

Doctorow Looks at the Rosenbergs

Some years ago, I began reading through the opening pages of E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, probably at a second-hand bookstore. I was attracted at once to the story but also put off by Doctorow's narrative style. The novel, published in 1971, is a fictionalized account of the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the married couple that expedited the flow of classified research on the atomic bomb from New Mexico to the Soviet Union. They were executed in June 1953 after having been tried and convicted on a charge of conspiring to commit espionage. The story looked interesting, but finally I set the novel aside.

More recently, over the Christmas holiday of 2013, I checked out of a local public library Doctorow's most recent novel, *Andrew's Brain*. In Doctorow style, the reader is obliged to figure out which character is speaking to whom and at what point in the narrative, which is often not linear. I got past that obstruction, however, and found an arresting discussion of neuroscience and a restatement of the mind-body problem in the author's learned, readable style. I exchanged email messages with a relative in St. Louis, an enthusiastic Doctorow reader, and soon found myself in the same library's second-hand book store, which had a number of the Doctorow novels. I acquired *Billy Bathgate*, *The March*, *Ragtime* (inevitably), and *The Book of Daniel*. Most of the copies were cheaply made paperbacks with

heavily creased spines, except for *The March*, a virtually untouched hardcover with its dust jacket intact. I bought them all, and started with *Billy Bathgate*, singled out by my relative for special praise. I thought I could see the impact of *The Adventures of Augie March*, and relished Doctorow's skill in capturing the idiom of Dutch Schultz and the criminal gang Billy is adopted into, the fresh descriptions of urban life, and the multitudes making their way through the markets and tenements of the Bronx.

I moved on to *The Book of Daniel*, struggling to interpret its dense, narrative tangle; a second reading proved essential for following the scattered threads of the story. The Rosenbergs, I knew, had two children, Robert and Michael, but for his novel Doctorow gave his fictitious couple a son, Daniel, and a daughter, Susan. The novel begins, or seems to, when Daniel tries to arrange the discharge of his sister from a psychiatric hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts. A very exact date—Memorial Day, 1967—is given for this event. Almost any story set in the 1960s appeals to me, and I have especially favorable associations to the year 1967. Psychiatric disorders offer dramatic story-telling material—Susan had tried to commit suicide “in a ladies’ room at a Howard Johnson's”—and the novel confirmed that Doctorow crafts very effective sentences. Although the reader is encouraged initially to believe that the story “begins” in May, 1967, it takes time to understand that Daniel is telling the story in a library at a somewhat later date,

composing what appears to be a kind of confessional statement that turns into the novel.

Or perhaps I should say that Daniel, a graduate student at Columbia University, is composing a meditation on his family history that takes the form of a doctoral dissertation. It includes ruminations on capital punishment and passages from and references to the works of other scholars, some named, others not. The book ranges, in no particular order, over thirty years of American history, from the Depression to the spring of 1968. Somewhat disparate subjects, including the Cold War, Stalin's Russia, and research on the atomic bomb, are touched upon and then quickly dismissed, in passages that may take up no more than a sentence or two. To this is added the story of the Rosenbergs, their trial and execution, their social circle of communists, bits of their personal history that Daniel wants to record. What is more, the narrator shifts from first to third person from one paragraph to the next, referring to himself as "I" and at other times as a character in the story; it takes essentially the length of the novel to recognize that he is writing from start to finish for himself and about himself.

Later on, when I began to research the background of the text, I found an interview the author gave in 1983, where he noted the influence of television and film on modern readers, training them to expect an orderly narrative sequence. (Of course, the great nineteenth century novelists arranged their stories in the same

way.) But "Beginning with *Daniel*," Doctorow told the interviewer, "I gave up trying to write with a concern for transition characteristic of the nineteenth-century novel. . . .I can't accept the conventions of realism any more. It doesn't interest me as I write." And later: "I told people when *Daniel* was published that it was constructed like [the television show] *Laugh-In*. . . .The idea of discontinuity and black-outs and running changes on voice and character—it was that kind of nerve energy I was looking for."

Doctorow has carefully hidden himself behind his characters, but the epigraphs that introduce the text, from the *Book of Daniel* (King James Version), Walt Whitman, and Allan Ginsberg, along with the story itself, suggest to me that he condemns the prosecution of the Rosenbergs and perhaps the development of atomic weapons as well. The Isaacsons's trial is treated as a gross miscarriage of justice, and in their cameo appearances the Rosenberg-like characters, Paul and Rochelle, staunchly insist on their innocence, as of course the Rosenbergs did consistently after they were arrested in the summer of 1950. I wrote that the novel "begins" on Memorial Day, 1967, and comes abruptly to an end almost exactly a year later, in the spring of 1968, when student demonstrators take over the Columbus University campus and drive Daniel out of the library, bringing his "research" to an end. But the composition itself is begun at some unknowable date during the twelve-month period. I think that the high point of the narration comes

in December 1967, when Daniel flies from New York to Southern California to confront Dr. and Mrs. Selig Mindish, the couple he considers responsible for the deaths, the executions, of his parents.

I should perhaps make it clear that I disagree with most of the propositions that Doctorow presents in his novel as well as in his interviews. He claims that history is a source of "images" that inspire his fiction, which is unobjectionable in itself. But he goes farther and argues that there is in fact little to distinguish between what is commonly regarded as fact and fiction. Here is a remark Doctorow made at a seminar at Harvard University in 1977, where he discussed writing historical fiction:

There really is no fiction or non-fiction; there is only narrative, and that there are obviously ways to distinguish between the two—fiction and non-fiction—but certainly not in terms of verifiable truth; one mode of perception has no greater claim on truth than the other; that the difference has to do perhaps with distance—narrative distance—from the characters; it has to do with the kind of voice that is talking, but it certainly hasn't to do with the common distribution between fact and imagination. . . . For a fiction writer, history is simply a source of imagery—images. He can organize these images and arrange them within the compositions that satisfy him. On the other hand, if you think about it, historians do the same thing, only with a greater degree of distance toward their material.

The trouble with this claim is that the Rosenbergs were indisputably guilty of the crimes for which they were tried and convicted. Julius was not only the center of an active spy ring but part of a vaster effort by Soviet intelligence to penetrate American industry, government and academic life. The only thing that

can be said for Doctorow, and it is a partial defense at best, is that we know today much more about the case than the author did in the 1960s, when he was writing the novel. And there is an element in the author's claim that I find a bit disingenuous. In an interview with the historian Allen Weinstein conducted in 2008, Doctorow notes that he read trial transcripts of the Rosenberg case. This sounds like research to me, and is not easily reconciled with the argument he made at the Harvard seminar that novelists need not do any research, indeed should avoid it, to bring their stories in line with the facts.

In the novel, the Rosenberg children have been adopted by Robert and Lise Lewin, probably the only sympathetic characters in the story. The husband is a law professor at Boston University and the wife a refugee from Vienna. All of the figures in the story who have any views on the the matter deny the possibility of a fair trial; the only exception to this would be Jack Fein, a *New York Times* reporter who appears briefly in the chronology.

The guilt of the Rosenbergs has been established by a voluminous set of documentary materials that has been growing in amplitude for decades. These would include the Venona transcripts, released by the U.S. Department of Justice in 1995. Electronic communications that passed between the Soviet consulate in New York and Moscow dating back to the 1940s, the transmissions were intercepted and interpreted by American cryptanalysts and ultimately allowed the

government to break up the Rosenberg network. Another important source is the memoir of Alexander Feklisov, *I Handled the Rosenbergs*, originally published in French in 1998 and translated into English in 2001. Feklisov worked for the GRU (Red Army Intelligence) and managed a range of intelligence operations in New York; among them were the Rosenbergs and couriers ferrying documents between the Manhattan Project in New Mexico and the East Coast. The Venona transcripts alone establish that Julius Rosenberg was the central figure in a network funneling defense-related intelligence to the Russians during and after the war. But even those who doubted the authenticity of the Venona decrypts, as some did, find it difficult to dismiss Feklisov, who was personally attached to the Rosenbergs, lauded their work, grieved over their executions, and faults the Soviets for not doing more to protect them. A spy exchange might have sprung the couple from Sing-Sing Correctional after their conviction.

There is more. In 2009, Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes published *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America*. Their study includes a trove of once-confidential material acquired by a Russian journalist who mined the Soviet archives that were opened up after 1989. The volume extends the range of *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, a book that Klehr and Haynes published in 1999. Alexander Vassiliev, the Russian journalist who gained access to state security archives, left—one is tempted to say fled—for the U.K. in 1996,

after Russian authorities in charge of the documents grew restive over the extent of his research. Klehr and Haynes, working with these materials, maintain that the Rosenberg network included a formerly unknown agent, Russell McNutt, who was recruited by Julius at a farm in Haddam, Connecticut in February 1944. McNutt, a civil engineer, was employed by the company that designed and built the uranium separation plant at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, which was part of the Manhattan Engineer District. Protected by the Rosenbergs' silence, McNutt lived out a peaceful post-war life until his death in 2008, and doubtless many others, playing a less significant role than he, did the same. Myriad books that have been published since the Venona file was released to the public make it clear that Soviet penetration of American life was far more extensive than historians had imagined.

This much about the network now seems indisputably true. Julius Rosenberg received a degree in electrical engineering from City Colleges of New York and joined the Young Communist League as a student. He formally became a member of the Communist Party in 1939, the year he finished his undergraduate studies and married Ethel Greenglass, who was three years older than he.

Rosenberg was described by his intimates as perhaps not a star in his circle of communist students but as aggressive and tough with opponents on the left, which is close to the picture Doctorow presents in the novel. Rosenberg and his wife

were active in cell 16B of the Industrial Division of the GRU, charged with recruiting agents and supplying information to the Soviets. Joel Barr and Alfred Sarant, aeronautical engineers, were members of the Rosenberg ring, classmates of his at CCNY, and defected to the Soviet Union when the FBI broke up the network in 1950. Morton Sobell, another electrical engineer, agreed to join the network in December 1943. (Pleading innocence for decades, Sobell made a half-hearted confession to a *New York Times* reporter in September 2008.) In the summer of 1940, Rosenberg became a civilian employee of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, and by 1942 at the latest was actively spying for the Soviets. He lost his job in 1945, when the Army discovered his membership in the Communist Party, but quickly found an equivalent position with the Emerson Radio Corporation, where he continued his work for the Russians.

David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg's brother, never joined the Party but was also a member of the Young Communist League, which he may have joined at a vocational school he attended in New York. Alternatively described as a machinist or a lab technician, Greenglass had a fair amount of technical training and was inducted into the U.S. Army in April 1943. In July 1944, he was sent to Oak Ridge National Laboratory. In less than a month, he was transferred to the center of the Manhattan Project in New Mexico, and on a trip to New York in November was

recruited by the Rosenbergs to extract information from the laboratories in Los Alamos.

The conventional interpretation for decades was that the government used the threat of Ethel's execution to compel her husband to talk—to name names and offer details. But the Venona transcripts make clear that Ethel and Julius worked together to bring her brother into the ring; Ethel was not a passive onlooker. And there were many other successful recruits as well. John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr assert in *Venona* that "the Venona messages do not throw her [Ethel Rosenberg's] guilt in doubt; indeed, they confirm that she was a participant in her husband's espionage and in the recruitment of her brother for atomic espionage. But they suggest that she was essentially an accessory to her husband's activity, having knowledge of it but not acting as a principal. Had they been introduced in the trial, the Venona messages would have confirmed Ethel's guilt but also reduced the importance of her role."

Harry Gold, a courier in the network, was the child of Russian-Jewish immigrants and came to the U.S. at age two. He received training as a chemical engineer in the 1930s. Though not a member of the Party, he was passing low-level industrial intelligence to the Soviets as early as 1934; by the end of the war, he was transmitting far more sensitive data than methods of extracting Vitamin D from fish oil. Gold served as a courier between the two coasts, taking

information not only from Greenglass but also from Klaus Fuchs, a second and infinitely more important source in Los Alamos.

Originally a member of the German Communist Party and a refugee from Nazi Germany, Fuchs obtained a doctoral degree in physics at Bristol University in the U.K. and conducted post-doctoral research in Edinburgh. He worked with Max Born, a famous Jewish physicist also driven out of Nazi Germany and later a Nobel laureate. The war years found Fuchs conducting atomic research, first for the British and later for the U.S. In December 1943, he was assigned to work with Harold Urey and others at Columbia University in another division of the Manhattan Engineer District. Fuchs established contact with Harry Gold in New York by early 1944, but was transferred to Los Alamos in August, arriving at about the same time as Greenglass. Fuchs enters the picture not as a mere technician but as a highly trained physicist assigned to work with Hans Bethe, another future Nobel laureate, on the most sensitive elements of the atomic project. Oddly, Fuchs disappeared from the Soviet campaign for several months in the spring of 1944, not even disclosing to his contacts that he was leaving New York for the center of the project in New Mexico. In a ten-day trip to the East Coast in February 1945, the Russians learned of his presence in the city and arranged another meeting between him and Harry Gold, this time in Boston, where his sister lived. Fuchs agreed to return to the fold, becoming what was probably the single most important

source for atomic intelligence during the war; he met with Gold a number of times when the latter traveled to Santa Fe. He ultimately answered to Igor Kurchatov, a Soviet physicist in charge of Russia's own atomic research center in Kazan, 700 kilometers east of Moscow and well beyond the range of German bombers. "If the god of war wanted to provide Kurchatov with a clear channel directly into the heart of the most important and secret work then underway at Los Alamos," writes the historian Richard Rhodes in *Dark Sun*, "he could have not chosen a more providential channel than Klaus Fuchs."

The entire network, including Fuchs, Gold, Sobell, the Rosenbergs and other figures not mentioned here, was rolled up in a quick succession of arrests in the first half of 1950. In September 1949, at the moment when the Soviets first successfully tested their atomic bomb, the FBI acquired freshly decoded Venona transmissions, and learned that Fuchs had been a central figure in an espionage ring active in New York and New Mexico. By then the physicist had been transferred to the Harwell Atomic Research Establishment in the U.K., a facility near Oxford. Information about Fuchs was passed on to British security, which began interrogating him in December on his war-time activities; by January, agents had obtained something like a full confession. He was formally arrested on February 2, 1950. Fuchs identified Harry Gold as his contact from photographs supplied by the FBI, but Gold—who had been connected to the Soviets through

other operations--had already been questioned by FBI agents, even before Fuchs's identification. After enduring some hours of interrogation by government agents, Gold gave in, confessed, and was arrested on May 23, 1950.

David Greenglass had been under FBI surveillance beginning in early spring. When Gold's arrest made headlines, he held a number of anxious discussions with Rosenberg. His brother-in-law was actually by then a business partner of his in a small machine shop and offered him thousands of dollars to finance an escape to the Soviet Union. Greenglass and his wife chose not to flee the country, despite the growing pressure of government surveillance, and the option was cut off in any case by the middle of June. Harry Gold, in Holmesburg Prison in Philadelphia, identified him as his contact in New Mexico, and Greenglass was immediately arrested. According to Ronald Radosh, author of *The Rosenberg File*, Greenglass broke down in his very first interview with FBI investigators, disclosing that the Rosenbergs had urged him to spy for the Russians. Julius was arrested on July 17, his wife about three weeks later. It is hard to establish his motives for confessing, but Greenglass's strongest incentive may have been the desire to obtain immunity for his wife.

The scholarly literature suggests that most of the parties who opened doors to FBI arrests hoped to protect other conspirators in the ring. A raft of circumstances—incidental evidence, emotional pressure, a skein of half-revealed

truths that led to further damning explanations by amateur spies in a period when the government had broad leeway to pressure suspects—all of this produced the set of arrests anyway.

What the reader finds in *The Book of Daniel* is a fictionalized version of this story in a text that wanders freely between established well-known facts and the domain of pure invention. Daniel, the narrator, is a deeply disturbed human being; that much the story makes clear. Doctorow's use of multiple voices may not simply be a narrative technique but reflect perhaps also a real confusion of identity borne by the speaker. It is likewise hard to know his birthdate. He identifies himself on the second page of the novel, writing in third person, as "a tall young man of twenty-five," which suggests, since the reader at that moment is in May 1967, that Daniel was born in 1942. But on the very last page of Book One, the speaker is uncertain whether he was born in 1939 or 1941, apparently unaware as well that he is proposing to the reader different dates for his birth. He is harsh and abusive with his wife, obliging her on a drive from Worcester to New York (with his infant son in the back seat) to remove her pants and underclothing and kneel on the floor of the car with her buttocks up in the air. He then he masturbates her against her will. He detests himself as much as he does any other character in the novel.

Shortly after returning from Worcester, he visits Riverside Park with his wife and child. He begins the playful practice of tossing his son in his air and catching him, a seemingly innocent game. But then he begins to toss the boy "higher and higher," catching him lower to the ground. The child, initially delighted, becomes terrified, and so does the wife, apparently powerless to stop him. Onlookers are beginning to stare at him. "The baby now shut his mouth," Daniel tells the reader, "concentrating on his fear, his small face, my Isaacson face, locked in dumb dread...I can't bear to think about this murderous feeling." And a sentence later: "I enjoyed the fear in his mother."

"I remember his cock," Daniel says, referring to his father, Paul Isaacson, the stand-in for Julius Rosenberg. "Face it, if I do, I do. He always shaved without clothes." This is surely Doctorow's fantasy, hardly characteristic of any conventional Jewish household from the 1930s and inspired perhaps by the passionate kisses the Rosenbergs exchanged in court: "They didn't go so far as to let me watch them fucking, but I did that too, one way or another," Daniel writes, describing himself "as a small criminal of perception." He also claims that he knew when his parents had had sexual relations, or "sometimes even when they were going to." "They used to make the whole house rock," he writes a few pages later. "They really went at it, they balled all the time."

Daniel assumes that his father disliked him ("He didn't dig me for a long time. He found it odd that he was my father") and offers more evidence of sexual strangeness. Paul Isaacson "didn't understand what I meant when I flirted with him like a woman, as all boys flirt with their fathers." Of course, in standard psychoanalytic theory, boys are expected to be sexually attracted to their mothers, if to either parent at all.

I want to suggest a source of the rage Daniel feels towards his parents, especially the father, and which might explain the innumerable derogatory remarks that he adds to his narration. Once imprisoned, the parents chose not to save themselves and orphaned their two children, setting them on the path of orphanages and relatives who took little interest in them until the Lewins entered their lives and adopted them. (In life, Michael and Robert follow a similar path, until the Meeropols, a devoted, childless couple, take them in.) Paul Isaacson does not keep his razor clean and leaves "blotches of gloppy shaving cream in the sink." The shower faucet was left dripping and wadded-up towels were left on the bathroom floor. "You knew when he'd been there." "Even his breathing was noisy," the son complains, describing how the father would sit hunched over the radios that he soldered and rewired in his repair shop. Completing a job, the father would "reward himself with another exhalation." One notices the bodily orientation

of these putative faults, which seem to go hand-in-hand with Daniel's strange sexual reactions. Descriptions of the mother seem more neutral and sparse.

Daniel ridicules his parents' devotion to communism, and he himself seems like a very conventional (if disturbed) leftist graduate student from the 1960s. Doctorow could have had his character research a remoter period of history, such as Colonial America, the Civil War, or the age of the reform. But he doesn't. Daniel's childhood, his entire life, actually, is inextricably bound up with the mid-century politics of World War II, Harry Truman, Stalin, the Cold War and the Korean War, and that is what he studies. The fragments in the novel dealing with American foreign policy after the war draw on revisionist texts that found a receptive college audience in the 1960s. The better-known include William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* and David Horowitz's *Free World Colossus*. These studies faulted Truman for the breakdown in relations with Stalin's Russia after 1945 and fit in well with the virulent anti-American sentiment of the student movement and of Daniel's anger in particular. But if the son is a demented reader, the parents are incompetent doers. They disregarded the risk of depending on amateur spies, which is what Fuchs, Gold, Greenglass and the others were, and the horror they were setting up for their children.

Perhaps Daniel regards his parents as fools. Joining the Party, he writes, "would justify them—their poverty, their failures, their unhappiness, and the really

third-rate families they came from. They rushed after self-esteem." Selling the *Daily Worker* on the streets was one thing; sustaining a network of spies during wartime and afterwards was another. "He would never believe that America was not the cafeteria at City College," the son remarks. Debates among twenty-year-olds could go well beyond mealtime without attracting the government's attention; organizing a network to penetrate research laboratories was another matter. Daniel draws an unflattering analogy to the fate of Nicholai Bukharin, a top Bolshevik from 1917 and a theoretician of the party, who was executed after one of Stalin's more sensational purge trials in 1938. "And what good did it do him," Daniel muses, "except that he became a hero in a novel"—a reference to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*—"and an image of sorrowful nobility to the Sovietologists?"

The U.S. Communist Party deserted the Rosenbergs, except to exploit the death penalty for propaganda value after prosecutors obtained a conviction. The Soviets disowned them entirely. David Greenglass and Harry Gold, central figures in the conspiracy and chief witnesses for the prosecution, broke easily and virtually assured the government a victory in court (as Dr. Selig Mindish does in the text). And unlike Fuchs, Greenglass made a modest contribution at best to the Soviet drive to build an atomic bomb. In 1954, one year after the Rosenbergs were executed, General Leslie Groves, overall director of the Manhattan Project, presented testimony before a closed hearing of the Atomic Energy Commission

that remained classified for years. Conceding that he would never make the admission publicly, Groves declared that "I think the data that went out in the case of the Rosenbergs was of minor value." (It should be remembered, however, that intelligence gathered after the war by the ring had greater significance.)

Daniel himself does not actually do very much in the text, other than deal abusively with most of the people who enter his life. He is not much of an activist, hardly seems aware that students have taken over the Columbia campus, and remains absorbed in his odd meditations in the university library. His sole contact with the new left appears when he meets up with Artie Sternlicht and a group of obscene, nasty, illiterate drop-outs, "hippies," living in squalor in a tenement in Tompkins Square, a tough neighborhood on New York's Lower East Side. In that interview with Allen Weinstein in 2008 that I referred to earlier, Doctorow said that one of the goals of the novel was to capture the difference between the Old Left of the Depression, "Europeanized, Marxist, theoretical," in his words, and the New, whose "genius was anarchic." That comparison is most evident in Daniel's contact with Sternlicht crowd. The Isaacsons lived in a well-maintained house and took their children to low-priced concerts of the New York Philharmonic. In the park off Tompkins Square, the local rabble gambol and "a thousand radios play rock." Transistor radios, portable music for the masses, and not the "console" kind that Daniel's father specialized in repairing.

Daniel shows up while Sternlicht is being interviewed by a reporter from *Cosmopolitan*, which has also sent a photographer to do some shooting. The reporter's copy will titillate frivolous readers eager for a picture of this rowdy, depraved subset of the American left. (In the 1930s, the age of the Old Left, Henry Luce sent Walker Evans to the South to photograph sharecroppers and others living in dire poverty, hardship that was strictly involuntary. The resulting pictures, now classic, were not intended to entertain.) Sternlicht—virtually all the major characters in the book are Jewish--represents the extreme, thuggish version of the 1960s left. He castigates those in "the movement" who trade on words: Participatory democracy, co-optation, restructure, counter-institutional man, a set of meaningless clichés. Sternlicht responds with "action"—commitment—and splinters a chair to demonstrate what he considers meaningful. "A revolution happens," he declares, offering his own set of clichés. "It's a happening. It's a change on the earth." His meeting with Daniel, to discuss the use of funds from the Isaacson Foundation for the Study of Revolution, ends inconclusively.

But the real villain in the story is Dr. Selig Mindish, the dentist who participates in the Isaacson network but finally becomes a key government informant. Jack Fein, the *Times* reporter who tries to interview Daniel, offers a few clues as to why a dentist, of all persons, would come to play a central role in the conspiracy. A reader will have to make his way through some convoluted

syntax: "All the government had was Mindish's accomplice testimony that to believe you'd have to believe it's possible that a radio repairman was trained and educated enough to draw intricate plans of the most sophisticated kind, and that he would reduce them so that they would fit on dental x-ray film."

Vain, nasty, incompetent as a dentist, Mindish and his wife and daughter flit in and out of the novel, appearing to play a very minor and accessory role—until the trial. A Polish Jew who immigrated to the U.S. around World War I, Mindish was never fully naturalized as a citizen and has left himself vulnerable to government pressure, yet another incompetent spy. He is also said to have been dissatisfied with his wife and to have coveted Rochelle Isaacson. In the internal monologue that Daniel contrives for his mother during the trial, she remarks that "He [Mindish] is so stupid, they are so stupid, he never properly became a citizen. He is legally vulnerable, sexually frustrated, a spy who saves himself by convicting his friends." Jake Ascher, the Isaacson's lawyer, tries to weaken the prosecutor's case by pointing out Mindish's grounds for cooperating with the government. But in the atmosphere of 1950, he claims, just acknowledging membership in the Party is enough to all but guarantee a conviction on a charge of espionage and conspiracy. As their attorney claims to another lawyer friendly to the Isaacsons,

No matter what strategy I employ by the inversions of these times a conclusion will be derived that makes them guilty. Whether they declare their communism or take the Fifth, communists they are shown to be. And

if they are communists they are liars. And if they are liars this dog Mindish must be telling the truth.

(There is some truth to this lament. In his book on the subject, *The Rosenberg File*, the historian Ronald Radosh reports that the trial judge, Irving Kaufman, was in touch with the Justice Department prosecution staff throughout the trial, which violates legal procedure. Although Radosh argued for the Rosenbergs's guilt twenty years before the Feklisov memoir confirmed his judgment, he agrees that the Rosenbergs may have been scapegoats. Had it not been for the examples of Alger Hiss, Harry Dexter White, Klaus Fuchs and a number of others who flourished as spies, the Rosenbergs might have gotten a different sentence. The Korean War, which broke out in June 1950, added to the panic.)

The emotional peak of Daniel's story comes near the end, at Christmas 1967, when he flies to Southern California. His ostensible purpose is a job interview at the University of California, Irvine, but his real goal is to confront Selig Mindish. He and his wife Sadie are spending their days at Disneyland, another ironic and sad culmination of the left. He moved there with his daughter and wife after the trial, changing his name and starting a new life. Daniel is convinced that a mysterious couple in New York at work for the Soviets disappeared when the network was broken up and his parents arrested. "The mystery couple of the Grand Concourse" in the Bronx, as Daniel calls them, "walked out of their apartment one Sunday as if

on an outing. . .they were never seen again." Daniel wants to track down this unknown pair, perhaps now in Russia, and establish their accountability for the crimes attributed to the Isaacsons. The fallacies of the government's case will be exposed, and his parents' names will be cleared. Selig Mindish knows who they are, and perhaps where they are. He, and perhaps he alone, is in a position to clear the family name.

What the reader is offered instead is a kind of cultural analysis of Disneyland and its founder, Walt Disney, a kind of parody in the style of Baudrillard and Walter Benjamin. We leave the world of espionage and criminal trials for the anxious, tedious world of doctoral dissertations and academic schematizing—more clichés. Daniel examines Tommorrowland, the Mad Hatter Teacup Ride, the Mark Twain Mississippi steamboat and mule pack trains, "simulated plant and animal and geological surroundings," a plastic Matterhorn, the corporate exhibits of Bell Telephone, Monsanto, Coca-Cola. "There is an absence altogether," notes Daniel, "of long-haired youth, heads, hippies, girls in miniskirts, gypsies, motorcyclists...." But the main achievement of Disneyland is the management of crowds, a proficiency that he suggests the Nazis would admire.

Daniel finally does get his chance to confront Mindish, but the scene is both touching and pointless. Mindish, once an active figure in the Communist Party and part of the Isaacson network, has been reduced to a feeble, minimally competent

old man. The figure who once transferred atomic secrets to dental film is now careening with his wife in miniature cars running on tracks at Richfield Autopia, harmlessly colliding with youngsters doing the same, their arms flying up in the air. The ride is a favorite of theirs at Disneyland; they bought a book of tickets that allows them to stay there for hours. When a reluctant Mindish is pulled from the track by his daughter, Daniel confronts a terribly aged man, his eyes sunken, his skin stretched tight and covered with melanin spots. His chin "moves up and down" and his lips "flap against each other." "Denny?" he inquires, when his daughter brings him to Daniel, hardly able to remember the young man's name, trying to summon a memory from the remote past. They stare at each other. "He found the back of my neck," Daniel writes, "and pulled me forward and leaned toward me and touched the top of my head with his palsied lips."

This concludes the thirty-year odyssey of American radicalism, extending from the last years of the Depression to the near-apogee of post-war prosperity. It begins with Paul Isaacson repairing radios during the day and contriving treasonous schemes and dreaming of Soviet triumph at night. It concludes with a one-time cohort who betrayed him and spends his final days at an amusement park in southern California, while the Isaacson children meet with youthful drop-outs and drug addicts in dangerous neighborhoods in New York.

The Dartmouth Bible that Daniel quotes early in his story identifies the original Daniel as "a Beacon of Faith in a time of Persecution." The narrator of our book is certainly not that. Daniel in the Bible is saved from the lion's den, into which he has been cast by Darius the Mede. The successor of Belshazzar as the ruler of Babylon, Darius decreed that he was the only deity worthy of worship. Daniel disregards the edict, recognizing only one God, and finds himself cast in the lions' den but protected by Yahweh, who seals the lions' mouths. "God is the lord of all history and the King of all peoples and nations," writes the Biblical scholar Alexander Di Lella.

In the epigraph from chapter three of the Book of Daniel that Doctorow quotes the passage where the Nebuchadnezzar commands the Babylonian public kneel down and worship the golden image. The picture is an obvious golden calf the Hebrews worshipped when they lost faith in Moses.

Daniel was in the lion's den and the Rosenbergs were in the electric chair. The wise Daniel of the Bible enjoys divine protection but his descendants, faithfully atheistic, do not. The Catholic version of the story of Daniel includes the married Susanna, accused of adultery by two elderly men covetous of her beauty. Their accusations lead to her near execution. But the Daniel, the Jewish sage acting on God's will, intercedes with the truth and saves her life. In Doctorow's telling, Susan commits suicide, "a failure of analysis," because her psychiatrist fails

to protect her against herself. The book opens with a citation from Daniel and closes with another, this one instructing the sage to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the end of time. . ."

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