior. Throughout his narrative, Daniel also shows persistent symptoms of increased arousal. For instance, he suffers outbursts of rage and has an irritable temper: “he was GONE! A lucky think [sic] too, I would have killed him” (251); he generally experiences difficulties concentrating on things, such as his dissertation; in addition, he presents episodes of hypervigilance and paranoia, and so, as his sister lies in the hospital bed, he explains that “to be objective, she is dying. To be objective, they are still taking care of us, one by one” (255).

To these a few other related symptoms must be added: on the one hand, Daniel’s narration has a discomfiting sense of timelessness, which is achieved through nonlinearity and chaotic, fragmented jumps in time and place<sup>12</sup>. In fact, he admits struggling to “work out the chronology” (193). For instance, at one time he does not even seem to know how old he is or in which year he was born: “We moved there in 1945 when I was four years old. Or maybe in 1944 when I was five years old” (118). Secondly, Daniel’s traumatic condition at times results in dissociation, which points to his fragmented psyche and is manifested in the narrative through his random use of the first and the third person in his role as narrator, as will be further explored later on. Finally, Daniel’s narration allows the reader to glimpse that he suffers from anhedonia. This condition frequently co-occurs with PTSD as a consequence of infantile psychic trauma (Krystal, 1995: 81). Anhedonic subjects suffer from a lack of capacity for enjoyment, and as such, Daniel is unable to enjoy any of the activities that are usually found pleasurable, such as hobbies, sexual intercourse, family life, or social interaction.

---

<sup>11</sup> This issue will be further examined in the next section.

<sup>12</sup> These issues will be further analyzed in the last section.

This can be illustrated by one of the most infamous passages of the novel, in which Daniel's capacity to turn a beautiful family scene into an insane nightmare becomes manifest:

In the park I threw Paul in the air and caught him, and he laughed. Phyllis smiled [...]. I tossed my son higher and higher, and now he laughed no longer but cried out. Still I did not stop and threw him higher and caught him closer to the ground. Then Phyllis was begging me to stop. The baby now shut his mouth, concentrating on his fear, his small face, my Isaacson face, locked in absolute dumb dread of the breath-taking flight into the sky and even more terrifying fall toward earth. I can't bear to think about this murderous feeling [...]. I enjoyed the fear in his mother. When I finally stopped she grabbed Paul and sat hugging him. He was white [...]. I took off (161).

This passage shows that Daniel simply cannot enjoy any activity which a healthy person would find enjoyable, and also points to a destructive, violent nature that leads him to victimize every single person around him, especially his wife.

Another aspect of Daniel's traumatic condition that deserves special attention is the status of his memories. After all, being a trauma narrative, *The Book of Daniel* concerns itself with the narration of the memories of a traumatic past. Dori Laub and Nanette C. Auerhahn have noted that victims' knowledge can emerge in several ways, namely, as transference episodes, in which present experiences are distorted or in some way influenced by the earlier traumatic event, as decontextualized memory fragments, and as overpowering narratives, where the traumatized subject can describe past events but continues to feel buried in the traumatic experience (1993: 295). All these forms of retrieving traumatic memories are found in Daniel's narration: the whole text can be argued to be an overpowering narrative, since Daniel is most certainly still absorbed into the original trauma and yet he manages to describe past events, although in a fragmented way. Decontextualized memory fragments frequently disrupt the narrative

line, such as the episode in which a car smashed a woman against a metallic fence right in front of Daniel's eyes, who could see her blood mixing with the milk from the bottle that she was carrying (108). Finally, there are frequent episodes of transference, the best example probably being Daniel's rendering of his parents' funeral, which abruptly turns into his sister's own funeral without further notice:

We stand at the side of the graves. An enormous crowd presses behind us. The prayers are incanted. Everyone is in black. I glance at Susan. She is perfectly composed [...] I feel her warm hand in my hand and see her lovely eye cast down at the open earth at our feet and an inexpressible love fills my throat and weakens my knees. I think if I can only love my little sister for the rest of our lives that's all I will need. The Lewins ride in the rear seat, Phyllis and I in jump seats at their knees. My mother wears a black hat with a veil over her eyes [...] (365)

It is obvious, then, that Daniel's determination to write about his traumatic past after his sister's "summons" is not an easy task, since as Cathy Caruth has put it, the images of traumatic representation, although accurate and precise, are largely inaccessible to conscious control (1995: 151). In fact, as Daniel progressively recovers his memories, they are presented with astonishing accuracy and in minute detail, to an extent that he even wonders at times: "how do I know this?" (63). He constantly calls himself "a little criminal of perception" (37, 41), and remembers with unnatural precision aspects which are far beyond a child's capacity. For instance, when the FBI has started to harass his parents, he proves to have had a general comprehension of everything that was happening:

Meanwhile, the newspapers have been reporting a chain action of arrests around the world. An English scientist. An American engineer. A half-dozen immigrants in Canada. Secrets have been stolen. The FBI has been finding these people, and convicting them in the same press release. A chain reaction. (133)

This phenomenon has been described by psychiatrist Dori Laub when analyzing his own status as a witness and his awareness as a child survivor (1995: 61). He explains that “it is as though this process of witnessing was of an event that happened on another level, and was not part of the mainstream of conscious life of a little boy” (62).

Yet, Daniel admits in his narration that there are still many things that he has not managed to recover: “I remember nothing of our trip to the Shelter” (197); or “just two or three images left from this period of our life” (183). In addition, Daniel’s memories are not always reliable and he repeats several times that what he just explained has most likely been invented: “Also, a heavy, old diamond shaped microphone from a real radio station. It broadcasts on a secret frequency directly to my father in his jail cell” (149). In fact, he provides an outright invented narrative of his parents last moments and execution, since he was not there to witness it (359). His problems remembering or knowing lead him to construct an unreliable narrative of the past made of scraps: his own fragmented, but precise memories, the trial transcript, his parent’s letters, accounts by the people involved, and his own invented passages. This fact links Daniel’s narrative to Sandra Gilbert’s notion of “writing wrong” (qtd. in Uytterschout, 2008: 64–65) and renders *The Book of Daniel* a “false document” (see footnote 4). According to Gilbert, who writes about her own personal experiences, “survivors of trauma are left behind with so many questions that all they can (try to) do is filling the gaps of a story [...]. Survivors writing about their experiences are in fact *imagining* what happened” (65).

And yet, in spite of his awareness that his narration is fragmented, incomplete, and at times invented, Daniel nevertheless feels the need to write the story of his trauma. On the one hand, he seeks to relieve his guilt, since he feels that “some of the force that propelled [Susan’s] razor was supplied by [him]” (36); in other words, he



feels responsible for his sister's attempt to commit suicide and assumes that it was his betrayal—his refusal to support her in the creation of a foundation with their parents name on it—that led her to try and end her life. He calls himself a “betrayor” (19) and feels that he has failed to support Susan in her own desperate attempt to find peace through the cleaning of the family name. On the other hand, he is ashamed because he has always rejected his past, presumably because it was too painful and maybe also frustrating for him to try and remember what happened to his parents:

[A]ll my life I have been trying to escape from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another they are what you come upon around the corner, and the Lord God who is so frantic for recognition says you have to ask how they are and would they like something cool to drink, and what is it you can do for them this time. (37)

Thus, Daniel seeks to get rid of the burden that troubles his heart and find some peace. As characteristically happens to trauma victims, he has been silent for years about the traumatic event, troubled by visions that he cannot fully own. Therefore, by attempting to narrate the past he seeks to reach a catharsis and cure his heart of what has been ailing it for a long time:

“IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?” (20)

...

“I, Daniel, was grieved, and the visions of my heart troubled me and I do not want to keep the matter in my heart.” (21)

Writers on trauma such as Judith Herman, Suzette Henke and Dori Laub stress the importance of creating a narrative of the traumatic event as a strategy to work through the trauma and attenuate the painful memories or at least provide some peace to the traumatized subject. Herman highlights the necessity for the victim to reorganize

“fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation” into “an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical contents” (1992: 177). Similarly, Laub argues that a victim must “re-externalize” the traumatic event by articulating and transmitting the story to an “empathic listener” and then “take it back again, inside” (Felman and Laub, 1991: 68–69). Further, Suzette Henke points to autobiography as a form of “scriptotherapy,” which offers the possibility of “reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically” and “encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past” (1998: xv). This is precisely what Daniel seeks to achieve, and his dependency on the empathic reader becomes evident in his frequent notes and addresses to him or her throughout the narrative (67, 74, 359), an issue which will be considered later on.

The question which arises, then, is whether Daniel’s relative success in retrieving the traumatic memories of the past and in narrating them to a more or less empathic reader has eased his condition and healed his ailment. His ability towards the end of the novel to narrate his parents’ death by electrocution, the single event that has been eluded throughout the narrative and yet has constantly hovered over it—and also the ability to do it in the past tense—indicates that he has managed, to a certain extent, to “assimilate” the traumatic experience into his model of the world (Granofsky, 1995: 8). However, as Daniel himself puts it, the imprint of Susan’s small warm hand in his hand is permanent (214). After all, as B. Van der Kolk and O. Van der Hart have found,

in the case of complete recovery [...] the story can be told, it has been given a place in the person’s life history. However, the traumatic experience/memory is, in a sense, timeless. It cannot be transformed into a story placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end. If it can be told at all, it is still a (re)experience” (1995: 177).

And so, the excessiveness of his behavior at his sister’s funeral in the last pages of his account suggests that although he has managed to assimilate the past and achieved some

closure, he will never overcome his guilt and will continue suffering the aftereffects of trauma.

### ***Concluding remarks***

The analysis above indicates that Doctorow has depicted in a masterly way the protagonist of *The Book of Daniel* as a traumatized subject whose attempt to recover memories of the hidden past leads him to articulate his pain and grief in the form of a narration that may allow him to come to terms with such past. The theories advanced by writers of trauma have played a key role in the understanding of Daniel's traumatic condition, the quality of his memories and the possibility of healing through narration. However, it should not be forgotten that *The Book of Daniel* is also a political novel, a fictional rendering of an imagined trauma deeply connected to famous historical events, written by an author who is not a primary witness. Therefore, it is also possible to argue that E. L. Doctorow pursues a wider aim, which can, in fact, be considered part of his literary project: the representation of individual trauma as symptomatic of the collective historical trauma that may lie at the foundation of North-American society.

It is possible to conclude, then, that the novelist may have been seeking to denounce how legal, social, political, and economic structures create and perpetuate situations and conditions that may result in traumatic victimization. In this sense, the book further seeks to make readers aware of the lasting effects of trauma and the suffering of victims, and to make us assess our own role as human beings in the creation and perpetuation of such traumatic situations, reflecting on the importance of witnessing empathically. Finally, Doctorow would also be seeking to defend the role of fiction as a

tool to raise awareness of ethical problems with regard to human behavior in contemporary society.

### 3. *THE BOOK OF DANIEL* AS A SITE FOR FEMINIST DISCUSSION

“There is no single ‘right’ reading  
for any complex literary work.”

(Kolodny, 1985: 160)

#### *Introduction*

As shown in the previous section, a reading of *The Book of Daniel* within the framework of trauma studies provides relevant insights into Doctorow’s literary project. However, the novel is much more than the tale of a survivor and, therefore, it should not be restricted to a harmonious and authoritative reading within a single framework of interpretation. More so since *The Book of Daniel* is a novel full of contradictions which render it a plural text open to multiple readings. In fact, Doctorow’s text cannot be a mere object for passive consumption by the reader, as (s)he is constantly challenged by the novel to unravel its multiple and often contradictory layers of meaning. This is hardly surprising, since Doctorow himself has argued that “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” (1993: 151).

This is precisely what an important number of feminist literary critics have sought to do with the fiction written by male writers: to reveal what the words give the reader apart from information, and which indirect, intuitive and nonverbal understandings are encoded in the literary text with regard to female roles and stereotypes, to sexual identity and difference. This critical perspective was inaugurated in the late 1960s with the work of two early feminist literary critics, Mary Ellman and Kate Millet, whose inquiries set the base for the “images of women” approach to literature (Moi, 1985: 42). This approach was later on theorized by Elaine Showalter,

who termed it “feminist critique” and defined it as a “historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena” and which is “essentially political and polemical” (Showalter, 1985: 128–29).

Obviously, the main problem of “images of women” criticism and “feminist critique” is that they are male-oriented, which has led most feminist critics to turn their attention to women’s text and feminine writing. However, male writers and critics have continued to dominate the literary landscape until recently—they certainly did so in the 60s, when the Women’s Movement was starting to gain momentum and E. L. Doctorow began his literary career. As a result, it is possible to argue that, in spite of its male-centered perspective, feminist criticism should not abandon completely the critical assessment of works written by male writers, because fiction encodes and disseminates cultural value systems and constitutes a primary site of ideological negotiation (Kolodny, 1985: 149); it is certainly true that literature does not create ideology, but it nevertheless may contribute to perpetuating male structures of power and stereotypical ideas about sexual identity and difference (Barrett, 1985: 73). And so, critics such as Adrienne Rich and Annette Kolodny call for “re-vision” and “revisionary rereading,” which will open new avenues for interpreting male texts which have tended to be read from male-centered critical perspectives (Kolodny, 1985: 59; Rich, 1972: 18).

This is precisely the possibility that *The Book of Daniel* offers, since it is readily apparent that, when read against the grain, Doctorow’s novel constitutes a perfect site for feminist revision.<sup>13</sup> First of all, most of the characters in the novel are women. Daniel’s life is dramatically determined by a number of female characters whose

---

<sup>13</sup> And yet, just one feminist reading of the novel has been carried out, probably because of the salience of political, historical and psychological themes: Mildred Culp’s summary-like character description of the female protagonists in *The Book Daniel* (1982).

representation ranges from passivity to psychological instability and courageous strength. On the one hand, he is deeply obsessed with his dead mother and his psychologically damaged sister, to the extent that they seem to control his mental and spiritual life. However, his fixation with them appears even positive when compared to his despicable attitude towards the other women in his life, especially his wife, who suffers from Daniel's sadistic drive. As a result, it is worth considering the relationship between Daniel's traumatic condition and his representation and treatment of the female characters as well as his own position with regard to female otherness. Secondly, being an autodiegetic narration, all the events in "Daniel's Book" are filtered through Daniel's own perspective and voice, to the extent that it is worth questioning whether his rendering of female voice, if there is any, can be anything other than subjective and unreliable and whether there is gender dialogue in the novel. Finally, in spite of their abundance, these female characters—with the exception of Susan—play a rather reduced number of widely stereotyped roles which coincide with traditional portrayals of women in literature and other media. Therefore, an analysis of these roles will determine whether the novel contributes to perpetuating a hegemonic gender ideology.

In order to assess all these issues, a close-reading of the novel has been carried out, taking into account not only what is specifically present as subject matter, but also what is there as the "unquestioned, often unacknowledged *given* of the culture" (Kolodny, 1985: 147). This inquiry will reveal E. L. Doctorow's own position towards feminist issues at the time of his first contacts with the American Women's Movement of the 1970s, and the quality and degree of his engagement with such movement.

### *Hermeneutics of suspicion: The Urgent Truth of “Daniel’s Book”*<sup>14</sup>

The first aspect that strikes the reader of *The Book of Daniel* – feminist or not; feminine or not – is the brutal way in which Daniel treats his wife. To put it plainly, Phyllis is a victim of domestic violence, since Daniel frequently tortures her sexually, physically and psychologically. His mistreatment is suggested and becomes evident already in the fifth page of the novel, where Daniel confesses the “strong erotic content” of his marriage and describes his wife as,

the kind of awkward girl with heavy thighs and heavy tits and slim lovely face whose ancestral mothers must have been bred in harems. The kind of unathletic helpless breeder to appeal to caliphs. The kind of sand dune that was made to be kicked around (5).

This highly degrading description not only establishes the power relationship existent between Daniel, who defines himself as Phyllis’s “tormentor,” and his wife, who is defined as a “sex martyr” (7); it also determines the bond between Daniel and his readers, since he already challenges their inclination to identify with an autodiegetic narrator who is capable of such a statement. Indeed Daniel is well aware of, and concerned about this issue: “And if the first glimpse people have of me is this, how do I establish sympathy?” (8).

---

<sup>14</sup> This heading requires further explanation. The notion of “hermeneutics of suspicion” has been borrowed from Toril Moi, who defines it as the assumption that “the text is not, or not only, what it pretends to be” (1985: 75-76). This term refers to the hermeneutic method of Paul Ricoeur and evokes Pierre Macherey’s theories of writing (Barrett, 1985: 74): it implies the search for underlying contradictions and conflicts as well as absences and silences in the text. As for the terms “urgent truth,” they have been used by E. L. Doctorow to refer to the novelists’ strategy to convince readers of the interest of reading their fiction (qtd. in Morris, 1999: 107). Here it is intended to refer to the urgency of reading male texts from a feminist perspective in order to reveal a truth that might be hidden in them with regard to sexual identity and difference, male structures of power, and stereotypical images of women.



In fact, any possibility of establishing sympathy with the reader is automatically destroyed by his shameless rendering of one of the most despicable sexual scenes to be found in writing:

Daniel instructed Phyllis to kneel on the seat facing her side of the car, and to bend over as far as she could, kneeled and curled up like a penitent, a worshipper, an abject devotionalist. [...] “Don’t hurt me. Just don’t hurt me, Daniel.” He ran his right hand over her buttocks. The small of her back was dewy with sweat. She shivered and the flesh of her backside trembled under his hand. [...] Daniel leaned forwards and pressed the cigarette lighter. His hand remained poised. Do you believe it? Shall I continue? Do you want to know the effect of three concentric circles of heating element glowing orange in a black night of rain upon the tender white girlflesh of my wife’s ass? (74).

After an episode like this one, even the most sympathetic of readers cannot but moralistically condemn Daniel’s sadism, if not simply hate him. Nevertheless, Daniel attempts to justify his behavior as a mentoring project to “educate” his wife into suffering. He believes that her leftist political leanings (her flower life and her love of peace) are “principles,” “political decisions” (7). And so, he must “work on her” (207) to teach her what being a revolutionary and belonging to the American left implies in terms of suffering; after all, their political stance cost his parents their life and Susan and him their mental health. As Daniel puts it, “it is a lot easier to be a revolutionary nowadays than it used to be” (314). The monstrous car episode does succeed in teaching Phyllis that Daniel and his family are all “such big deals of suffering” (72), which makes Daniel pleased because according to him “she wouldn’t have been capable of it six months before” (73) before his “education project” began.

It is possible to interpret Daniel’s torturing of his wife as a process of “acting out” his trauma (LaCapra, 2001: 21), since it mirrors the obsession of Daniel’s father with indoctrinating his young son in order to instill communist values into him and

improve his mind, “teaching [him] how to be a psychic alien” (42). His behavior may also be seen as a pathetic way of compensating for the impotence and helplessness that result from his status as a traumatized victim, since it allows him to maintain “a sense of agency” (Vickroy, 2002: 24). In addition, his actions are also consistent with his poor self-image. This interpretation points to Daniel’s traumatic condition as a likely source for his sadistic behavior. In fact, Daniel’s violent and abusive attitude is problematized—though most certainly not justified—by his trauma, to the extent that the reader is frequently torn between feelings of pity and contempt, sympathy and repulsion. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, it is obvious that Daniel has overcome his sadistic drive and has stopped torturing and terrifying his wife and child, which might possibly be related to his own ability to “work through” his trauma (LaCapra, 2001: 21).

Another remarkable statement with regard to the relationship between Phyllis and Daniel is the following: “July-August, 1967, I was very careful with Phyllis. We lived in a state of convalescence, waking up each morning to find the marriage somewhat stronger but still in need of hugs and kisses and tender lovemaking” (121). The implicit idea behind such a statement is that hugs and kisses are only necessary in order to lure Daniel’s victim back to him, whereas violent sexual, physical and psychological control over a woman are acceptable when there is a “purpose” behind. His technique appears to be successful since she always comes back to him and forgives his abuse. As Daniel puts it, “she looked for a rationale to forgive me and I was able to help her find one. We tried to share responsibility for my actions. We considered me as our mutual problem. I was shameless” (121). In fact, Phyllis’s passivity and faithfulness to the perpetrator point to a compliance with the regrettably too widespread patriarchal idea that a woman is responsible for the kind of treatment that she receives and she must

passively accept whatever her husband does to her because it is her duty as a wife.<sup>15</sup> The question that arises after this analysis is the following: what is Doctorow's attitude towards his protagonist's sadistic and degrading behavior? Does he feel sympathy or scorn? Why has he allowed its problematization by Daniel's traumatic condition? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to consider in more depth the role that the representation of Daniel's trauma plays in the dichotomization of the two sexes.

Daniel's degrading description and treatment of Phyllis are very different from the way in which he deals with his sister and his biological mother. As mentioned above, he seems to be deeply obsessed with them, probably as a result of his traumatic condition; after all, he lost his mother at an early age and was left alone in the world with his little sister, in charge of protecting and taking care of her, sharing with her a tragedy that isolated them in a hostile society that had deprived them of their family. On the one hand, Rochelle is described as a very strong, realistic, and intelligent woman. She is an active member of the Communist Party, she is always on top of everything and directs the family "like a military commander" (56). She faces her trial, conviction and execution with a "composed ironic smile" on her face (363), and she is executed last because "they had rightly conceived that [his] mother was the stronger" (359). It becomes obvious through Daniel's narration that until her death he treated his mother lovingly and respected her as the one in charge of making the decisions, since "nothing [was] really official without [his] mother's endorsement" (57), while his father is

---

<sup>15</sup> In the late 1960s, the present time of Daniel's narration, divorce was still rather uncommon. Divorce rates would not increase until the early 1970s, when the first no-fault divorce bill was signed in California, followed by a similar bill in virtually every state in the US over the following decade (Wilcox, 2009). At that time, deep cultural changes were starting to alter the position of women as a result of the Flower Movement and the Women's Movement, and yet women were still generally confined to the private sphere (Faludi, 1991).

reduced to the role of an “irresponsible child”, a man too self-obsessed to take care of practical family matters who “couldn’t be trusted to make a living” (45).

As for his sister Susan, it is obvious that Daniel idolizes her to a point that verges upon insanity and to the extent that he measures all the women in his life against his sister. And so, for instance, during an argument with Susan over her decision to create a foundation for revolution with their parents’ name on it, Daniel fights her fiercely, and yet, he admits to himself “a poverty in his choice of wife” (97). The bond between Daniel and Susan is too complex, too contradictory and yet too strong to be understood outside the context of their mutual traumatic condition. He takes care of her (23) and tends to her lovingly when she is at the hospital (10), and yet fights her roughly in every occasion, always trying to exert his power over her; he admits that his life is strongly influenced by hers (214), and yet he is glad to be the one who survives (254); he despises her for her ideas about politics, drugs, and sex (11), and yet he admires her deeply for her strength and determination (97). Furthermore, their relationship is complicated by a sort of mutual incestuous attraction between them, and Daniel seems to be obsessed with his sister’s sexuality. And so he explains that when Susan was thirteen, she “used to work her tentative saucy sex on [him]” (265), and she gave him “glimpses of herself in her underwear” (78). Likewise, Daniel showed her the hair that he was growing around his penis (358), and he admits that “more than once [he has] asked [him]self if [he’d] like to screw [his] sister” (253). Such fixation with each other’s sexuality reveals that the traumatic events of their childhood have impaired their way of relating to each other and to other people (Vickroy, 2002: 14).<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> In fact, Daniel’s depiction of his sister allows the reader to glimpse her own traumatic condition, even though her trauma is not available in an unmediated rendering, and must be inferred from Daniel’s narration. It would be very interesting to carry out an analysis of Susan’s

Daniel's description and treatment of the three main female characters in the novel allow us to determine his position with regard to female otherness. To begin with, it is worth pointing out that Daniel's identity becomes known to the reader mainly through his relatedness to the female characters in his narrative; in other words, it is through his description of the female characters and the treatment that they receive that the reader can glimpse Daniel's identity, personality and psychological state. Thus, Daniel's disrupted attachments and sadistic drive are made evident in his relationship to his wife and sister; similarly, his fixation with his mother and, especially, his sister can only be understood in the context of his traumatic condition. Further, Daniel's life, choices, and decisions are strongly determined by the different relationships established between him and the three key female characters. And so, he admits to have chosen his wife out of a merely erotic motivation, arguably seeking to put an end to the unresolved sexual component of his relationship with Susan. In the same way, he may have chosen to write a history dissertation as a result of his own traumatic attachment to his parents' political leanings and his obsession with torture and capital punishment.

As a result, it is not difficult to understand "Daniel's Book" as the site of a power struggle for narrative control; it can be read as Daniel's desperate attempt to recover agency and independence from the psychological and narrative power exerted over him by his mother and sister and to defend his otherness from these two influential female characters. Such an endeavor has several effects on his narrative. First of all, Daniel accepts Susan's summons to try and recover the memories of his traumatic past and tell the story of their parents' execution, but he does it his own way, banning his sister from speaking directly to the narratee; it is Daniel's tale that the reader gets, in

---

traumatic symptoms. However, due to space limitations, such study is beyond the purposes of this master dissertation.

which Susan is relegated to a secondary role in spite of the fact that she is as much a protagonist as Daniel; she is the subject matter or at least an important character—although never the narrator—in most of the episodes in his book. Secondly, Rochelle intends her execution to be Daniel's *bar mitzvah* (362), the Jewish coming of age ritual in which boys become accountable for their actions. However, Daniel does not become a responsible adult—or narrator for that matter. In fact, his unreliability as a narrator allows him to enter his mother's mind to put her supposed thoughts in writing, creating for her an internal monologue, and to invent those events that he has not witnessed, such as the trial and the execution of his parents. And so, by the end of the novel, Rochelle has stopped being just Daniel's mother; she has become a character in the hands of Daniel as omniscient narrator, she has been subjected to his narrative control and can no longer direct him "like a military commander" (53). Now it is the other way around.

It can be argued, then, that Daniel is desperately trying to take control of his life and counteract his helplessness through writing, by erasing his mother's and sister's subjectivity and control. Thus, his struggle evokes Simone de Beauvoir's main thesis in *The Second Sex* that "throughout history, women have been reduced to objects for men: 'woman' has been constructed as man's Other, denied the right to her own subjectivity" (qtd. in Moi, 1985: 92). This is precisely what Daniel's narrative effectively achieves. This effort actually mirrors his sadistic and violent treatment of his wife, Phyllis, a passive woman whose voice is also completely silenced and whose weak character offers Daniel the possibility of being, for once, the one in control, the tormentor and not the victim.

Daniel's denial of the female characters' right to express their own subjectivity, together with the fact that their voices are silenced by his obsessive narrative control makes it possible to contest John G. Parks contention that *The Book of Daniel* is a

polyphonic novel (1991: 455). Parks has used Bakhtin's theory of polyphony to claim that Doctorow's novel is dialogic in that it is "both disruptive or even subversive of regimes of power, and restorative of neglected or forgotten or unheard voices" (1991: 455). It is undeniable that the novel is polyphonic in that sense, but it is also undeniable that women's voices qualify for such a status; they certainly were neglected, forgotten and unheard in the early 1970s. However, the argument above proves that Daniel's helplessness and powerlessness, which result from his traumatic condition, prompt him to attempt eradicating his mother, sister, and wife's voices—and, for that matter, the voices of all the other secondary female characters—by subjecting them to the filter of his own mediating perspective. As a result, it is obvious that Parks must be referring to other neglected, forgotten or unheard (male) voices in his article, while he simply seems to ignore women's voices.

The obvious result of Daniel's silencing efforts is that any possible dialogic relationship with the women in his life is effectively cancelled. Thus, it can be asserted that there is no gender dialogue to speak of in *The Book of Daniel*. The only perspective and the only voice to be heard are Daniel's. This conclusion has also been somehow hinted by Marshall B. Gentry (1993), who has scanned several of Doctorow's novels in order to determine whether the author has succeeded in incorporating gender dialogue. The fact is that this critic does not even consider *The Book of Daniel*, probably due to its obvious absence of it. However, the question remains whether Daniel's refusal to engage in gender dialogue, as well as his obsession with controlling the narrative voice at all times results from Doctorow's failure to incorporate feminist concerns and genuinely open his text to the voices of women, or whether it can be ascribed to the character's own position towards female otherness and to his traumatic condition.

Before this question can be properly answered, it is also necessary to analyze Daniel's narration to determine the roles assigned to female characters in the novel. To begin with, it must be noted that the women in *The Book of Daniel* generally carry out domestic roles, such as cleaning the house and rearing the children, whereas the male characters are portrayed as the more or less successful family providers. This division of roles, however, is complicated by class issues: Grandma's life as a Russian immigrant in the United States is described as a routine of sixteen hours sewing for a few pennies on top of the strain of taking care of a home, a husband and three children (80). Similarly, her daughter Rochelle has to work both inside and outside the home: "when she was working, before Susan was born, she would clean the house late at night and on weekends" (51). This statement proves that domestic chores are exclusively reserved for women, whether they may also have a job outside the house. However, when the Isaacson family decides that they can do with only one salary, it is Rochelle who gives up her job as a bookkeeper and retreats into the domestic realm, even though she used to make more money than her husband (236) and was better educated—unlike Paul, she completed college (45). In the case of Lise Lewin, she does not even need to worry about giving up a fulfilling job, since she "enjoys" the benefits of a "comfortable middle class life" thanks to her husband's job as a lawyer and, thus, she is from the beginning confined to the home, taking care of her adopted children and carrying out house duties.

Regrettably, one generation later the situation is exactly the same. Phyllis is a nineteen-year-old freshman dropout who has given up college to marry Daniel and start a family. She is the one who stays at home, taking care of the baby and doing all the housework, while Daniel spends his time at the library pretending to write his dissertation. In addition, Phyllis is forced to put aside her political activism, and so, for example, she must renounce attending the demonstration at the White House because



she must stay with the baby (310). The same problem affects Baby, the girlfriend of the revolutionary guru Artie Sternlicht, who subordinates her political ideas to domestic duties: she must take care of him, cook and do the housework for him while he is out there, fighting the patriarchal state that he opposes and which is at large responsible for the subordination of women. In fact, Eric Rasmussen has argued that Sternlicht, the novel's primary figure of the sixties countercultural radicalism, can be viewed as a figure emblematic of the sexism that characterized a large number of members of the New Left (2011: 200), and which also characterizes Daniel.

The only exception to be found in the novel is Susan, who does not play any role traditionally associated with women; she is a leftist revolutionary activist who believes in peace, free love and independence. Susan is not subordinated to a domineering male provider, and so she is in absolute control of her life. It becomes obvious through Daniel's account that he is upset about his sister's independence from him and her "commanding presence," "her brightness, her loudness and her hysterical self-occupation" (78). Yet, he cannot do anything to control or subdue her. In addition, she tries to fight the sexism of the New Left Movement by attempting to create a Foundation for Revolution to be run by herself, going so far as to confront Sternlicht's macho rhetoric. She understands the limitations of the New Left which is "still fucking [them]" (10), and might even be seen as a second-wave feminist.

However, Daniel's narration also implies that it is her politically committed attitude that eventually destroys her; and indeed, she ends up in a mental hospital bed, assuming a catatonic "starfish" state and letting herself die (253). The question that arises is whether E. L. Doctorow should be praised for his critique of women's subordinate status within the New Left and his creation of a revolutionary, politically committed female character, or whether he should be criticized for "killing" the only

woman in the novel who is independent of male subordination. It is worth noting that it was the author who decided to make one of the Isaacson children a girl, since the original Rosenbergs had two sons, and none of them committed suicide. What is, then, E. L. Doctorow's purpose? What is his stance on feminist issues?

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Providing an answer to all the questions that have arisen in this section is not an easy task, since it implies making generalizing statements about Doctorow's conscious or unconscious attitude towards feminist concerns at the time in which he wrote *The Book of Daniel*. To begin with, asked in an interview about his position towards the Women's Movement, Doctorow has claimed that he favors feminism, since he considers it "an indisputable important advance in human apprehension of what life is" even though he admits that he has not written from an explicitly feminist point of view (qtd. in Morris, 1999: 110). Further, questioned in another interview about his concern with sexuality, Doctorow states that gender issues are important to him as a form of politics: "I think more likely it is a preoccupation having to do with sex as power, either perhaps using sex as a metaphor for political relations, or helplessly annotating what passes for sex in a society that suffers paternalistic distortions" (qtd. in Morris, 1999: 121). Both statements point to Doctorow's awareness and support of feminist concerns.

It is possible to conclude that such support is manifested in *The Book of Daniel* in a number of ways. First and foremost, Daniel's despicable behavior towards his wife prevents the reader from identifying with a male character who is able of such sadism and cruelty. As a result, the natural bond of identification between the narrator and the reader is helplessly broken and the reader's sympathy towards Daniel's behavior and

position is shattered. Once this bond is broken, Daniel's narrative control and erasure of female subjectivity, his struggle for power, his attitude towards female otherness, his refusal to engage in gender dialogue and, why not, his relegation of Phyllis to the domestic sphere can easily be contested by the reader. Therefore, it can be argued that Doctorow effectively succeeds in preventing the reader from identifying with the novel's protagonist and main representative of patriarchal power over women. This effect is further achieved through the presence of two strong, educated, and courageous women, whose power Daniel's struggle for narrative control attempts to hide but cannot completely erase. Susan's death at the end of the novel must be interpreted, then, not as the narrative's punishment of the only female character who confronts patriarchy, but arguably as a narrative strategy to provide the novel with a more dramatic finale.

The same argument can be used to interpret Doctorow's assignment of traditional domestic roles to most of the women in the novel; leaving aside the fact that such was the real situation for many women in the 1970s, both Grandma and Rochelle are socially superior to their husbands in that they succeed in taking care of their homes and children while also providing for the family in economic terms. In the case of Rochelle, the clearly negative portrayal of her husband as weak and irresponsible is part of Doctorow's project to present the reader with strong female characters to identify with, confronting Daniel's obsession with controlling the narration and monopolizing the reader's attention. It is possible to conclude, then, that *The Book of Daniel* constitutes a sophisticated critique of the paternalistic and patriarchal status quo. However, the criticism is not straightforward or simplistic; it needs to be "dug up" by the reader. After all, Doctorow believes that "the presumption of any art is that ordinary messages are insufficient," since they put the writer in "grave danger of becoming

didactic” (qtd. in Morris, 1999: 108); it might be, then, that he understands that it is more effective to make people think for themselves.

Finally, it is possible to reach some conclusions about Doctorow’s view of the role that the representation of trauma plays in the dichotomization of the two sexes. Perhaps one of the shortcomings of feminism, especially second wave feminism, has been to put too much emphasis on the victimization of women; it can be safely argued that feminism has tended to appropriate the category of victim and save it exclusively for women, while patriarchy has been identified as the perpetrator. In spite of his general support of feminist concerns, Doctorow has understood this deficiency: the sharp distinction between (female) victim and (male) perpetrator has become fuzzy, as women are not the only victims in contemporary society. The distinction cannot be applied any more un-problematically in a society characterized by collective historical trauma, as shows the fact that it is impossible to apply one category to Daniel without applying the other. This view is consistent with the results reached in the previous section with regard to Doctorow’s literary project: the exposure of the collective historical trauma(s) that lies at the foundation of North-American society—among which the subordination of women is certainly one, but not the *only* one—and the defense of the role of fiction as a tool to raise awareness of ethical problems related to human behavior in contemporary society.

#### 4. *THE BOOK OF DANIEL* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NARRATOLOGY

“The only material which we have for  
our investigation is the text before us”

(Bal, 1985: 6)

##### *Introduction*

In the course of the analyses that have been carried out in the previous sections, many issues related to narratology have already been mentioned in passing, such as the unreliability of the narrator and the distance established between him and the level of the implied author and the implied reader—or ultimate textual implications (see Collado, 2011: 3). However, a more rigorous examination of the novel’s narratological features may provide relevant insights into Doctorow’s narrative technique and into the way in which *The Book of Daniel* is constructed and meanings are created. *The Book of Daniel* displays a highly experimental narrative style whose examination is vital for an understanding of the themes dealt with, and more importantly, for how these issues are presented and addressed.

It is widely acknowledged among literary critics that content should not be considered in isolation from form. Therefore, a narratological analysis of Doctorow’s novel may deepen the knowledge achieved by the ideological and thematic analyses of the novel that have been conducted from the perspectives of trauma studies and feminist literary criticism. On the one hand, the first part of the present dissertation has proved that *The Book of Daniel* is a trauma novel, since it deals with Daniel’s traumatic symptoms, his status as survivor and his difficulties recovering the memories of his traumatic past. However, Doctorow’s artistic agency does not stop at giving expression to these issues. He also displays an experimental narrative style that reproduces and

aesthetizes Daniel's condition formally. Thus, a narratological analysis of the novel will reveal that *The Book of Daniel* presents a number of key stylistic features that tend to recur in trauma fiction. On the other hand, the second section of the dissertation has established that Doctorow's novel constitutes a sophisticated support of many feminist concerns, since it condemns the protagonist's sadistic and misogynistic behavior and presents the reader with strong female characters to identify with, while at the same time it problematizes the traditional feminist appropriation of the category of victim. As a result, it may be worth assessing the extent to which the novel's support of feminist issues affects, or is reflected in its formal features.

In order to address these issues, a narratological analysis has been conducted taking into account the narrative strategies and techniques employed to represent the protagonist's traumatic condition and the novel's general support of feminist concerns. The analysis has been based on the theories put forward by critics such as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Wayne C. Booth, Walker Gibson, and Gerald Prince. Thus, notions of narration and focalization have been considered, as well as narrative time, narrative levels, the role and characteristics of the novel's narratee, and the effects on the text of the pair reliability/non-reliability. In addition, the novel's aesthetization of trauma has been studied, taking into account the formal features that it shares with other trauma narratives, as described by critics such as Ronald Granofski, Laurie Vickroy and Anne Whitehead. Finally, the book has been examined from the perspective of metafiction, following notions developed by Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon while considering the relationship between its narrative experimentation and issues of trauma and feminist criticism. This inquiry will prove E. L. Doctorow's skill in creating a harmonious novel in which content and form complement each other to serve the author's literary project.

### *Narrating Instance, Aesthetics of Trauma and Metafiction in The Book of Daniel*

To begin with, it is worth examining the novel's "narrating instance"<sup>17</sup> in detail. Probably the most remarkable aspects of Doctorow's novel from a narratological point of view are the constant shifts of voice, from autodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration and back again without warning. This often happens from one paragraph to the next, or even from one sentence to the next:

There was an assumption that constantly surprised *Daniel*, that took getting used to: [...] Less and less did *my* heart bound in erratic dysynchronous jumps, like the rubber band balls *I* used to make. And so Susan and *Daniel* Lewin slipped into the indolent rituals of teenage middle class (77; emphasis added).

Thus, split voice characterizes the whole novel and complicates the analysis of the figure of the narrator, since it blurs Gerard Genette's distinction between homodiegetic (autodiegetic) and heterodiegetic narration (1996: 184). Daniel is most certainly the only narrating authority in the novel, as has been clearly established in the second section. "Daniel's Book" is his testimony, his primary witness account of the traumatic past events that are responsible for his present condition. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the heterodiegetic voice that, at times, bursts into the narration belongs to Daniel himself, since it is also his consciousness that lies behind it.

Daniel's fragmented narrative voice can be best understood in the context of his traumatic condition, as a symptom of the dissociation of personality that works as a defense mechanism among traumatized subjects (Herman, 1992: 43; Vickroy, 2002: 28). In fact, the shifts from autodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration do not occur at

---

<sup>17</sup> This is Gerard Genette's term to refer to the conjunction between narrative voice, time of narration, narrative perspective and narrative level (1996: 174).

random; they frequently take place when Daniel is narrating a particularly painful memory or an event that makes him feel embarrassed of his behavior:

The young man was going after one of the doctors with an office in the professional building, a psychiatrist named Duberstein. He was going to kill this Doctor Duberstein (251).

...

And she looked so pale, my God, she is dying and there is nothing Daniel can do (255).

The novel's split voice may be, thus, understood as a narrative strategy for the aesthetization of trauma, since it mimics the fragmenting and disorienting effect of trauma on victims (Vickroy, 2002: 27).

There are other features that characterize the novel's autodiegetic narrator. First of all, when considered from the perspective of narrative level, it is clear that Daniel is an extradiegetic narrator, since there is no other narrative voice on any superior level (Genette, 1996: 179); Daniel hovers over the narrative, placing himself on the level immediately superior to that of his report. Additionally, he is also the fictive author<sup>18</sup> of "Daniel's book," the text that we are reading, which reinforces the metafictional component of the book (Genette, 1996: 180). Secondly, the narrator becomes omniscient as the novel progresses, as mentioned before (Booth, 1996: 153). Thus, as the narration develops, Daniel acquires an inside view of the characters in his narrative, going so far as to create for them a stream-of-consciousness in which their thoughts become exposed. Finally, he is certainly an unreliable narrator, as it becomes obvious through his narration not only that he has become mysteriously omniscient but also that

---

<sup>18</sup> Not to be confused with the implied author or textual implications, a level that will be considered later on.



at times he is incapable of separating the “real” world from his own imagination (Booth, 1996: 152):

Also, a heavy, old diamond-shaped microphone from a real radio station. It broadcasts on a secret frequency directly to my father in his jail cell [...] I advise him to be ready and to wait further instructions. Roger, he radios back to me. Roger and out, I reply (149).

His unreliability is clear when we consider the ironic gap that exists between his words as he narrates the story and the ultimate implications of the text or level of the implied author. This superior and ironic level makes us think that Daniel’s above statement is impossible, whilst the narrator is convinced of its veracity.

The frequent shifts of voice that affect the narrator do not correspond to shifts in perspective. Daniel remains the only focalizer in the novel, the only center of consciousness (Bal, 1985: 104); it is through his perspective that all the events in the novel are presented. The only exceptions are some newspaper excerpts (143), a few letters written by Paul and Rochelle Isaacson from their prison cells (233), and some other letters written by the lawyer Ascher (248), Daniel’s adoptive father (190), Susan (95), and Daniel’s Grandma (79). These are the only occasions in which a voice and a perspective other than Daniel’s can be found in *The Book of Daniel*, and that only if it is assumed that Daniel’s transcription of the letters is faithful. This fact supports the contention stated in the previous section that Daniel’s obsession with narrative control bans any other subjectivity, especially any female subjectivity, from expressing itself as a distinct voice in the novel.

There are, however, other shifts in focalization in the novel which are worth mentioning. Daniel’s narration is clearly a retrospective one, since he tells past events

from his present position. Yet, at times his adult focalization gives way to passages where Daniel seems to withdraw completely to his childhood:

It is Sunday, a warm Sunday morning in September. Everyone is up early. The phone is ringing. I am admonished to hurry up and wash and get dressed. I have to feed *stupid Susan* while the *grownups* get dressed (53 – emphasis added).

The awkward child-focalized parts like this one create a sense of timelessness, as if time had not passed for Daniel. The effect is further achieved by means of the use of the present tense to narrate the past, a strategy that is to be found quite frequently in the novel: “In the meantime a yellow school bus has turned into the block. The driver is hunched over the wheel, peering at house numbers” (56). Both strategies are best understood, once again, in the context of Daniel’s traumatized condition, as techniques for the aesthetization of trauma; as such, they point to trauma’s timelessness and to the problems separating the past from the present that trauma victims usually suffer (Vickroy, 2002: 27).

A study of the novel’s voice and point of view would not be complete without an examination of the explicit or implicit narratee, an essential element of all types of narrative (Prince, 1996: 194). In the case of *The Book of Daniel*, this is certainly a very interesting figure, since its identity is as variable as Daniel’s mood. At times, Daniel’s narratee is another character in the novel. And so Professor Sukenick, his thesis director, seems to be the addressee of most of the out-of-context encyclopedia-like interludes that constantly interrupt Daniel’s narration of the traumatic events of his past. These excerpts of varied length deal with issues such as Communist politics, execution forms, treason and tyranny, traitors, and the Cold War, and other topics which are in general appropriate for a history dissertation. At other times, especially in situations of remarkable psychological pain for Daniel, his sister Susan becomes the narratee:

As it is I've done too much for you – and for what? You don't talk, you don't reinforce their sense of you. All they have is my word. I remember your voice, but how can I expect them to remember your voice. You can't write out voices. All I can say about your voice is that it is so familiar to me that I cannot perceive the world except with your voice framing the edges of my vision (254).

...

I'm familiar with the phenomenon – Susan, tell her your brother who lives in the library knew at this moment what the daughter of Selig Mindish was going through (345)

These passages may suggest that when exposed to deep psychological pain and despair, Daniel reveals that the true addressee of his narration is his sister Susan. It is possible to argue that she is his ideal narratee, since he is writing not just for her but to her; it is from her that he seeks sympathy, understanding and forgiveness, and it is for her that he decides to try and put their traumatic past into writing, to save them both. The quotation above also points to Daniel's self-conscious awareness that he is writing a text, an issue that will be explored later on.

For the rest of his narration, however, he seems to be addressing an unknown narratee, who is frequently addressed explicitly and in different terms, depending on Daniel's mood at the time:

#### A NOTE TO THE READER

Reader, this is a note to you. If it seems to you elementary, if it seems after all this time elementary [...] then reader, I am reading you. And together we may rend our clothes in mourning (67).

....

Do you believe it? Shall I continue? Do you want to know the effect of three concentric circles of heating element glowing orange in a black night upon the tender girlflesh of my wife's ass? Who are you anyway? Who told you you could read this? (75)

....

I suppose you think I can't do the electrocution. I know there is a you. There has always been a you. YOU: I will show you that I can do the electrocution (359).

These quotations suggest a rather antagonistic relationship between the narrator-focalizer and his narratee, which is quite remarkable since, as Mieke Bal has noted, the reader watches with the focalizer's eyes and will presumably be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character (1985: 104). In the case of Daniel's narration, it has been widely proved that, despite Daniel's concern with establishing sympathy, he is well aware that it is a very difficult task. As a result, he articulates a narratee that is more an enemy than a supporter. Once again, this might be best understood in the context of Daniel's traumatic condition, since he is too ashamed of his behavior and too obsessed with his own victimization to really believe in the possibility of an empathic narratee. In fact, Laurie Vickroy has pointed out that victims of trauma often feel isolated and alienated from society because of their differences with others (2002: 23). Similarly, Judith Herman has argued that social judgment of traumatized people tends to be very hard (1992: 115). In addition, these excerpts point to the novel's metafictional self-reflexivity, an issue which will be further explored later on.

Finally, it is worth considering the role of the two other entities that are present in the novel, although not physically and at a superior structural level than the narrator and the characters of the story: the implied author or level of textual implications (see Booth, 1996: 147; Collado, 2011: 3), and the implied reader or real reader's capability to understand such implications (see Gibson, 1996: 156). These two entities belong to a level that stands above the narrator and his narrative; they are not part of the novel's fictional world, but refer to the ultimate ideology of the text and to our capacity as readers to understand it. In this sense, the textual implications present Daniel's mutual

status as victim and perpetrator, for which he deserves neither full sympathy nor absolute disapproval. The novel's ultimate implications project an implied reader who shares the same attitude towards victimization in contemporary society and understands the ambiguous status of Daniel's victimhood.

Another aspect that is worth considering for an analysis of the narrating instance is the temporal relation established between the moment of narration and the moment at which the narrated events took place. First of all, following Gerard Genette's analysis of temporal position, it is possible to argue that *The Book of Daniel* is an "interpolated narration", since it combines subsequent and simultaneous narration (1996: 175); most of the events are narrated retrospectively, whether narrated in the present tense or in the past. However, at times the narrator is telling the story at the very moment in which it occurs:

This is a Thinline felt tip marker, black. This is Composition Notebook 79C made in U.S.A. by Long Island Paper Products, Inc. This is Daniel trying one of the dark covers of the Browsing Room. Books for browsing are on the shelves. I sit at a table with a floor lamp at my shoulder. [...] I feel encouraged to go on. Daniel, a tall young man of twenty-five, wore his curly hair long. (3-4)

The novel's interpolated narration has an obvious effect on the narrative: the story and the act of narrating become entangled in such a way that the latter has a metafictional effect on the former, the act of writing becoming a self-conscious effort. This effect is further achieved by the novel's anachronic development. In other words, the events narrated by Daniel do not follow a chronological order; rather he jumps backwards and forwards in time, rendering the events as they come up to his mind, going back ten years, returning to the present, jumping to an event that took place six months earlier, and so on:

Perhaps [Phyllis] could summon up my dissertation, actually create it, just by imagining me here in the library. Why not, if her imagination was good enough? One autumn day, with the wind slicing through the chain link fence around the schoolyard, and heavy grey clouds racking into each other over the rooftops of apartment houses, Rochelle went shopping with her son, Daniel, and her baby daughter, Susan (122).

Here Daniel jumps from a few months before the narrating time, to an event in 1949, eighteen years earlier. Once again, these formal features may be best understood in the context of the novel's status as a trauma narrative; on the one hand, anachrony is a common technique for the formal representation of traumatic memories, which are often fragmented and tend to resist normal chronological narration; on the other hand, interpolation mimics the disorienting effects of trauma (Vickroy, 2002: 5). After all, as Roger Luckhurst has put it, "no narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way" (2008: 9).

Throughout this analysis of the novel's narrative instance, a number of formal features have already been described which correspond to different techniques for the aesthetization and reproduction of trauma. This obviously results from the fact that *The Book of Daniel* is, among other things, a trauma narrative and, as such, it goes beyond presenting trauma as subject matter; it has internalized "the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within [its] underlying sensibilities and structures" (Vickroy, 2002: 3). Furthermore, novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only be properly represented by mimicking its symptoms (Anne Whitehead, 2004: 3). And so, it is possible to ascribe a number of formal features, such as the novel's split voice, its shifts from adult to child focalization, the unreliability of the narrator, its interpolated narration and the fragmented, anachronistic development of events, to the formal aesthetization of trauma, as argued above. To these, several other formal techniques must be added that appear in the novel.

One of the most obvious ways in which the symptoms of trauma are represented formally is through repetition, which is to be found in the novel at the levels of language, imagery and plot: “I don’t remember who drove the car. It was not Ascher, Ascher was sitting next to me in the back seat. I was in the middle. Susan was on my right” (290–1); and then, ten lines later, again, “I can’t remember who drove. Ascher sat in the back with us. I was between Ascher and Susan. My stomach hurt. My fingers ached” (291). The best example of repetition would be the constant references to electricity, which becomes the main source of imagery. And so, for instance, Daniel’s father is described in terms of electric symbolism: “He seems tireless, full of electricity, restless, constantly speaking his thoughts and postulating his ideas” (59). As mentioned above, Geoffrey Harpham has gone so far as to argue that in *The Book of Daniel* the master principle of narrative is electricity, affirming that Daniel’s fractured story becomes a recreation of his parents’ electrocution (1985: 88). This statement could not be more accurate, since it is possible to argue that Daniel’s narration mirrors the schizophrenic behavior of the electron; the narrative constantly and quickly jumps in time and space, like the electron does.<sup>19</sup> This analysis supports and extends Harpham’s contention, but it also points to the influence of the New Physics in contemporary literature.

Also remarkable is the protagonist’s frequent repetition of metaphors related to sexual intercourse and violence. And so, after meeting the revolutionary guru Sternlicht and hearing about his ideas, Daniel concludes that “[he] is probably a champion fucker” (187). Similarly, Daniel describes his parents’ trial in sexual terms:

---

<sup>19</sup> Werner Heisenberg, the German theoretical physicist who formulated the Uncertainty Principle, was the first to refer metaphorically to the electron as schizophrenic, due to its condition as both a particle and a wave whose position cannot be fixed in space and time at once.

[...] there could be no question about the semantics of disaster. They were fucking us. Each new indictment handed down by the Grand Jury perfecting the conspiracy, expanding it, adding to its overt acts, drove it in deeper (198).

Here, the process of building the Isaacson's conspiracy case is presented as a coital penetration. The use of this sort of symbols is related to another common formal feature to be found in trauma narratives: the presence of recurring motifs having to do directly or indirectly with biological functions (Granofsky, 1995: 14). Finally, there is repetition of key events, which are rendered several times throughout the narrative. Among this, stand out the references to Susan's statement at the sanitarium right after her attempt to kill herself and the episode of the woman who was killed right across Daniel's home and whose blood got mixed with the milk and the broken glass which she was carrying. As these examples suggest, repetition is a powerful formal strategy to represent the process of acting out and evoke the troubled mental condition of the protagonist (Whitehead, 2004: 86).

Another remarkable feature for the aesthetization of trauma to be found in *The Book of Daniel* is the creation of silences and gaps. These represent formally the "obstacles to communicating [traumatic] experience" that traumatized subjects find when it comes to rendering the traumatic events that were responsible for their condition (Whitehead, 2004: 3). A particularly disturbing example of such silences is Daniel's depiction of his first weeks at the Shelter:

Some of the older boys were into puberty and had hair. There was a lot of homo wrestling. One kid liked to jerk off in the middle of the room where everyone could see him. Once there was an attempted sodomizing. There were always violent confrontations and some kid or other would be discovered with a knife he shouldn't have had (201–2).



In spite of the harshness of this passage, it is more interesting for what it does not say; Daniel is the new boy, and it is obvious from what he has narrated so far about his childhood that he is not a very tough child. In addition, he is going through a very difficult situation, and it has been already established that he has difficulties relating to other children of his age (195). It is possible to assume, then, that it must not have been very easy for Daniel to adapt to his new life at the Shelter. Therefore, one wonders how much of the description above is Daniel's veiled account of his own experience, and whether he might have been the victim of that attempted sodomy or the one who was caught with a knife. After all, if things had gone as smoothly at the Shelter as Daniel's narration suggests (210), why would he be so desperate to run away? As a result, it may be argued that Daniel is blocking information, because he is consciously or unconsciously repressing this memory. It is clear, then, that silences and gaps in the novel represent the traumatic sense of simultaneous knowledge and denial as a result of resistance and repression, and they evoke a conflicted or incomplete relation to memory (Vickroy, 2002: 29).

The formal features of *The Book of Daniel* that have been examined so far establish the novel's experimentalism, since they are coherent with the general tendency among trauma fictions to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit (Whitehead, 2004: 82). Furthermore, they are also coherent with the postmodern drive towards experimentation, self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty in literature. A common feature that characterizes fiction written after World War II is its self-consciousness. Novelists tend to become much more aware of a number of theoretical concerns involved in building fictions (Waugh, 1984: 2). This is certainly the case of E. L. Doctorow, who has also engaged in critical practice, writing a number of celebrated essays on fiction (see Doctorow, 1993 and 2006). Therefore, following Patricia

Waugh's definition of metafiction, it is possible to claim that *The Book of Daniel* is a piece of fictional writing which self-consciously draws attention to its own status as an artifact (1984: 2). As such, Doctorow's novel displays two formal features that are generally considered metafictional, namely self-reflexivity and intertextuality.

The process of creating "Daniel's Book" represents the clearest indication of the novel's self-reflexivity, and the narrative constantly calls the reader's attention to it. A particularly remarkable example of this self-consciousness is Daniel's to-do-list in which he takes notes of the subjects he must include in his narrative:

Subjects to be taken up:

1. The old picture poster that I found in Susan's Volvo, in the front seat, in a cardboard tube.
2. The terrible scene the previous Christmas in the Jewish household at 67 Winthrop Rd., Brookline, a two-family house built, in the style of that neighborhood, to look like a one-family.
3. Our mad grandma and the big black man in the cellar. [...] (19)

This list resembles the typical plan that a writer would elaborate before starting to write—but would probably not include in the final draft—and it draws attention to the process of writing. The novel's self-reflexivity is also enhanced by the constant references to the reader, which have already been explored in the analysis of the novel's narrative instance. Finally, Daniel's narration self-consciously puts emphasis on the problems that may arise when constructing a narrative:

I can't describe this. I am tired of describing things (293).

....

What is most monstrous is sequence. [...] The monstrous reader who goes from one word to the next. The monstrous writer who places one word after another (300).

These excerpts are meant to highlight the author's strain at writing. The second quotation may also be understood as reflecting on traditional realist story-telling, manifesting certain insecurity about the relationship between fiction and reality in terms of time and chronology; not everyone experiences chronology in the same terms, especially not those people who suffer the effects of trauma.

On the other hand, intertextuality plays a very important role in the novel as a source of metafictional commentary. The novel's most obvious intertext is the biblical *Book of Daniel*: it provides the novel with its title, but it also frames Daniel's narration, since both the first epigraph and the final paragraph are quotations taken from the biblical narrative. In addition, the protagonist of Doctorow's novel seems to have a special fondness of his biblical namesake and frequently refers to his story:

In this context it is instructive to pause for a moment over the career of Daniel, a definitely minor, if not totally apocryphal figure (or figures) who worked with no particular delight for a few of the kings in the post-Alexandrine Empires (13).

And so, Daniel chooses to identify with this biblical figure, since, like him, he has engaged in a task of "interpret[ing] and analyz[ing] the awful visions of his head" (250). However, it is possible to argue that the real source of Daniel's interest in his biblical namesake is based on the "Book of Susanna," which is included in the biblical *Book of Daniel* and which constitutes another important intertext of Doctorow's novel. In this apocryphal text, Daniel saves a Hebrew wife named Susanna who has been falsely accused of being promiscuous and has been sentenced to death. Daniel Isaacson is obsessed with saving his own Susanna, his sister Susan, but unlike the biblical Daniel, he does not succeed (see footnote 8).

The other important intertext to be found in the novel are a number of historical records about different execution forms, about torture and tyranny, and about certain

events in Soviet history. References to these records are frequently included in the history interludes that constantly interrupt Daniel's autodiegetic narration. The important metafictional role of these intermissions still remains to be considered; when contrasted with the fictional quality of the novel, the reference in these sections to events and issues that are considered to be historically accurate sends an important postmodern message about the similar epistemological status of history and fiction.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, although *The Book of Daniel* is a fictional text, it does deal with a historical event, the Rosenberg case. As such, much of its content is based on historical information extracted from letters, newspaper excerpts, and the transcript of the trial.

This analysis links *The Book of Daniel* to the quintessentially postmodern form of "Historiographic Metafiction," a term coined by Linda Hutcheon to refer to those novels which are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (1988: 5). And so, it may be argued that although it has been analyzed here as a trauma narrative, Doctorow's novel can also be studied as a work of historiography which reflects on its own status as a fictional text.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Concluding remarks***

The analysis of *The Book of Daniel* that has been carried out in this third section proves the novel's extraordinary worth and complexity, since it is now clear that the book is much more than the themes and ideas that it puts forward; it is also a masterpiece from the perspective of narratology, and it attests E. L. Doctorow's skill as a writer. After all,

---

<sup>20</sup> It is, in fact, E. L. Doctorow's main contention in his celebrated essay "False Documents" (1977) that history and fiction share the same fictional status (see footnote 4).

<sup>21</sup> Due to space limitations, an in-depth analysis of the novel from this perspective is beyond the scope of the present dissertation.

he has been able to device the perfect form for the content that he wished to convey, displaying a highly experimental narrative style that places him among the greatest postmodern North-American authors.

As the analysis above shows, Doctorow's remarkable skill becomes manifest in his inexhaustible thirst for formal experimentation, his masterly employment of techniques for the aesthetization of trauma, and his purposeful creation of a unique narrating instance, without which the novel would be much less powerful as a cultural artifact. In addition, the writer has proved that he is a postmodern author in full right; on the one hand, he has developed a highly self-reflexive style which allows him to send an important postmodern message about the status of fiction. On the other hand, he has clearly internalized interesting notions put forward by the New Physics and contemporary ideas about the complexity of the human psyche. Finally, his narrative style has sought to decentralize realist forms, demonstrating that alternatives to this traditional (male) mode of writing are not only possible, but also successful, which may be understood as a support of contemporary feminist ideas about narrative techniques.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that, in *The Book of Daniel*, it is obvious that Doctorow has managed to create a narrative style that supports his own ideas about the complexity of human behavior and human relations in contemporary society. Fiction is, in his hands, a tool to raise awareness of contemporary ethical issues.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the analyses carried out in the three main sections of the present dissertation, a large number of issues have been examined, and several partial results have been reached. Taken together, these lead to a number of general conclusions about *The Book of Daniel* and about Doctorow's literary project. However, before setting them out, it may be worth revising and summarizing the main ideas that have been explored and the results that have been reached in the three main sections above.

In the first section, *The Book of Daniel* has been addressed as a trauma narrative. First of all, the debates over what a traumatic event is and who may suffer from PTSD, and over who is entitled to write about trauma have been considered, proving Doctorow's right to create a trauma narrative and the traumatic quality of the events suffered by the protagonist. Secondly, the protagonist's condition has been analyzed, arguing that he presents the symptoms associated with PTSD and anhedonia. Finally, the status of his memories has also been examined, and the possibility of healing through narration has been assessed, determining that complete recovery is impossible for the protagonist.

In the second section, the novel has been read against the grain, as a site for feminist revision. First of all, the importance of critically assessing the work by male writers has been defended on the basis of the role of fiction as encoder and disseminator of cultural values and as site of ideological negotiation. Secondly, the analysis has focused on the protagonist's violent and controlling treatment and attitude towards the female characters, and on his position with respect to female otherness, paying attention to the power struggle for narrative control and to the absence of gender dialogue.

Finally, the analysis has also sought to examine the roles assigned to female characters in the novel.

The last section has employed the narratological method of analysis. The novel has been approached from the formal perspective, with the aim of assessing its technical strategies and evaluating the way in which the ideas presented in the thematic and ideological analyses are supported formally. First of all, the novel's narrating instance has been examined, concentrating on narrative voice, perspective, time of narration, and narrative level. Further, the narratee, the implied author —or level of textual implications— and the implied reader have been analyzed. Secondly, the formal strategies for the aesthetization and representation of trauma have been considered, reinforcing by means of formal features the thematic reading of the novel as a trauma narrative. Finally, the analysis has focused on postmodern experimentation, examining the novel's metafictional self-reflexivity and its intertextuality.

These analyses have led to a number of partial results. After the examination of the novel from the perspective of Trauma Studies, it has been possible to conclude that the novel seeks to represent individual trauma as symptomatic of the collective historical trauma that lies at the foundation of North-American society; it further seeks to denounce how legal, social, political and economic structures create and perpetuate situations and conditions that may result in traumatic victimization; and it intends to make readers aware of the lasting effects of trauma and the suffering of victims, so that we may assess our own role in the creation and perpetuation of traumatic situations and reflect on the importance of witnessing empathically and not alienating victims of trauma. The analysis of the novel from a feminist point of view has led to the following partial results: on the one hand, it has been concluded that Doctorow has intended his novel to support feminist concerns and to be a sophisticated critique of paternalistic and

patriarchal status quo. On the other hand, it has been established that the novel reflects on the role that the representation of trauma plays in the dichotomization of the two sexes, since it proves that the category of victim cannot be reserved for women any longer; the distinction between victim and perpetrator is not clear-cut any more, it has become blurred in contemporary society. Finally, the narratological method of analysis has resulted in a number of results about the novel's formal structures and the writer's narrative technique. It has been proved that *The Book of Daniel* is a masterpiece from the perspective of narratology, and Doctorow's skill as a postmodern writer has been attested, since he has been able to create a novel in which content and form support each other perfectly well, to the point of blurring their traditional limits.

When considered together, the partial results reached in the three previous sections lead to a number of general conclusions, which contribute to defining the purpose of *The Book of Daniel* and the way in which it constitutes a coherent part of E. L. Doctorow's literary project. To begin with, it is possible to conclude that *The Book of Daniel* contributes to Doctorow's ongoing denunciation of a number of current North-American values and cultural constructions, questioning their ethic validity. This is so for two main reasons; on the one hand, the novel denounces traditional ideas about the category of victim. It challenges the traditional feminist appropriation of this category for women, which is not ethically adequate in a society which has suffered devastating events of the magnitude of World War II and the Holocaust, and in the context of postcolonialism, postwar politics and capitalist individualism. In addition, the novel confronts an understanding of the concept of victim as an absolute category in the context of the postmodern challenge to binarism and categorical thinking. In contemporary society, the boundaries between the categories of victim and perpetrator have become blurred, since anyone can be both. On the other hand, *The Book of Daniel*



seeks to denounce individualism, a defining value of North-American society which has, nevertheless, brought the country to its current level of alienation and isolation. And so, the novel defends empathy and understanding as tools to overcome the collective historical trauma that lies at the foundation of North-American society and which sickens it.

Doctorow's denunciation of the unethical quality of these values and cultural constructs is also coherent with his project of depicting the ugliest aspects of North-American society, which will be further continued with his following novels. It is possible to conclude that *The Book of Daniel* constitutes a challenge to North-American myths such as the "American dream" and "American exceptionalism." And so, the novel condemns the very North-American idea that if a person is not rich and successful, it is his or her own fault, since everyone has the same chances in the land of opportunity. Similarly, the novel highlights and stresses a number of situations and conditions which effectively destroy the myth of exceptionalism of North-American institutions: it depicts a flawed Judiciary system in which a person can be convicted and executed on the basis of another convict's testimony; it condemns the "witch hunt" of McCarthyism; it represents the failure of social structures and institutions to provide for the least privileged; and it criticizes the predominance of patriarchal social structures and ideology. Thus, it can be concluded that *The Book of Daniel* contributes to Doctorow's project of demythologizing North America.

This project is also related to Doctorow's ongoing determination to expose through his fiction North-American social, economic and political structures as mechanisms of control and alienation. In fact, *The Book of Daniel* constitutes a perfect example of how such structures frequently result in traumatic victimization, rendering the individual subject powerless and defenseless. Therefore, it is possible to conclude

that the novel seeks to denounce institutions and structures such as Capitalism for its creation of an alienated class of workers who can barely survive on their wages, North-American democracy, which has not just excluded but rather effectively destroyed the seeds of socialism and communism, and patriarchy, which has traditionally relegated women to the domestic sphere, subjected them to the alleged superiority of men and disregarded them as second-class citizens. Such aim is closely related to Doctorow's own left-wing ideology and his support of feminist concerns, which permeates through his oeuvre.

Finally, Doctorow's emphasis on formal experimentation, his skill in creating the perfect narrative instance for the messages that he wishes to send, and his masterly ability to match form and content make it possible to conclude that it is also part of his literary project to defend the role of fiction as a tool to raise awareness of ethical problems with regard to human behavior in contemporary society. And so, the narrative technique displayed in *The Book of Daniel* proves Doctorow's skill as a writer who has an important message to send to the world and is determined to send it through fiction.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that *The Book of Daniel* is part of the writer's wider literary project of revealing and interpreting the socio-historical forces that shape the society of the United States of America. His ultimate aim is to improve North-American society by calling attention to its defects and demanding from his readers that they assess critically the ideology, the structures, and the institutions that surround them, leaving aside individuality and learning to show empathy and understanding towards others. Thus, the novel constitutes a defense of the importance of literature for the education and improvement of the mind and the soul. Finally, *The Book of Daniel* highlights the importance of frameworks of analysis such as Trauma Studies and Feminist literary criticism and of the narratological method for

contemporary literature, because they may help to understand how literary works go beyond entertainment and may become incomparable sources of knowledge and ethical values for contemporary society.

## WORKS CITED

- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed), 1980.
- *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., text rev.), 2000.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1985.
- Barrett, Michèle. "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender." In Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (eds.) *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985: 65–85.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text." In Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (eds.) *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985: 45–64.
- Bloom, Harold (ed). *E.L. Doctorow: Critical Views*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2002.
- Booth, Wayne C. "Types of Narration" (1961). In Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa (eds.) *Narratology*. London and New York: Longman, 1996: 145–54.
- Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" In Cathy Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995: 100–112.
- Caruth, Cathy (ed). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Clayton, John. "Radical Jewish Humanism: The Vision of E. L. Doctorow." In Richard Trenner (ed.) *E.L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations*. Princeton: Ontario Review, 1983: 109-119.

Collado Rodríguez, Francisco. "A Practical Approach to Narrative Texts: Basic Concepts of Narratology" (2011). At <<<https://moodle.unizar.es/mod/resource/view>>>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Cooper, Stephen. "Cutting Both Ways: E. L. Doctorow's Critique of the Left." *South Atlantic Review* 58.2 (May, 1993): 111–25.

Culp, Mildred. "Women and Tragic Destiny in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." In Daniel Walden (ed.) *From Marginality to Mainstream: A Mosaic of Jewish Writers. Studies in American Jewish Literature*, vol. 2. Albany: New York State UP, 1982: 155–66.

DeRosa Aaron. "Apocryphal Trauma in E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Studies in the Novel* 41:4 (Winter 2009): 468–88.

Dillon, Brian. "The Rosenbergs meet Nebuchadnezzar: The Narrator's Use of the Bible in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique*, 40.4 (Summer 1999): 365–78.

Doctorow, E.L. *The Book of Daniel* (1971). London: Penguin, 2006.

----- "False Documents." *Jack London, Hemingway, and the Constitution: Selected Essays 1977–1992*. New York: Random House, 1993 (1977): 149–64.

----- *Creationists*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Ellmann, Mary. *Thinking About Women*. New York: Harcourt, 1968

- Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." In Cathy Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995: 183–99.
- Estrin, Barbara L. "Surviving McCarthyism: E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *The Massachusetts Review* 16.3 (Summer, 1975): 577–87.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Crown, 1991.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Forrey, Robert. "Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*: All in the Family." In Daniel Walden (ed.) *From Marginality to Mainstream: A Mosaic of Jewish Writers. Studies in American Jewish Literature*, vol. 2. Albany: New York State UP, 1982: 167–73.
- Fowler, Douglas. *Understanding E.L. Doctorow*. Columbia: South Carolina UP, 1992.
- Friedl, Herwig and Dieter Schulz. *E. L. Doctorow. A Democracy of Perception: A Symposium with and on E. L. Doctorow*. Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1988.
- Genette, Gérard. "Voice" (1980). In Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa (eds.) *Narratology*. London and New York: Longman, 1996: 172-89.
- Gentry, Marshall B. "Ventriloquists' Conversations: The Struggle for Gender Dialogue in E. L. Doctorow and Philip Roth" (1993). In Harold Bloom (ed.) *Modern Critical Views: E. L. Doctorow*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2002: 113–32.
- Gibson, Walker. "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers" (1980). In Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa (eds.) *Narratology*. London and New York: Longman, 1996: 155-160.

- Girgus, Sam B. "A True Radical History: E. L. Doctorow" (1984). In Harold Bloom (ed.) *Modern Critical Views: E. L. Doctorow*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1989: 7–26.
- Granofski, Ronald. *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
- Harpham, Geoffrey G. "E. L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative" (1985). In Harold Bloom (ed.) *Modern Critical Views: E. L. Doctorow*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House. 1989: 27–49.
- Harter, Carol C. and James R. Thompson. *E. L. Doctorow*. Boston: Twayne, 1990.
- Henke, Suzette. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998.
- Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Irom, Bimbisar. "Between 'Retreat' and 'Engagement': Incomplete Revolts and the Operations of Irony in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Studies in American Fiction* 39.1 (May 2012): 61–85.
- Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." In Elaine Showalter (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985: 46–62.

- "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism." In Elaine Showalter (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985: 144–67.
- Krystal, Henry. "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-UP" In Cathy Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 1995: 76–99.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.
- Laub, Dori and Nanette C. Auerhahn. "Knowing and Not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74.2 (1993): 287–02.
- Levine, Paul. *E.L. Doctorow: An Introduction*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Lorsch, Susan. "Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* as Künstlerroman: The Politics of Art." *Papers on Language & Literature* 18.4 (Fall 1982): 384–97.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1985.
- Morgenstern, Naomi. "The Primal Scene in the Public Domain: E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Studies in the Novel* 35.1 (Spring 2003): 68–88.
- Morris, Christopher D. *Models of Misrepresentation: on the fiction of E. L. Doctorow*. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1991.
- , ed. *Conversations with E. L. Doctorow*. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1999.



- Onega, Susana and José Ángel García Landa (eds). *Narratology*. London & New York: Longman, 1996.
- Parks, John G. *E. L. Doctorow*. New York: Continuum, 1991.
- "The Politics of Polyphony: The Fiction of E. L. Doctorow." *Twentieth Century Literature* 37.4 (Winter, 1991): 454–63.
- Plain, Gill and Susan Sellers (eds.) *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Prince, Gerald (1980) "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee." In Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa (eds.) *Narratology*. London and New York: Longman. 1996: 190-202.
- Rasmussen, Eric D. "E. L. Doctorow's Vicious Eroticism: Dangerous Affect in *The Book of Daniel*." *Symploke* 18.1 (May, 2011): 189–17.
- Reed, T.V. "Genealogy/Narrative/Power: Questions of Postmodernity in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *American Literary History* 4.2 (Summer, 1992): 288–04.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English* 34.1 (October 1972): 18–30.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Toward a Feminist Poetic." In Elaine Showalter (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985: 125–43.
- Siegel, Ben (ed). *Critical Essays on E. L. Doctorow*. New York: G. K. Hall, 2000.
- Stark, John. "Alienation and Analysis in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique* 16.3 (1975): 101–10.

- Tokarczyk, Michelle M. "From the Lion's Den: Survivors in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique* 29.1 (Fall 1987): 3–15.
- *E. L. Doctorow's Skeptical Commitment*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Trenner, Richard (ed). *E.L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations*. Princeton: Ontario Review, 1983.
- Uytterschout, Sien. "Visualized Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*." *ZAA* 56.1 (2008): 61–74.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel A. and Onno Van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." In Cathy Caruth (ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995: 158-181.
- Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Virginia: Virginia UP, 2002.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1984.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004.
- Wilcox, W. Bradford. "The Evolution of Divorce." *National Affairs* 1 (2009). At <<<http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-evolution-of-divorce>>>. Accessed 16th August, 2012.
- Williams, John. *Fiction as False Document: The Reception of E. L. Doctorow in the Postmodern Age*. Columbia: Candem House, 1996.

Wutz, Michael. "Literary Narrative and Information Culture: Garbage, Waste, and Residue in the Work of E. L. Doctorow." *Contemporary Literature* 44.3 (Autumn, 2003): 501–35.