

2014

Children's Cacophony: Family in The Book of Daniel

Eileen Totter

Georgia College & State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Totter, Eileen (2014) "Children's Cacophony: Family in The Book of Daniel," *The Corinthian*: Vol. 15, Article 6.

Available at: <http://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian/vol15/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Box. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Corinthian by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Box.

Children's Cacophony: Family in *The Book of Daniel*

Eileen Totter

Dr. Bruce Gentry

Faculty Mentor

E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* is a historical fiction novel concerning the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, so most scholarship accordingly sees the text as leftist heroes bravely struggling against the state. Molly Hite contextualizes how momentous the Rosenberg trial was for American politics: "like the executions themselves, this edict marks a key moment in the articulation of Cold War doctrine. The electrocution of the Rosenbergs was a stunning overreaction to a purported crime—passing the 'secret' of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union" (85). Subsequently, first time readers of Doctorow's text may feel inclined to find a parallel between the real Rosenbergs and the fictional Issacsons. Like the Rosenbergs, Paul and Rochelle Issacson are Jewish parents who are arrested and executed for presumed treason. Brian Dillon summarizes this theory: "Daniel certainly believes [his parents] were the victims of a queerly orchestrated, hysterical, anti-Semitic persecution" (369). Doctorow does show how the Issacson parents are destroyed by the state, but few scholars note that he also presents the left as detrimental to the family as the right. The father and daughter who invest so heavily into leftist politics that they abandon the family, Paul and Susan, are not tragic heroes like some scholars claim. Their ignoring family to fight for the left proves to be an empty struggle, which results in isolation, then death. Rochelle, however, refuses to give up her role as mother, even when the state makes her a prisoner. She links herself to Mindish, allowing her to symbolically possess him, stressing familial forgiveness over political heroes and villains. Daniel travels not to the past to avenge his parents, but rather a Disney-esque future to where Rochelle/Mindish reconciles

with Daniel. This forgiveness is maternal in the coded, gendered behaviors of Mindish crying over Daniel, then kissing him, stressing Rochelle's symbolic return to her son. After this scene, Daniel can demonstrate more familial tendencies in his own life. Doctorow's text is not a tribute to leftist politics like scholars claim, but rather the family, which alone possesses the unique strength to endure the corruptive politics of both the right and the left.

Some readers may interpret Doctorow presenting Daniel's passionate/political father as preferable to his uptight/familial mother, but Doctorow suggests the opposite when violence occurs, and the family survives as opposed to the left. Douglas Fowler argues that the politically motivated deaths of the parents ennoble them, creating "tragic martyrs to their own idealistic naïveté, to the political passion of their historical movement" (45). He presents the Issacsons as tragic heroes, and the text appears to confirm his argument as Daniel remembers his father: "He wrestled society for my soul" (34). Paul is presented as someone who believes in change, rather than simply desiring a better life. When the political Paul is compared to his more familial wife, Rochelle—"My mother was impatient with all of this. She was a pragmatist. [...] Her politics was the politics of want" (32, 34), Doctorow makes a clear divide because Paul seems more heroic in his lofty support of Communism than Rochelle's need for concrete improvement. But these roles are reversed at the Paul Robeson concert. The scene begins idealistically: "My father reads something aloud from a book, something funny, and everyone laughs and comments on it. My mother is smiling" (48). The left is practically pastoral in this moment from Daniel's childhood, and Paul is active and adored by his leftist community. Rochelle is passive, seemingly confirming Paul as the text's political hero. However, the Issacsons are not so much martyrs created by the right as they are victims abandoned by the left. The community falls apart the instant violence happens: "From the front to the back of the bus, people are ducking, like dominoes going down in a row" (49). The leftists are too worried about their own lives to help the family. Paul, as a good Communist, prepares to challenge the state: "Calmly, with his right hand, my father removes his glasses, folds them against

his chest, and hands them up to Mindish” (51). Paul appears to be the hero, with Mindish as his partner. But the image of Mindish being Paul’s right-hand man in politics is ruined by Paul surrendering his glasses— his sight— to the leftist Mindish, before being beaten by the crowds while his Communist comrades watch on. Paul’s supposed heroism fails because there is no real support in the left, not even for those who defend its ideology. John Stark sums up Paul’s problem best: “When they accept a leftist theory of history and society [...] they become alienated from people who hold more common positions. [...] Paul Issacson, the father, also separates himself and his family from others culturally” (103). Stark presents good points, as the Communists are isolated in their bus, but he neglects that Paul leaves his family for his cause, making him separate from even Rochelle and the children, thus dooming himself. Rochelle’s protecting Daniel from the falling glass is a very maternal act that Doctorow links to preceding generations: “she is laying her head on my back and muttering into my backbone. Murderers. Dogs. Scum. It is the muttering epithet of my grandma” (50). Unlike the highly politicized protest and fight, Rochelle’s anger at the state is coded as both familial and maternal. When Doctorow links Rochelle’s cursing to his grandmother, not only is he stressing familial power— Rochelle succeeds in protecting Daniel while Paul fails in fighting the crowds— he gives her supernatural qualities when Daniel sees her as synonymous with family, which will later manifest when Daniel confronts Mindish. The only way to endure strife, Doctorow suggests, is to be familial rather than political.

Susan’s life and death provides fodder for scholars that wish to argue that leftist politics are ennobling, but she truly serves as a warning to Daniel against abandoning family for politics that fail to sustain her psychologically. Joanna E. Rapf says the poster Daniel gives to Susan “is a visual link between present and past, but it is also metaphoric, because from the perspective of the present, it is now the children who must be freed” (151). Rapf is correct in this parallel. When Susan tells Daniel, “[t]hey’re still fucking us” (9), Doctorow places the state as the Issacson children’s tormentors. But Rapf fails to delve deeper into her analysis, ignoring how

Susan's leftist politics are personally destructive when she abandons her family for her cause. She rejects not only her mother's familial nature, but also Daniel defending her: "She dressed us all like bags. Why must you always think she was perfect?" (41). Susan's domestic void is instead filled by politics, as symbolized by her parents' poster. Unable to connect with her family, her mother most especially, Susan instead tries to find a political link under the guise of benefiting other liberals. Her actions appear heroic and even communal—"The plans for a Foundation for Revolution were offered up by the younger orphan, Susan, a Radcliffe student, flushed with the triumphs of the Boston Resistance" (78). But as Susan tries to become a political hero like her father before her, she becomes a villain to her family: "Someday, Daniel, following your own pathetic demons, you are going to disappear up your own asshole [...] Susan fended off the worries of her [adopted] parents. She put them down for their own cautiousness" (77, 79). Susan repudiates her family, hardly an ennobling action. Rather than being an agent of liberal change in the name of her family, Susan is so busy berating them—especially her mother and Daniel—that no link can be established, serving to be her undoing. Susan is not an example, she is a warning.

Despite Susan's refusal to establish any true familial links, there is a later scene that appears to support Rapf's thesis that Susan represents familial need: "From under his jacket Daniel pulls a cardboard tube. [...] The poster is a black and white photograph of a grainy looking Daniel looking scruffy and militant. Looking bearded, looking clear-eyed. His hand is raised, his fingers make the sign of peace" (211). The poster seems to symbolize Daniel accepting the left as good, at least good enough to save his sister, with the older style of photography juxtaposed with 1960s leftism creating a world where "the Old Left [...] informs the New Left" (Rapf 148). However, Daniel presents Susan an image, not his actual self, and in fact this image was bought: "It is a posed photo posed blown up at a cost of four ninety-five" (211). He fabricates an image to please Susan rather than genuinely accepting the left, which cannot save either one of them. When he goes to protest, he is presumably inspired by Susan. However, his protest goes

poorly: “Daniel drank his own blood. It was Pentagon Saturday Night. He swallowed bits of his teeth” (256). Once again, the family is abandoned for politics, when Daniel makes his wife and son leave before he joins the protestors (254). He tries to be political to create a pleasing image for Susan, but he is destroyed physically as Susan was destroyed psychologically by powerless leftism. Surprisingly, once he returns home to his wife and child, the scene is domestic, even humorous: “I got back to Washington and found the car and drove to the neighborhood of old American houses and found my wife in the quiet white room of the quiet American house. [...] ‘Listen,’ I said, trying not to whistle through my teeth. ‘It looks worse than it is. There was nothing to it. It is a lot easier to be a revolutionary nowadays than it used to be’” (257). After being beaten, literally, by the political system, Daniel returns to the wife and the child he has abused earlier in the text. However, instead of repeating his abuse, or his family escaping, they surprisingly become a family again. This turn happens because Daniel actively chooses the domestic over the political after his beating and arrest. When he thinks about Susan while in jail, it is in both metaphoric terms and third person: “Daniel discusses the endless reverberations of each moment of this time, doing this time in discrete instants [...] with Starfish, my silent Starfish girl” (257). After suffering his father’s fate, Daniel realizes that allying himself with Susan would lead him down the same path. Even as he fantasizes about being with her, he removes himself. But when he goes home to his wife and child, he slips back into first person: “The next morning I paid my fine and was released. It was another lovely day” (257). Daniel is now only too aware now of what will happen if he continues his protesting, and opts for the now virtually idealized home and family. No longer conflicted concerning his loyalties, at least subconsciously, Daniel is now in a position for forgiveness rather than vengeance, which leads to the reunification of his own family.

After Susan’s political efforts are dismissed as ultimately useless to improving her life or that of others, Doctorow gives her redemption through a familial death in the second of three possible endings for the text. Most critics see the multiple endings as literary

flotsam. The endings are dismissed by Hamner as being simply too much for a text that has essentially concluded with describing how Daniel's parents were killed by the state, saying that "following the execution scene, Daniel offers three endings which are basically repetitive in that each shows him as a novice learning to put away childish things and to account for his actions" (164). Christopher D. Morris essentially concurs with Hamner: "Daniel's three endings undermine the nature of endings and suggest instead that history is an open-ended series of events" (88). But each ending is necessary to the completion of Daniel's familial growth, in this case allowing him to connect with his sister, and then his wife. Susan was unable to connect to her parents politically, despite her best efforts: "The Foundation was to be named after Paul and Rochelle Issacson. The Paul and Rochelle Issacson Foundation for Revolution. [...] Susan suggested that she would welcome Daniel's participation in the Foundation [...] because it would indicate, as well, a unanimity of family feeling, a proper assumption of their legacy by the Issacson children" (79). Despite her refusal to see her parents in a positive domestic light, she does still yearn for a connection, as evidenced by what she wants to call her Foundation, and her willingness to work with Daniel to fulfill their "legacy" (79). But the inability for leftism to stand in for family becomes clear even as early as Susan making her offer to Daniel, noting that he would bring additional money to the Foundation (79). Susan is not constructing a new family, but rather a business, and it ultimately fails to offer her true fulfillment, leading to her suicide. Susan, who could not move beyond the past, dies to join her parents, as Daniel summarizes neatly: "Susan's grave is under a tree very near my parents' graves. I arranged everything" (301). In death, a sphere removed from politics, Susan can finally be with her family. This ending stresses how Daniel can finally interact with his family, both living and dead, as he attends Susan's funeral with his living relatives: "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. Her eyes are swollen and red [...] Phyllis's face is pale, drawn. It is a sunny day and her weeping eyes are blue" (300). This scene draws a direct contrast to Daniel's grandmother's funeral, where politics

literally keep the family separated: “There were ladies from the neighborhood sitting around [Rochelle] and talking merrily, but she was sitting on a little wooden bench and she had no shoes on. [...] In the front of the living room his father was talking to some men. [...] ‘It is unbelievable to me,’ his father said, ‘that the Congress of the United States could pass such an insane bill. It is simple insanity. If the Communist party doesn’t register, it breaks the law’” (84, 84-5). The politics in the Issacson’s lives pollute even something as instinctual to the domestic sphere as a funeral. Susan’s funeral, however, is meant only for the families. Indeed, the final words of this ending imply that Daniel has now fully joined the familial sphere: “I tell him again, this time for my mother and father. Issacson. Pinchas. Rachele. Susan. For all of them. I hold my wife’s hand. And I think I am going to be able to cry” (202). As Daniel finally expresses love for his dead relatives, he connects with Phyllis, and is able to react to Susan’s death like a normal husband and brother.

Paul and Rochelle’s respective focuses on the left and the home affect both their sanity and agency. Paul loses his mind in a grim parallel of Susan’s end, but the familial Rochelle remains whole. John Clayton sees Rochelle’s death as creating the next generation of leftists: “it asserts a counter-ritual to bring her son to manhood, an initiation to the community of the oppressed” (185). But Clayton is so focused on the novel’s politics, he ignores the familial. Rochelle links her son’s bar mitzvah to her death: “Let our death be his bar mitzvah” (298). She wants her son to become a man, thus becoming a father to Susan. Rochelle sets into place the role that will presumably keep the children safe. She has subtly accepted her death— “what they do is electrocution, and it’s very painless” (243)— and realizes that Daniel is growing up, noting his height and shoulders (242-3), and knows he can assume the familial role when she is gone. Daniel already seems to be slipping into that role, promising to protect his mother: “‘I won’t let them kill you,’ I swore. ‘I’ll kill them first’” (244). He begins his own maternal path, which will lead to guilt when he cannot stop his parents’ death. This guilt is ended only by Rochelle clinging to the roles of wife and mother, even as the state tries to take those away from her.

She sends Paul love letters during the trial: "Don't you know that your girl longs for you with a love that is indestructible?" (188). Paul responds and sends his own letters, which should suggest that they are staging their own personal, political rebellion with such intimate letters during their trial. But Paul's inner thoughts reveal that he is cracking psychologically due to his imprisonment: "Who is the higher authority? Who do I call? Who saves me" (188). Paul, who is more aligned with the Communists than his own family, finds himself without support in prison: "There is no one behind us. I have checked" (188). Rochelle, however, makes her situation familial, becoming a mother to the female prisoners: "green shots of concern go out from her to these women, and in the exercise yard she might explain to this one what she understands of the value of psychotherapy, and where, in what city agencies, it can be arranged for at no cost" (199). The establishment will no longer allow her to mother her own children, so Rochelle instead becomes the mother to her fellow prisoners, maintaining her maternal role. Paul places all his faith in Communism rather than the family, and suffers alone. But Rochelle's refusal to give up her role as mother gives her community, even in prison. Her final words are not meant to tear apart the establishment, but rather preserve her family.

Even when Rochelle openly rejects Communism, her focus is domestic rather than political. Because she rejects all politics rather than changing sides like Mindish, she can later possess him to forgive her son. When Rochelle obsesses over Mindish in prison, Stephen Harris sees her as wanting leftist revenge: "This is more than wishing to remind a Judas that there is a victim that will suffer as a result of his deceits. For what Rochelle experiences and wishes to communicate in this moment of acute tension is the full, existential force of her being" (200). Harris suggests that Rochelle is ultimately defined by politics because of her focus on Mindish. But her determination to remain a wife and mother is what keeps her sane while in prison. Indeed, her ire stems primarily from how the Communists abuse Paul: "Always they treated Paul like a child and with his mind! a mind so fine and so superior to theirs" (203). Rochelle's maternal role allows her to understand Communism's uselessness. Even as she assumes the feminine role of chiding those

who harm her family, she still begins to see Communism as offering no genuine promise for the lower classes. However, Rochelle does not seek to harm Mindish. There is no vengeance scheme involved as she ruminates on her former friend, because she realizes that he is not the traitor: “Someone not Mindish, Mindish hasn’t the brain, someone told him to do this” (203). Doctorow deliberately places Rochelle and Mindish together in the narrative, rather than keeping the Mindish/Paul relationship to create the familial forgiveness that will release Daniel from both sides of politics. He chooses Rochelle to possess Mindish because of her domestic nature: “Our children are different children. I no longer know what they look like. I no longer remember what it is to lie next to my husband” (202). Paul is focused on himself, desperate to be rescued. But unlike Paul, Rochelle has a reason to return to the text. Thus, when Rochelle does reappear through Mindish, Daniel does not exact revenge, but instead is cried over and kissed. Rochelle’s clarity and anger makes her the lingering spirit in the text, not for vengeance, but rather to repair her family. Her ghost is found not in politics or protest, but rather familial/domestic moments such as Mindish with Daniel.

In order for the familial twist in the text to occur, Doctorow forges a strong mother/son bond between Daniel and Rochelle, even they spend much of the novel’s time apart. Daniel’s need to connect with his parents, especially his mother, becomes a major part of his identity. Harris says that, “we see a dramatised ‘argument’ between the individual’s experience and subsequent reading of the past, and the conflicting assumptions and claims communicated in the official historical accounts. [...] Daniel is driven to interrogate history in order to restore a viable sense of self” (66). Harris is correct in that Daniel does look to both history and politics in an attempt to connect with his parents. What Harris neglects, however, is the internal struggle over such a quest. Indeed, Daniel himself cannot understand why he does not care about the politics involved in his parents’ murders: “The Issacson Foundation. IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART [...] WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?” (17). Daniel has become so accustomed to seeing his parents in a

political only context, that he now associates not being interested in his parents' politics as synonymous with not loving his parents.

Doctorow abandons the political for the familial when Daniel visits Disneyland for a presumed leftist confrontation that becomes a symbolic family reunion. Some scholars argue that the opposite occurs, and that Doctorow instead reinforces the political. Eugénie L. Hamner sees Doctorow's Disneyland as clear cut in its symbolism: "Daniel thinks Disneyland's methods of handling crowds 'would light admiration in the eyes of an SS transport officer' (p. 306)" (162). Hamner's argument does have support, as Daniel notices a grim reality about the crowds: "One notices too the disproportionately small numbers of black people, of Mexicans, possibly because a day at Disneyland is expensive" (290). Disneyland is a white-centric and wealthy sphere, the world that Paul and Rochelle Issacson fought against, and the world that Mindish betrayed them to. He now plays here, in what appears to be the traitor's reward: after staving off a world where all races and classes would have been equal, Mindish now enjoys the exclusive comfort of the upper class, which should make him the villain to Daniel's leftist hero. However, Doctorow's Disneyland is more nuanced than Hamner believes. Despite his mission to find the man who betrayed his parents to the state, Daniel notices the things a child would about Disneyland: "Linda and I and Dale walked briskly down Main Street USA. We passed a horse-drawn trolley, an old-time double-decker bus. We passed a penny arcade with Charlie Chaplin flipcard Movieolas" (290). The attractions also stress the past, as Daniel moves metaphorically back in time to his own childhood, placing him in a state where forgiveness can be granted. Mindish's daughter, Linda, returns to childhood as well, referring to her mother as "Mama" (291), yet also plays caregiver to her now childlike father: "[Mindish's] daughter kneeled beside him asking him if he'd like a chocolate milk shake" (292). In Disneyland, everyone is a child, reinforcing the idea of regressing to a time to where Doctorow can give his characters an almost happy ending. The setting changes as well, this time to a world that stresses new beginnings, as Linda reveals Mindish's location: "'They'll be in Tomorrowland,' she said. [...] The whole

world turns colorfully modern” (290). What Doctorow creates is a blank slate of a setting, where the familial does not need to fear political conflict. As such, Mindish loses any sense of previous identity. “He’s senile” (292). Some readers may see this turn as poetic justice, as Mindish cannot truly enjoy his freedom due to his betrayal of the Issacson. However, this senility also makes Mindish a blank slate. Any hopes for politically fueled revenge are lost as Mindish becomes a senseless old man alone with his family. Because there is nothing of Mindish left psychologically, Doctorow can now have other characters inhabit him, such as Rochelle. The idea of presenting a character as familial is repeated in Mindish, who despite being senile is still found in family environments, thus making him a blank slate that Rochelle’s spirit can easily slip into. Daniel chasing down Mindish is not meant to symbolize vengeful politics, but is rather a careful construction for Daniel’s eventual forgiveness.

Concerning Daniel’s confrontation with Mindish, Dillon says that “Daniel seeks a final recovery of his parents [...] metaphorically by wanting to know how the political system could support, even encourage the electrocution of his parents” (365). But Doctorow negates politics when Daniel sees Mindish at Disneyland, a place that is meant to represent family. Hamner says that “[i]mmediately following Dr. Mindish’s humanizing kiss [...] Only then can Daniel describe his parents’ electrocutions” (164). Hamner correctly notes this linking of events, and how Mindish is the impetus behind Daniel’s eventual reforming. However, the focus is too much on Daniel, and not how Rochelle, through linking herself to Mindish previously, is finally able to grant Daniel forgiveness through him, who is her stand in for this scene. When Daniel introduces himself to Mindish, there is not even a hint of revenge in it: “Hello, Mr. Mindish. I’m Daniel Issacson. I’m Paul and Rochelle’s son. Danny?” (292). He is possibly more polite to Mindish than anyone else in the text so far, implying that there is a certain amount of paternal respect between the two. He also identifies himself as “Paul and Rochelle’s son” (292), further stressing the familial. Daniel casting himself as the child in this familial scenario is sealed when he calls himself a childish

diminutive of his own name. He introduces himself as a small child would to his mother. And it is this child's role that makes Mindish act in the role of the mother: "For one moment of recognition he was restored to life. [...] He found the back of my neck and pulled me forward and leaned toward me and touched the top of my head with his palsied lips" (293). Rather than any sort of revenge or new knowledge, such as the other couple that presumably escaped, Mindish becomes Daniel's mother, comforting him. The crying and the kiss are all coded as feminine, maternal behaviors that imply that the now senile/blank slate Mindish is symbolically possessed by Rochelle long enough to grant Daniel the empathy and love. Disneyland becomes the one sphere where Daniel can confront his past, and be able to move on to tomorrow.

Perhaps the most political moment in *The Book of Daniel* occurs when the establishment is finally, literally overrun by the left, but Daniel's reaction suggests that not only can he no longer connect to such a movement, he also no longer feels that he should. Now that he has reconnected to the familial, politics are no longer necessary. The leftist rebel is disinterested in Daniel, despite being the son of the Issacson: "We're doin' it, we're bringing the whole motherfucking university to its knees! [...] Close the book, man, what's the matter with you, don't you know you're liberated?" (302). Leftists have destroyed the establishment and plan to create a more equal society. But like before, this ideal society is based off of violence and alienation. Before, both Paul and Daniel were beaten savagely when trying to participate in leftist politics. Susan was driven to despair and suicide. And even when the leftists appeared to have won, there is a strong sense of alienation—the protestor does not recognize the son of the famous Issacson leftist. He shows no real interest in helping out his fellow man beyond screaming at him that he is now free, a far cry from the leftist utopia promised by liberal politics in the text. This unwillingness to connect is mutual. Indeed, Daniel himself seems more mildly amused by the revolution than anything else: "I have to smile. It has not been unexpected. I will walk down to the Sundial and see what's going on" (302). Some readers may choose to interpret this passage as Daniel finally embracing leftism and joining the protestors.

But rather than participating as he did earlier, or as Paul tried to participate on the bus, Daniel is content with simply observing, reinforcing that he is not longer interested in leftist revolution, even as it occurs. Daniel no longer sees leftism as synonymous with his identity. The difference between this incident and the previous ones is that now that Daniel places more value on the familial, which proves to be his salvation.

Doctorow constructs his endings symbolically so that Daniel finds closure rather than having the left triumph over the right in all three scenarios. Rather than simply stating the same points three times over, readers learn more about how and why Daniel chooses family over politics. While many critics disapprove of the multiple endings, Dillon notes that Daniel refuses to participate in the revolution when it finally happens: “[Daniel] allows a stranger issuing a command the logic of which Daniel neither approves nor disapproves” (376). But even Dillon ignores why Daniel can now ignore protesters, as evidenced by part of his dissertation’s title: “Women’s Anatomy, Children’s Cacophony” (302). Women and children make up Daniel’s present family—the family he can now hold in the second ending—suggesting that he is now familial. Additionally, Dillon is wrong concerning the first ending: “he returns to his family’s former home and views from the outside the setting for his parents’ arrest; the scene inspires no catharsis” (376). Dillon glosses over the first ending in favor of the last one, presumably because there are politics in it. But Doctorow instead creates a symbolic scenario where Daniel can save his parents: “A black woman opens the front door and calls to [her children] to come inside. [...] I would like to turn and ask the woman if I can come in the house and look around. [...] But I will do nothing. It’s their house now” (299). If Daniel had requested to enter his childhood home, he would have been a political outsider disrupting a family, like the state when his father was arrested. He refuses, choosing family over politics. Doctorow’s endings are not an exercise in banality, but rather emphasize how the family can survive without the emptiness of leftism.

The Book of Daniel is a book about leftism and family, but not in the way that readers and even critics may first suspect.

Doctorow explores how familial love can endure in a society so strongly polarized, using the Rosenberg trial as his starting point. Daniel's own confusion comes from not understanding if he can find community in leftism or family— but when he tries to become an activist for please his politically motivated sister, but instead is nearly killed. Daniel's journey is meant to parallel his mother's, who clings to her familial identity so strong that not only does she preserve her sanity— unlike her politically motivated husband— she symbolically possesses the now senile Mindish so Daniel can be forgiven rather than fulfill some politically motivate vengeance quest. Each ending is constructed in a way to demonstrate that Daniel has finally embraced the familial instead of leftism. Ultimately, the text presents leftism as detrimental to the family, but powerless to stop those those truly embrace the familial role.

Works Cited

- Clayton, John. "Radical Jewish Humanism: The Vision of E.L. Doctorow." *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*. Ed. Ben Siegel. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000. 184-92. Print.
- Dillon, Brian. "The Rosenbergs Meet Nebuchadnezzar: The Narrator's Use of the Bible in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique* 40.4 (1999): 365-78. MasterFILE Elite. Web. 30 Mar. 2013.
- Doctorow, E.L. *The Book of Daniel*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007. Print.
- Fowler, Douglas. *Understanding E.L. Doctorow*. Columbia: University of South Carolina P, 1992. Print.
- Hamner, Eugénie L. "The Burden of the Past: Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critical Essays on E.L. Doctorow*. Ed. Ben Siegel. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 2000. 160-5. Print.
- Harris, Stephen. *The Fiction of Gore Vidal and E.L. Doctorow*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002. Print.
- Hite, Molly. "A Parody of Martyrdom": The Rosenbergs, Cold War Theology, and Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 27.1 (1993): 85-101. Academic Search Complete. Web. 23 May 2013.
- Morris, Christopher D. *Models of Misrepresentation: on the Fiction of E.L. Doctorow*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991. Print.
- Rapf, Joanna E. "Sidney Lumet and the Politics of the Left: The Centrality of Daniel." *Literature Film Quarterly* 31.2 (2003): 148-55. Academic Search Complete. Web. 12 Mar. 2013.

Stark, John. "Alienation and Analysis in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique* 16.3 (1975): 101-12. Academic Search Complete. Web. 12 Mar. 2013.