

With this issue the editors will be initiating a new policy. First, we will invite scholars from outside the Nordic countries to contribute their insights to the journal. The essay by professor Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua is the first contribution of this kind. Second, we plan to commission reconsiderations of major writers, major works, central problems, and important themes in American Studies. In the next issue we will inaugurate the series with a re-evaluation of Edgar Allan Poe.

NARRATION AND HISTORY IN E. L. DOCTOROW'S *WELCOME TO HARD TIMES,* *THE BOOK OF DANIEL,* AND *RAGTIME*

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Very distinctive novels in terms of subject matter, style, technique, and tone but each characterized by an exploration of the relationship between history and fiction and by a foregrounding of their own status as a construction of language, *Welcome to Hard Times*, *The Book of Daniel*, and *Ragtime* express a strong consciousness of the "fictiveness" of all discourse about reality and history.¹ In fact, if one of the major achievements of *Welcome to Hard Times* is its dramatization of the discrepancies between history-as-lived and history-as-remembered and if *The Book of Daniel* is distinguished by the way in

1 Some of the ideas about the first two novels discussed in this essay are developed in somewhat different form in my articles "Narrating History: E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*," *Revue Francaise D'Etudes Americaines*, N. 31 (Fevrier 1987), pp. 53-64 and "The Revision of the Western in E. L. Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times*," *American Literature*, 61 (March 1989).

which it shows history to be discursively structured while speaking powerfully about real political and historical issues, primary among the characteristics which establish *Ragtime* as another step forward in Doctorow's revitalization of historical fiction are its ironic reworking of the mimetic mode of representation, its rejection of the traditional theories of history expressed in the genre, and its revelation that its own metahistorical notion is drawn from literature and art as much as from analysis of history.

In Welcome to Hard Times (1960) Doctorow directs his attention to one of the most enduring American stories, the myth of the frontier, which originated in the colonial period, was repeatedly adapted to serve the needs of succeeding generations, and is still a powerful presence in contemporary culture. He approaches this myth as a form of history in the sense developed in the 1950s by Roland Barthes who maintained that modern myths are created when the dominant cultural forces transform the reality of the world into images of that world.² Interested in showing how myths become categories of perception which filter out contradictions and provide a "fictitious" version of reality, Doctorow defamiliarizes the images of the frontier tale in order to offer them, and the myths they helped create, for a fresh evaluation. To this end, he underplays some components of the traditional formulas while bringing others to the foreground so that the main elements of his book simultaneously resemble the standard icons of frontier legend and diverge significantly from them. Furthermore, as he overturns previous literary conventions he effects a dialectical refinement of the ideologies which these conventions project and edges the reader toward perception of certain formerly concealed aspects of western reality.

Besides revising many prominent features of the popular sagas about individual heroism and social progress set against the romantic background of the Old West, Doctorow makes the process of composing a western story one of the themes he treats. As a formulaic adventure tale, the classic western emphasizes action and uses a mode of discourse that does not call attention to itself, presupposing that the reader can proceed through language to direct apprehension of the fictional world. Through his depiction of Blue as memoirist-historian and through Blue's running commentary on the problems he encounters in that role, Doctorow gives his western a self-reflexive spirit unusual in the genre and confers on it a unique accentuation of its status as an interpretation of history. As a matter of fact, by focusing on Blue's efforts to formulate a coherent reconstruction of the past, Doctorow's book privileges the act of thinking about history and about the problematics of historical narration, undermines the illusion of self-evidence built into the repre-

² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, 1957; translated Annette Lavers, London: Granada, 1973), p. 215 .

sentational strategies of the classic western, and highlights the subjectivity and provisionality of its own interpretation of the frontier experience.

When Blue begins his story, aiming "to write what happened,"³ he shares the positivist orientation of the so-called scientific historians of the late nineteenth century because he believes that his memoir can accurately represent and interpret the past and will stimulate cognition of historical actuality in whoever reads it. During the process of writing, however, he becomes not only aware of but obsessed with the difficulty of understanding and communicating "the truth." His doubts spring from his discovery of the complex interaction between fact and perception, memory and reality, language and truth, a dilemma which he inscribes into his narrative.

As he reviews the past Blue realizes that he deciphered the world of Hard Times according to how he had wished it to be, namely, in the process of evolving toward civilization, and that he had conceived of himself and of the other townspeople in terms of the traditional conventions and ideology of the frontier tale. He does not present his insight that he is a coded creature of his society's discourses in theoretical terms but communicates it indirectly. Important indications are his frequent use of the word see or an equivalent to mean something like to comprehend and the fact that more often than not what he "saw" in the past differs significantly from what he "sees" or "knows" in the present. For example, he recalls that when new settlers finally found their way to Hard Times he exulted because "Everything was new in my sight" (p. 112) but later remarks "If I was a wiser man I would have seen where the misery was. You could step out the door and the scar of the old town was blocked from your sight, but the scar was still there" (p. 151). In like manner, he remembers telling Molly with conviction that even if the Bad Man were to return they would have nothing to fear because "you see this time we'll be too good for him" (p. 151) but is ultimately forced to acknowledge "Of course now I put it down I can see that we were finished before we ever got started, our end was in our beginning" (p. 187).

Another factor thwarting Blue's efforts to offer a faithful model of reality is his growing lack of certitude about the reliability of his memory, and in particular, about whether he can identify with clarity and precision the significant moments in what he calls—in opposition to subjective perception of events—the "real time." For instance, in discussing the evolution of his relationship with Molly he laments that he cannot locate the point when it reached its brief perfection before precipitating toward its disastrous finale: "with all my remembrances, I can't find it.... Really, how life gets on is a secret, you only know your own memory and it makes its own time. The real time leads you along and you never know when it happens, the best that can be

3 E. L. Doctorow, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960;reprinted, New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 7. All page references are to the Bantam edition.

is come and gone" (p. 139). Yet, even when Blue writes about incidents that have been firmly lodged in his memory, he questions the validity of his recollections, sensing that just as memory gives shape to reality, so too, writing influences the shape of memory. Recalled experience becomes comprehensible only when given a plot or story line, that essential element of narrative which emerges from the mind of the author. Narrative is what translates knowing into telling and it is precisely this translation that disturbs Blue. Disoriented by his own narrative power, which is making him an artist in spite of himself, he observes at the start of his third ledger: "I have been trying to write what happened but it is hard, wishful work. Time is beginning to run out on me, and the form remembrance puts on things is making its own time and guiding my pen in ways I don't trust" (p. 139).

Blue's discovery that the "truth" of history is not to be found in a past reality conceived of as objectively fixed and separate from language but is something created by the historian in the present and through the story he tells also contributes to his crisis of confidence in his own medium, in the ability of language to depict reality. Contrary to his belief that language is a neutral vehicle for the transmission of thought, he finds that the words he writes are not innocently transparent but are clouded with his personal traumas, individual shortcomings, and psychological evasiveness. One of his last comments reads: "And now I've put down what happened, everything that happened from one end to the other. And it scares me more than death scares me that it may show the truth. But how can it if I've written as if I knew as I lived them which minutes were important and which not, and spoken as if I knew the exact words everyone spoke? Does the truth come out in such scrawls, so bound by my limits" (p. 213)? No wonder, then, if Blue at one point describes his history as nothing more than "marks in a book" (p. 187). Unable to reach the confident grasp of time, experience, and history that he had hoped for when he began his account, he has to resign himself to the knowledge that the document he is consigning to a future generation is a personal reconstruction, a subjective interpretation, an artifact susceptible to being construed in a variety of ways.

More explicitly than in *Welcome to Hard Times*, in *The Book of Daniel* (1971) the search for historical knowledge dominates the action and determines the narrative method, playing a crucial role in tying together the myriad of historical and psychological themes, the wealth of social and political analysis, and the multiple levels of meaning present in this rich and complex novel. In those parts of the story which trace the past of the Isaacson family as Daniel remembers it the book evokes some important conventions of the classical historical novel. In spite of this, in rendering Daniel's recollections of the past, Doctorow undermines the basic assumptions of such a novel, where, behind the effort to create a representative microcosm lies the idea that the writer can finally perceive the truth of history and give it

authoritative artistic form. History is conceived of as a process that can be objectively understood, having an orderly, unfolding meaning to which all the particularities of daily life can ultimately be related while the proper function of the author is to capture and convey the truth of that historical process and to provide a coherent picture of that ordered universe. In Doctorow's novel, even if Daniel brilliantly shows that his parents epitomized a certain type of American Communist and that their experiences were linked to a historically specific set of circumstances, he cannot establish through memory alone whether they were guilty or innocent, and if guilty, why their punishment was so harsh. Consequently, in place of the confident evaluation typical of the classical historical novel, his account conveys a more modern sense of uncertainty about being able to grasp the full meaning of history.

Where Doctorow diverges both from the conventions and from the underlying assumptions of the classical historical novel is in his foregrounding of how Daniel's particular existential situation affects the extent and nature of his perceptions. While the classical historical novel presupposes a narrator who not only has total knowledge of all the facts but is consistently neutral and detached in presenting them and is therefore capable of providing an unmediated transposition of historical reality into fiction, Daniel naturally lacks both omniscience, since he was a child when the events he is narrating occurred, and dispassionateness, because those events destroyed his primal family and wounded him deeply. As a result, his tale annihilates the "positivist illusion of neutral objectivity and the empiricist illusion of neutral subjectivity" on which the classical historical novel is built.⁴

Even as Daniel learns about the limitations of memorial knowledge, he shifts his stance from that of eyewitness and memoirist and becomes a *histor*, a narrator as inquirer, trying to look outward and to construct a narrative about the past on the basis of such information and evidence as he can gather from outside sources.⁵ His research—undertaken to better comprehend the general historical situation in which his parents' experiences occurred and to find some key concepts to use in his thinking about those events—leads him toward important discoveries about the nature of historiography. In particular, he learns how selection, arrangement, and omission are all vital parts of historiography and how, to truly understand history, one must first identify the rhetorical stance, the mode of discourse, and the strategies of representation adopted by the historian. His discoveries are consistent with the ideas of contemporary historical theorists like Hayden White, who insist on the impossibility of any thoroughly objective historical discourse and variously

4 Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 200.

5 I use the term *histor* as defined by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 242-243.

stress that history is not mere description and reproduction of fact but is shaped both by the nature, quantity, and completeness of the information available and by the historian's point of view, aims, and interests. As Hayden White has observed: "no set of . . . historical events in themselves constitute a story, the most that they offer to the historian are story elements. The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play." Because "most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings," properly understood, "histories ought never to be read as unambiguous signs of the events they report but rather as symbolic structures, extended metaphors. . . ."⁶

In his role as *histor*, Daniel encounters several reconstructions of the circumstances surrounding his parents' fate. These range from the viewpoint of such radical and revisionist historians of the 1960s as William Appleman Williams, which, pointedly summarized by Daniel in his essay "True History of the Cold War: A Raga," indicates that events like the execution of the Isaacsons should be understood as an unfortunate but logical outcome of American foreign policy after the Second World War, to the identification of the Isaacsons as conspirators and traitors in the "authoritative" version constructed by the FBI, which Daniel terms "FRYING: a play in ten overt acts." The interpretations he uncovers also include the devaluation of the Isaacsons in particular and of the Old Left in general espoused by Artie Sternlicht as spokesman for the New Left, which casts the Isaacsons in the role of pro-Soviet dupes and accomplices in their own destruction, as well as the liberal analysis advanced by his foster father Robert Lewin, who depicts the Isaacsons as unwilling pawns in a national drama, the evolution of which was determined both by a crisis in foreign policy and by a domestic credibility crisis linked to possession of the atom bomb. Far from helping Daniel move toward a final clarification, these conflicting interpretations confer on the trial and execution of his parents a fascinating but frustrating ambiguity which forces him to conclude that his only certainty is that history is elusive.

Daniel, however, cannot easily accept the concept of the elusiveness of history in relation to the death of his parents so, abandoning the intractable problem of attaining reliable knowledge from historical sources, he endeavors to solve the mystery of their guilt or innocence through an imaginative

6 Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 47, 48, 52.

reconstruction. In this attempt to penetrate the essence of history by reenacting the past in his own mind, he behaves like the "detective historian" described by R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History*. Collingwood writes that "the hero of the detective novel is thinking exactly like an historian when, from indications of the most varied kind, he constructs an imaginary picture of how a crime was committed and by whom, using his 'constructive imagination' which tells him—as it tells the detective—what 'must have been the case.'"⁷

As detective-historian, Daniel submits the historical record to the analytic procedures of hypothesis formulation, testing, and explanation. He interviews people who witnessed the events of his parents' case and, after analyzing the existential situations that may affect their testimony and taking into account their probable omissions and distortions, he uses their reminiscences to formulate his own interpretation and tries to put that interpretation to the test. The hypothesis he develops is that Selig Mindish, chief witness for the prosecution, accused the Isaacsons in order to divert attention away from the real spies and that, while Rochelle was kept in ignorance, Paul agreed to this cover-up maneuver because it appealed both to his fervid loyalty to Russia and to his firm belief that the American legal system would not convict any of them because they were all innocent. Although this hypothesis seems ingenious and convincing, Daniel cannot prove it for when he tracks down Mindish in California he finds that his parents' accuser, and his own principal witness for the defense, is thoroughly senile. Once again, the truth he is seeking eludes him and instead of moving from a confusion of clues to meaningful order and reaching a plausible verdict, he proceeds from mystery, to possibility, to doubt.

Doctorow's presentation of the various forms of historical investigation undertaken by Daniel in order to comprehend why and how the larger events of history collided so forcefully and tragically with the individual experiences of his parents dramatizes the epistemological uncertainties typical of the modernist historical novel, which asks how we can know a reality whose existence is not in doubt but which can be apprehended and understood only through the limited perception of the individual. Daniel, in fact, is portrayed in the act of examining how facts, events, and history acquire significance and grappling with the inevitable element of subjectivity that pervades all accounts of the past. Yet in contrast to what generally happens in the modernist historical novel, where the individual consciousness of the narrator or the controlling vision of the author finally succeeds in countering the chaos of history with a personal or aesthetic order that has unity, coherence, and completeness, Daniel does not move beyond doubt to some inspired vision. He ultimately comes to a skeptical acceptance of his radical legacy by learning to identify the positive

⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946; reprinted, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 243.

and negative qualities of the Old Left and the New, he vastly increases his knowledge of American history as well as of the problems involved in historical inquiry; he makes significant progress psychologically both personally and in relation to his family. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel he is still in the position of having to accept the contradictions, paradoxes, and unanswered questions of history without being able to find consolation in some alternate form of epistemological certitude such as myth, religion, psychology, or art.

Whereas *Welcome to Hard Times* overtly problematizes uncertainty about perception and interpretation of reality and *The Book of Daniel* adds to that theme an accentuation of the difficulties involved in dealing with textualized remains of the past, *Ragtime* (1975), building on those same issues but without giving them metafictional prominence, utilizes a "detached and authoritative" narrative voice that is actually existentially grounded in the world it narrates and advances a strong sociopolitical interpretation that is ultimately revealed to be limited and provisional. At the same time it blends sharp representation with implicit questioning of the ability of literature to "represent" and projects a theory of history quite different from those usually expressed in traditional historical fiction.

Despite its wealth of precise images of turn-of-the-century America, *Ragtime* actually invites reexamination of the whole concept of mimetic representation, especially of what images are: who produces and sustains them, what they can tell about reality and what they can conceal, what distinguishes empirically-grounded from invented images. This problem is already present in the first paragraph, which would seem to be setting the stage for a classical historical novel by offering a stream of images about the ragtime era in one of its easily recognizable "official" versions. But even as Doctorow provides vivid images, he begins to weaken their power as keys to deep historical understanding and to call into question a manner of writing historical fiction based on analogous configuration. Specifically, his process of deconstructing his images involves foregrounding their stereotypical quality through simple language, a flat storybook tone, and use of staccato sentence structures. The novel opens:

In 1902 Father built a house at the crest of the Broadview Avenue hill in New Rochelle, New York. It was a three-story brown shingle with dormers, bay windows and a screened porch. Striped awnings shaded the windows. The family took possession of this stout manse on a sunny day in June and it seemed for some years thereafter that all their days would be warm and fair. The best part of Father's income was derived from the manufacture of flags and buntings and other accoutrements of patriotism, including fireworks. Patriotism was a reliable sentiment in the early 1900's. Teddy Roosevelt was president. The population customarily gathered in great numbers either out of doors for parades, public concerts, fish fries, political picnics, social outings, or indoors in meeting halls, vaudeville theatres, operas, ballrooms. There seemed to be no entertainment that did not involve great swarms of people. Trains and steamers and trolleys moved them from one place to another. That was the style, that was the way people lived. Women were stouter then. They visited

the fleet carrying white parasols. Everyone wore white in the summer. Tennis racquets were hefty and the racquet faces elliptical. There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants.⁸

As the final statement of this passage indicates, along with highlighting the clichés hidden in the familiar images, Doctorow challenges their stability and destabilizes their tranquillizing effect by syncopating them with less common ones. Such counterpointing reveals how the popular image of an innocent pre-World War I America ignores and mystifies important aspects of American life at that time and concurrently suggests that "verisimilitude" can sometimes mask ahistorical motives by substituting a static picture of an era for dynamic representation of its multiple forces and realities. What the reader perceives as a result of this technique is that the ragtime era was not only the golden age of innocence immortalized in "Hello Dolly," "The Music Man," and Disneyland's Main Street, nor simply a period of patriotism, big-game hunting in Africa, and the race for the North Pole, but was also the era of Ellis Island immigration, racial tension and segregation, strikes and repression, and the rise and consolidation of a radical critique of capitalism.

Doctorow further revises tradition in *Ragtime* by having his conventionally "typical" protagonists share the narrative focus with characters of a kind generally considered peripheral in fictional history. In fact, along with members of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant upper-middle-class family who conform to the notion of type in that they derive their individual traits from some peculiarities of their age, he brings into his narrative two other families: Tateh's East European Jewish immigrant family living in the ghetto on the Lower East Side and the black family composed of Sarah, ragtime pianist Coalhouse Walker, and their infant son. Through division of his narrative among these three groups, he not only underscores the inadequacy of the WASP family as a fully representative microcosm but also stimulates readers to reconsider the relative emphasis given to the various social groups in standard versions of American history at the turn of the century.

Aware of the difficulty of arriving at "true" images of American historical reality, Doctorow does not use his marginal protagonists in a simple, straightforward manner. Tateh, who after rising from rags to riches creates a new family with Mother, Little Boy, Coalhouse Walker's son, and his own daughter, besides shifting attention to the immigrant population, evokes such conventional American cultural images as the self-made man and the melting pot. Though the reader might enjoy the pleasure of recognizing these myths, Doctorow does not underwrite the complacency they project. Tateh's success

⁸ E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Bantam, 1975). All page references are to the Bantam edition.

story is strongly grounded in irony since it proceeds through his repudiation of his first wife, who could not survive unsullied in the New York ghetto, and his abandonment of his socialist ideals during the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Moreover, the image of the melting pot which Tateh creates in his "Our Gang" style film comedies is dangerously mystifying, for it erases memory of racial, ethnic, and class tension by presenting a peacefully pluralistic social order in which all antagonisms have been reconciled. The complexity of Doctorow's depiction of his marginal characters is even more notable in the story of Coalhouse Walker. In portraying Walker as a Black Panther in a Model-T, Doctorow—departing from traditional verisimilitude, which permits anachronism only insofar as it unobtrusively contributes to consolidating the impression that the past was a necessary pre-condition for the present—superimposes past and present to produce a split-screen effect that holds them simultaneously in focus. For example, Walker's meeting with Booker T. Washington in the Morgan Library both strongly "echoes the contemporary debate between integrationists and black separatists"⁹ and points to the debate about black response to their sociopolitical situation at the turn of the century symbolized in the conciliatory politics of Booker T. Washington and the political radicalism advocated by W. E. B. Du Bois.

Likewise leading readers to question classic conventions and to reflect on the relationship between fiction and history is Doctorow's use of his world-historical characters. Generally, when such characters are presented, their depiction does not clash with received ideas about their behavior and ideology and they are cast in minor roles, serving primarily to verify the historical trajectory of the plot, to intensify the aura of authenticity of the historical recreation, and to reinforce the validity of the novel's historical interpretation. Although Doctorow sometimes assigns his world-historical characters the customary function of providing an extra-textual validation of the novel's historical generalizations or takes them beyond known fact into credible extrapolation in their interactions with his fictional characters, quite frequently he has these characters engage in highly improbable actions and conversations and shows them participating in imaginary events. This mingling of traditional and transgressive depictions problematizes the whole question of reference in the historical novel because it subverts the expectation that the presence of world-historical characters should strengthen the link between fiction and history by reinforcing the fiction's documentary validity and installs the suspicion that the "real-world" referent of the novel is, at least in part, a product of the novelist's inventiveness. Ironically, some of Doctorow's most unconventional scenes challenging standard mimeticism in relation to depiction of world-historical characters are also among his most historically suggestive: Booker T. Washington facing Coalhouse Walker in the Morgan

9 Paul Levine, *E. L. Doctorow* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 55.

Library provides a powerful image of confrontation between opposing ways of responding to the injustices of racial inequality; Emma Goldman massaging Evelyn Nesbit while lecturing her on how her sexual corruption is a consequence of capitalism places in conjunction two "new" images of womanhood in the early twentieth century, the sexually liberated American girl and the political activist; J. P. Morgan and Henry Ford confabulating about their superiority to the rest of humanity as they found the Pyramid Club points to the fact that as America's major financial and industrial capitalists they already headed an exclusive "secret" society which dominated world economy.

An even more important innovation in *Ragtime* regards what is probably the salient feature of any historical novel, that is, the concept of history it proposes as the shaping force on the characters and on the author and readers. Unlike the classical historical novel, *Ragtime* does not embrace a progressive theory of historical development, nor, like many examples of the genre in the modernist period, does it exemplify a cyclic view of history. Instead, the metahistorical notion chosen by Doctorow to illuminate the dynamics of history is that of transformation, or mutability, a view which differs from those just mentioned in several significant ways. Change may sometimes indicate progress, as occurs in the story of Mother, who in the course of the novel overcomes her Victorian sexual inhibitions and breaks out of her role as model WASP homemaker to embrace a multiracial, multiethnic reality. At other times, change may simply be repetition with a difference. Whether Father runs a fireworks factory or a munitions plant, he is expressing the same patriotic belief in America's historical mission. Similarly, in contrast to the progressive view of history, which makes it possible to hope in a better future, and to the cyclic view, which affirms that mankind continues to repeat its original and tragic errors, in the principle of transformation, fate is open-ended. Individuals may be conditioned by history or they may leap beyond circumstances and transcend the patterns of the past. For instance, neither his elegant manners nor his fame as a ragtime pianist can earn Coalhouse Walker respect as a human being from the racist firemen of New Rochelle, but Tateh rises from poverty in New York to affluence and power in Hollywood. Lastly, in place of the aura of enduring validity built into the other metahistorical notions, transformation offers an ironic commentary on its own provisional nature. A world of infinite transformation is one in which nothing, not even explanations of itself, can be considered permanent.

The sources of this theory of history, how it can be used to analyze human affairs, and how it affects the shape of narrative are not open subjects of debate in *Ragtime*, as similar topics are in *Welcome to Hard Times* and *The Book of Daniel*. Rather, these same issues are offered for the reader's meditation in certain images and episodes in the novel. One such self-reflexive image is the rectangular glass which Tateh uses as the primary tool of his

cinematic art. With it, he composes mental images of whatever details, events, and behavior capture his attention, thereby taking them out of their local contexts and preserving them from the mutation of time. Then, through the technique of montage, he restores to these images a sense of movement, tension, and mutability, and simultaneously makes them part of a new context, a conceptual design invented by him and which can be perceived by the spectator. Like Tateh's films, Doctorow's book, made up of many carefully framed images, possesses a dynamic quality brought about by staccato cutting and constant shifting of scene. This juxtaposition of heterogeneous material produces a free stream of changing, transforming, and commingling forms, pictures, and compositions, out of which arise powerful coherent themes that enable the diverse elements to coalesce into a complex image of American life. A further self-reflexive image is provided in the description of Coalhouse Walker's performance of Scott Joplin's "Wall Street Rag" for the family in New Rochelle. Since in ragtime music an internally syncopated melodic line is pitted against a rhythmically straightforward bass to create a constant collision between variation and repetition, ragtime music is, like cinema, an aesthetic form eminently suited to represent transformation and at the same time to give it meaning and structure. No wonder then, that the rhythm of the sentences and events in this novel is, as every reader has noted, a verbal analogue of ragtime music.

A third example of self-reflexiveness in the novel can be found in Chapter Fifteen in the pointed reference to the literary model in which the concept of transformation was first fully articulated, when the narrator reveals that the little boy loved to listen to his grandfather recount tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. "They were stories of transformation ... stories [which] proposed to him that the forms of life were volatile and that everything in the world could as easily be something else" (pp. 132-133). In telling his stories, generally well-known by his audience, Ovid aimed at creating interest through the originality of the voice, perspective, and detail of his particular recounting. Doctorow, too, stresses many familiar images but syncopates them with less common ones from social and political realities not often emphasized in fictional accounts of the ragtime era and often introduces surprising variations. In Ovid's work, gods and men are for the most part treated in the same manner, as actors in a universal drama where destiny is the only overriding force. The lives of the fictional and world-historical characters in *Ragtime* are similarly crossed by the social and economic forces that lead to success and failure in early twentieth-century America. Ovid's collection of myths and legends is woven into an unbroken narrative of transformation through such devices as interlocking tales and coincidence, the same devices we find in *Ragtime*. Moreover, because of the repetition of the basic element of transformation in all the stories, Ovid risked monotony, which he obviated

with a style characterized by speed, economy, and vividness and by the use of striking images, all qualities which likewise characterize the style in *Ragtime*,

Perhaps most significant in light of the vision and interpretation Doctorow's novel presents of the turbulent years between 1902 and 1917 is the fact that *Metamorphoses* is, on one level, a universal history which "beginning with the Creation ... ends with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and the amazing metamorphosis on which Augustan poets loved to dwell, that of Rome from a little village into the capital of the world,"¹⁰ and that underlying this history is a sense of continuous war between order and disorder, cosmos and chaos, integrity and disintegration. Doctorow sets the action of his novel during the period of America's affirmation as a world power and demonstrates the disorientation, violence, and uncertainty that accompanied the large-scale transformation of the nation from its traditional character into one that was increasingly urban, industrial, commercial, and secular. In addition, just as Ovid, through the logic of metamorphosis, implies that Rome's hegemony will not be permanent, Doctorow sets the narration of *Ragtime* in the 1970s, a period of America's decline on the international scene.

A further layer of meaning in relation to the metacommentary Doctorow develops on the sources and implementation of the literary-historical paradigm of transformation emerges at the close of the novel when it is revealed that the little boy—who listened with fascination to tales from Ovid, heard Coalhouse Walker play ragtime music, and found a second father in Tateh—grew up to become the narrator of *Ragtime*. Doctorow would seem to be saying that the narrator of this novelistic memoir learned about transformation as an abstract concept before he applied it to reality. It was not solely or primarily the events of his life and his historical research which brought him to this totalizing concept; rather, with the concept to guide him, he had a way of understanding and interpreting reality, as well as of making a meaningful totality out of the flux of experience.

Revelation that the vision of history shaping the presentation and interpretation of American life in *Ragtime* is highly personal and inspired by literature and art as much as by observation and analysis of history calls to mind the contemporary view of historiography as a form of literature that points both to the events described and to the mythos or plot through which they are given order and by which the historian transforms the reader's vision of them. But as in *Welcome to Hard Times* and *The Book of Daniel*, in *Ragtime* Doctorow creates a dialectic between this view of history as discourse and an innovative use of fiction to explore history, employing his experimental techniques to convey a strong sense of the experience and burden of historical events and to demonstrate how history can be not just the subject matter of fiction but can enter its language, its imagery, and its structure.

10 L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Surveyed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 63.

Book Reviews

Sara M. Evans and Barbara J. Nelson. *Wage Justice: Comparable Worth and the Paradox of Technocratic Reform*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. 224 pp.

Sara Evans and Barbara Nelson are both well-known and dedicated advocates and scholars of equal rights for women and their book on wage justice is a continuation of their earlier efforts to demonstrate the extent of the historic discrimination and devaluation of women's work. *Wage Justice* is unique as it combines a detailed study of comparable worth in action with a broad view of the historical and theoretical development of the principle of pay equity.

Women have always been paid less than men even though they have been employed in jobs that demanded equal skills, efforts, and responsibility. In 1986, the median earnings of white women working full-time, year-round averaged 64.2 percent of the earnings of white men whereas black and Hispanic women averaged, respectively, 56.2 and 53.3 percent of white men's earnings. The earnings gap between men and women is due to a number of factors but all explanations identify occupational sex segregation and differences in the human capital characteristics of men and women as culprits. It is the inequitable wage gap that comparable worth wage policies try to redress. Evans and Nelson prefer a definition that places comparable worth within the broader goal of eliminating wage discrimination and state that comparable worth is "the principle that jobs dissimilar in nature can be compared in terms of knowledge, skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions, and that jobs equivalent in value in these terms should be paid equally."

Evans and Nelson contend that the actual results of comparable worth policies fall short of the expectations that underlie advocates' egalitarian vision of economic justice for women and minorities due to the paradoxical nature of comparable worth. In fact, the implementation of comparable worth strengthens managerial power because the realization of the egalitarian and feminist principles implicit in pay equity is dependent upon technocratic business methods such as sophisticated job evaluation systems and other management tools. Furthermore, comparable worth emphasizes horizontal equity and actually reinforces existing job hierarchies as it only addresses the question of equal pay for work of equal value and not the vertical inequities in the workplace. Evans and Nelson point out that the fact that a doctor might earn five times as much as a nurse would not be addressed in a comparable worth analysis since

their jobs are not rated the same. Recognizing the weaknesses of comparable worth, the authors argue that it should be but one of several strategies for achieving pay equity.

Their study is based on the experience of Minnesota which was the first state to pass and implement a comparable worth wage policy for state employees but *Wage Justice* also compares Minnesota's efforts with the experiences of other states. Minnesota passed the State Employees Pay Equity Act in 1982 and the Local Government Pay Equity Act in 1984. Furthermore, the local jurisdictions were given a deadline by which to have completed an examination of current wage practices and to have devised a remedy for wage inequities if they existed. At the state level the policy was implemented smoothly and by August 1987 an overwhelming 90 percent of local governments had complied with the Act and initiated their implementation plans. However, Evans and Nelson find that the implementation at the local level was far more conflictive and brought a number of hostile or uninformed people into the process and that as an unintended consequence local management became more powerful at the expense of local unions.

Wage Justice is an important book because it analyzes a piece of controversial and potentially transformative legislation from its introduction through its initial phases of local implementation and sheds light on the factors that actually initiate and shape policies. Evans and Nelson help map out some of the difficulties that egalitarian and feminist policies encounter and draw our attention to the paradoxical nature of social reform. However, their study is not an easy introduction to comparable worth or sex segregation in the workplace. It takes a very dedicated reader to make his/her way through the detailed descriptions of the state and local implementation phases. In the maze of data the authors sometimes lose themselves in details and do not succeed in placing their analysis in a broader historical and theoretical context. Finally, this is a book that addresses itself to a narrow audience of policymakers and social scientists.

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