



Pedagogická
fakulta
Faculty
of Education

Jihočeská univerzita
v Českých Budějovicích
University of South Bohemia
in České Budějovice

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Pedagogická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky

Bakalářská práce

Kulturní a historické pozadí románu E. L.
Doctorowa Ragtime

E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*: History and
Fiction

Vypracovala: Michaela Skřepská, AJ-NJ
Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Alice Sukdolová Ph.D.

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Poděkování

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Anotace

Téma: Kulturní a historické pozadí románu E. L. Doctorowa *Ragtime*

Autor: Michaela Skřepská, AJ- NJ

Cílem bakalářské práce je zhodnotit vztah historie a fikce v románu E. L. Doctorowa *Ragime* a zkoumat vyprávěcí techniku jakožto hudebního stylu ragtime. Výzkum a hodnocení je soustředěno zejména na postavy, které skutečně existovaly, a autor je obsadil do fiktivního příběhu. Cílem je také rozbor díla, které bylo vydáno v roce 1975 a získalo řadu významných ocenění. Rozborem je myšleno představení knižního díla, zařazení díla do literárně-histrického kontextu a hlavně srovnání s jeho filmovou verzí z roku 1981 režiséra Miloše Formana. V bakalářské práci jsou obsaženy informace o autorovi a jeho největších dílech, židovské a severoamerické literatuře a autorech, kteří v té době působili a čím se v 2. polovině 20. století židovská literatura zabývala.

Abstract

Theme: E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*: History and Fiction

Author: Michaela Skřepská, AJ–NJ

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to judge and to find the difference between fact and fiction in the novel of E. L. Doctorow *Ragtime*. The narrative technique of the music style ragtime is considered in this novel as well. The research is focused especially on characters that actually existed and that were put into a fictional story. The next aim of this bachelor thesis is the analysis of the book which was published in 1975 and got many prestigious awards. The analysis contains the introduction of the novel, classification in a historical context and the comparison with the film (1981) by the director Miloš Forman. In this thesis there is information about the author – E. L. Doctorow and his most significant pieces of work, about the Jewish and Southern literature, their specific authors and the context of Jewish literature of the 2nd half of 20th century.

Contents

Contents	6
Introduction.....	8
1 What is <i>ragtime</i> ?	10
1.1 Musical characteristics and origin	10
1.2 Famous composers of that time	11
1.3 Scott Joplin, “King of Ragtime Writers”	11
2 Edgar Lawrence Doctorow	13
2.1 Doctorow’s career.....	13
2.2 Awards	14
2.3 Doctorow’s legacy.....	14
3 Jewish American literature in historical context.....	15
3.1 Jewish American authors	15
3.2 Jewish American literature since 1945	15
3.2.1 Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991)	16
3.2.2 Bernard Malamud (1914 – 1986)	16
3.2.3 Philip Roth (1933)	17
3.2.4 Saul Bellow (1915-2005).....	17
3.2.5 Jerome David Salinger (1919-2010)	18
3.2.6 William Styron (1925-2006).....	18
3.3 Southern writers and literature	19
4 Analysis of the novel <i>Ragtime</i>	20

4.1	Summary of the novel <i>Ragtime</i>	20
5	<i>Ragtime</i> in context and its deeper analysis	26
5.1	Rhythm of staccato	26
5.2	Narrative method.....	27
6	List of characters and their analysis	29
6.1	Fictional characters	29
6.2	Historical characters	32
7	History and fiction	34
8	Miloš Forman	38
9	Film adaptation analysis.....	40
9.1	Comparison of the film and the novel <i>Ragtime</i>	40
	Conclusion	44
	List of bibliography	47
	Website sources	48
	Attachment.....	50

Introduction

The most famous book of the American author Edgar Lawrence Doctorow is definitely *Ragtime*. This novel is named by a musical style called ragtime which was, and still is, very popular, especially in the USA. The bachelor thesis with the title *E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime: History and Fiction* deals with historical and fictional characters and events in the novel.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the theoretical part which contains the notes about the musical style ragtime, information about the author of the novel and finally the authors of the Jewish American literature. The second part pays attention to the practical one which includes the analysis of the novel, the introduction of the main characters and the setting of the storyline. The narrative technique and its analysis also belong to the practical part as well as the difference between fact and fiction occurred in the Doctorow's novel. Another chapter explains differences between the novel and the film adaptation of the famed director Miloš Forman. At the end of the thesis, some original photographs of actors and Forman are enclosed.

The aim is to compare and to find the difference between history and fiction in the novel. The thesis also studies the narrative technique of the musical style ragtime. The research is focused especially on the main characters that appear in the Doctorow's masterpiece *Ragtime*. Some of these characters did really exist but they were put into the fictional story.

The next intend of this bachelor thesis is the analysis of the novel which was published in 1975 and won many noteworthy awards. An interpretation of the book and its comparison with the film adaptation from the year 1981 by the director Miloš Forman belong to the analysis part as well. However, this adaptation was nominated for 8 Oscars. The main point of this chapter focuses on the authenticity – it means to what extend is the film different from the novel's interpretation. The interpretation of the characters is mentioned at the end of the chapter as well as which characters appear in the film and in the novel.

This thesis contains information about the author E. L. Doctorow and his well known pieces of work. However, information about the Jewish literature is mentioned as well as about authors who wrote in this period of time and about the context of Jewish American literature in 2nd half of 20th century. To sum up, the thesis comprises a few notes about

Southern American literature as well because some parallels to Jewish American literature might be also found. A connection between the situation in the earlier USA and author's thoughts are embraced in one analysis chapter in the thesis.

Finally, this thesis deals with a description of the musical style ragtime, with its expansion and its important and famous personalities they were inspired and influenced by this musical style.

1 What is *ragtime*?

The word *ragtime* embraces a composition of two words *rag* (short version of ragged) and *time*. There are a few definitions below that describe the word *ragtime*:

1) An early form of jazz, especially for the piano, first played by African American musicians in the early 1900s.¹

2) A style of jazz piano music, developed by Scott Joplin around 1900, having a two-four rhythm base and a syncopated melody.²

For better understanding there is a range of visual examples of the musical style ragtime such as the film of the director Miloš Forman which also contains a play with a ragtime melody and rhythm. These songs have inspired many composers and amateurs to create a song with a ragtime melody (some of them could be seen on YouTube.com).

1.1 Musical characteristics and origin

“Ragtime as a musical style was very popular at the end of the 19th century, roughly 1893 to 1917. This type of musical style belongs to jazz. The rhythm of ragtime, as it was said, has a syncopated melody and it makes it lively and springy, and therefore ideal for dancing. The term “ragged time” refers to its rhythmically broken up melodies. That is exactly what Doctorow used in his novel – fast and short sentence which remind the staccato rhythm of ragtime.

Ragtime developed in African American communities throughout the southern parts of the Midwest, particularly Missouri. Bands would combine the structure of marches with black songs and dances such as the cakewalk (“cakewalk was a dance developed from the “Prize Walks” held in the late 19th century, generally at get-togethers on slave plantations in the Southern United States; alternative names for the original form of the dance were “chalkline-walk or “walk-around”). The music, which predated the explosion of sound recordings, became widespread through the sale of published sheet music and piano rolls. In

¹ <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ragtime> 2014-08-14

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ragtime> 2014-08-14

this way it contrasts sharply from early jazz, which was spread by recordings and live performances.”³

“A distinctly American musical style, ragtime may be considered a synthesis of African syncopation and European classical music, especially the marches made popular by *John Philip Sousa*”⁴, who was a successful American composer and was known as “The March King”.

1.2 Famous composers of that time

The popularity of ragtime was increasing mainly because of the quick rhythm and many composers were interested in this kind of musical style. The expansion started at the end of 19th century and it was favourite style especially for the African American community. After a while, it spread not only into the American society. The main composers were *Scott Joplin*, who was the most famous ragtime composer, *James P. Johnson* and *James Scott*.

1.3 Scott Joplin, “King of Ragtime Writers”

Scott Joplin belonged to the most successful and legendary composers and pianists of the musical style called ragtime. Being African-American origin, he came from Texas. There are speculations about when he was actually born. It is known that could be the year 1867/1868. He died on April 1, 1917. Anecdotes say that he started to play a piano when he was just a little boy in a house where his mother used to work. Joplin travelled a lot but when he did not travel; he worked as a pianist in Sedalia, playing at various events and sites. He played especially for black men in clubs and collaborated with his two pupils on rags.

Before Joplin published his next rag, he obtained the assistance and guidance of a young lawyer, Sedalia resident Robert Higdon. In August 1899 they contracted with Sedalia music store owner and publisher John Stark to publish *The Maple Leaf Rag*, which was to become the greatest and most famous of piano rags. Then Joplin completed *The Ragtime Dance*, a stage work for dancers and singing narrator.

³ <http://jazz.about.com/od/historyjazztimeline/a/ragtime.htm> 2014-08-14

⁴ <http://www.mfiles.co.uk/ragtime-music.htm> 2015-04-15

After the death of his second wife Freddie Alexander he left Sedalia and moved to Chicago where he created another rags (*Fig Leaf Rag, Heliotrope Bouquet, Gladiolus Rag, Wall Street Rag, Solace*).

By 1916 Joplin was experiencing the devastating physical and mental effects of syphilis. By mid-January, 1917, he had to be hospitalized, and was soon transferred to a mental institution where he died on April 1, 1917.⁵

⁵ <http://www.scottjoplin.org/biography/> 2014-08-15

2 Edgar Lawrence Doctorow

He was born in January 6, 1931, in Bronx, state New York, United States. He works as a professor and is also a significant American writer and editor. His parents, Richard and Rose Doctorow, are second-generation Americans of Russian Jewish descent who named their son after *Edgar Allan Poe*. He still lives in New York City and New Rochelle and because he knows these places very well, he could include them in his novels, for example the town where the family lives in the novel *Ragtime*. (Bloom, 2001)

2.1 Doctorow's career

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow is a successful American author who became well known especially for his pieces of work *The Book of Daniel* or *Ragtime* and for his unique works in which historical fiction appears. He grew up in the middle-class Jewish family and thanks to this fact he could better express the environment of social differences in his books. He graduated from Kenyon College and Columbia University in a major of literature which gives evidence of the level of his education and knowledge. (Bloom, 2001)

Doctorow follows up the themes like minorities, immigrants, underdog characters or criminals who are leaders in charge in his novels. He is concerned to be a major innovator of the point of view on the relationship between history and fiction which means that he is able to cast real people in a fictional story. He also tried to involved serious topics of the earlier society into a genre such as the Western (*Welcome to Hard Times*), science fiction (*Big as Life*) or a detective fiction (*The Waterworks*). (VanSpanckeren, 1994)

He used to serve in the U. S. Army in Germany. When he came back he took a job as a reader for Columbia Pictures which really helped him to write his later novel *Ragtime* and also inspired him for publishing his first novel called *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960). He taught at several colleges and universities, including Sarah Lawrence College, Yale University Drama School, Princeton University, New York University, and the University of California. (Bloom, 2001)

2.2 Awards

E. L. Doctorow has won many awards for his work so far. He has won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction; National Book Critics Circle for *Ragtime*, 1975; award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, 1976; National Book Critics Circle and American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters for *Billy Bathgate*, 1990; PEN/Faulkner Award for best novel, The PEN/Faulkner Foundation, for *Billy Bathgate*, 1990 or National Book Critics Circle, for *The March*, 2006.”⁶

2.3 Doctorow’s legacy

The novels of E. L. Doctorow demonstrate the transition from meta-fiction to a new and more human sensibility. His critically acclaimed novel about the high human cost of the Cold War, *The Book of Daniel* (1971), is based on the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for espionage, told in the voice of the bereaved son. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (1975) is a rich, kaleidoscopic collage of the United States beginning in 1906. Doctorow’s fictional history of the United States is continued in *Loon Lake* (1979) set in the 1930s, about a ruthless capitalist who dominates and destroys idealistic people. (VanSpanckeren, 1994)

Later Doctorow novels are the autobiographical *World’s Fair* (1985), about an eight-year-old boy growing up in the Depression of the 1930s; *Billy Bathgate* (1989), about Dutch Schultz, a real New York gangster; and *The Waterworks* (1994) set in New York during the 1870s. *City of God* (2000) turns to New York in the present. (VanSpanckeren, 1994)

⁶ <http://www.notablebiographies.com/newsmakers2/2007-Co-Lh/Doctorow-E-L.html> 2014-08-17

3 Jewish American literature in historical context

The first historical experience of Jews in the USA was in the 16th century. First Jews arrived with Cortes to Mexico where they established the new inquisition. On this continent started to appear new language called Yiddish and because of spreading of this new language there were also Yiddish newspapers and theatres. The problem occurred when people were supposed to decide who would become “the chosen people” – whether the Puritans, who thought that they were first on the continent, or the Jews. (Procházka, 2002)

After the beginning of World War II, Jews started to emigrate because they found themselves in danger, especially writers, physicists, artists and other intellectuals. One of lands, they could go, was, of course, the USA. Then the Jews became a minority in the USA. The main themes of Jewish American authors included capitalism, assimilation, everyday lives of Jews and their culture and naturally anti-Semitism. In their works appear English and Yiddish as well. (Goffman, 2010)

3.1 Jewish American authors

The significant Jewish American authors who should be mentioned are *Bernard Malamud (1914-1986)*, *Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991)*, *Philip Roth (1933)*, *William Styron (1925)*, *Jerome David Salinger (1919-2010)* and *Saul Bellow (1915-2005)*. (Procházka, 2002)

3.2 Jewish American literature since 1945

The fight for black civil rights played a major role after the period of the World War II, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s. The main reason was obviously the same feeling of a subordinate minority when the Jews were trying to support the black movement. The Jews strove for assimilation but on the other hand, they desired to preserve their identity which appeared not only in the reality of their lives but also in the prose fiction of Jewish American writers.

However, some critics claimed that Jewish authors achieved this huge success thanks to a so called survivor-guilt syndrome which not only the authors but also some of their characters suffered from (for instance the character called Nathan in the novel of William Styron *Sophie's Choice*). (Procházka, 2002)

3.2.1 Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991)

First, it has to be considered whether Singer should be classified as a Jewish American author or not but he has Jewish origin and was born in Poland. That is the reason why he created so many novels from the environment of earlier Poland. He did write about Jews but his works refer to either post war America or to pre-war Poland and he achieved fame for winning the Nobel Prize.

For example, the saga *The Family Moskat* (1950) is telling a story about the background of World War I and the period between wars and about three generations of Jews living that time. One can say that controversial topics about Nazis and anti-Semitism are also involved. The works written as an issue of post war America were supposed to answer the question how to live in the U.S. after the Holocaust and as a matter of fact, the topic of Holocaust is included in the novel *Enemies: A love Story* (1972). (Procházka, 2002)

There is something unique about Singer's novels and it is not just the way he wrote because he wrote his books in Yiddish but supernatural features such as the mystical past of Jews or the world of imps occur there. It can be noticed in a story called *Gimpel, the Fool* which was translated to English by Bellow. (Goffman, 2010)

3.2.2 Bernard Malamud (1914 – 1986)

Malamud is considered a Jewish origin author, however, he was born in Brooklyn and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn and the City College of New York and later he took a master's degree at Columbia. He used to teach evening classes in 1950s and during this period of time short stories had been created and appeared in magazines called *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*. It could be said that Malamud belonged to very productive writers, especially Jewish ones because he was trying to write stories about the topic related to manners of working-class and issues of immigrated Jews. (Procházka, 2002)

As mentioned, Malamud wrote many books which brought him success – such as his first novel *The Natural* (1952). The icebreaker of his career came a few years later thanks to the book called *The Assistant* 1957 which was considered the best and most memorable one by its readers. Next novels which were written by his hand are *The Fixer* (1966) or *The Tenants*

(1971). Malamud created also short stories collection such as *The Magic Barrel* (1958). (VanSpanckeren, 1994)

Malamud portrayed his characters in grotesque circumstances and focused on problems of immigrated Jews who were deemed a minority in the United States. He also captured poor environment such as houses or streets and fight against suffering into his novels (e.g. *The Assistant*). (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007)

3.2.3 Philip Roth (1933)

Roth, as a Jewish origin author, became famous by writing a collection of stories *Goodbye, Columbus* which really upped his carrier and guaranteed him his first literary price in 1959. Ten years ago came another success – the bestseller of that time called *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). In this book the autobiographical features like growing up in New Jersey and remembering what was happening that time appear. Roth also adapted a fable about a man's metamorphosis called *The Breast* (1971). In his later novels – *My Life as a Man* (1974) and *The Professor of Desire* (1977) – he returned to a tradition of a social novelist: marriage, divorce, the family, being a Jew and a life of an individual. In *The Facts* (1988), Roth used the autobiographical writing. (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007)

Ironic humour, the every-day life of Jews who had been already assimilated into the larger American culture or the real-life story from the World War II (Roth used to serve in the army) also appear in Roth's works. (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007) One might say that there are some similarities between Roth's and Doctorow's style of writing because both of them wrote about characters or events that were either fictional or a matter of reality; Both have a clever style of writing and in their works they mention stories of Jewish people and their identity.

3.2.4 Saul Bellow (1915-2005)

Bellow had belonged to a group of Russian Jewish immigrants before moving with his family to Chicago. He was studying at the University of Chicago and North-western University where he fell in love with literature and desired to study further. On the other hand, the study field seemed too difficult for Bellow, so he was dropped out after just one semester. Returning back to Chicago, he started to teach, edit and write fiction. His novels

were awarded many times not just by readers but also by other American authors and critics. It was spoken highly of Bellow's narrative technique and of opening up into new ranges of aspiration. (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007)

His first novel is called *Dangling Man* which was published in his nearly 30s and which had a huge success as well as his second novel *The Victim* – both works were written in 1950s and in that time new issues started to appear there. *The Adventures of Augie March* (1959) is believed Bellow's most known novel which is filled with sights and sounds, colours and surfaces. In his next two novels called *Herzog* (1964) and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Bellow gave the interpretation of living in New York and of problems which occurred in most of people's lives, for example relationships or disorder. (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007)

3.2.5 Jerome David Salinger (1919-2010)

Salinger belonged to authors who were not so productive that time and he spent a long time in privacy without publishing – especially after 1970s. The novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) guaranteed him his very first success and it became popular mostly with the young generation. The storyline itself is telling a story of adolescent alienation and loss of innocence of a teenager called Holden Caulfield. Salinger admitted that autobiographical features were added in his novel, mostly from Sallinger's childhood. (Klinkowitz & Wallace, 2007)

Other Sallinger's works included *Nine Stories* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (1961) and *Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters* (1963). One of his stories was mentioned in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1965 but since then, Salinger has not published any more. (VanSpanckeren, 1994)

3.2.6 William Styron (1925-2006)

The last protagonist of the Jewish American literature for this part is William Styron who belonged to the famous authors that time and ranged among the Southern authors as well. The most valuable piece of work is called *Sophie's Choice* (1979) which refers to a woman who is forced to make serious decisions about her life and the lives of her children – who would die or be saved. (Procházka, 2002)

Styron preferred individualities that were set in specific places and time in order to show their limits and how they were possibly able to solve demanding and stressful situations. Another thing is that the topic of the Holocaust and larger racial injustice of the Nazi regime occur in Styron's works as well as in other Jewish authors' books. (Procházka, 2002)

Styron's first book is called *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951) which focuses on characters that are highly tested with their limits as human beings. The story deals with a suicide of a young woman who decided to end her life by leaping from a New York skyscraper. At the end of Styron's career he paid attention to writing memoirs, for example *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (1993) because of dealing with his near-suicidal depression. (VanSpanckeren 1994)

3.3 Southern writers and literature

In the South there were many significant authors who became quickly famous. The Southern writers tended to adhere to time-honoured traditions. The Southern writers like *William Faulkner, Thomas Wolf, Tennessee Williams, and Truman Capote* belonged to the so called "Southern Renaissance." Main themes contained family, the family home, history, the land, religion, guilt, identity, death and the search for redemptive meaning in life. (Procházka, 2002)

The southern literature should be mentioned in this thesis because there are many parallels that are obviously worth sharing. With all respect to the main topic of this thesis, it ought to be said that in the book both topics appear here— either problems of Jews or the assertion of black people. The point is that writers of both styles wanted to do something about discrimination, disrespect of minorities or finding one's identity. (Procházka, 2002) "Either Southerners or Jews were believed to be outsiders, which bring with it certain advantages for the writer: as an observer he can see things from a certain distance, and, of course, therefore be more critical of American society." (Procházka, 2002:259)

A similar past should be counted to points what connect both cultures. The black people were taken as a minority as well and they had to deal with the accusation of racism which was basically shown in author's works and had an impact not only on their lives but also on the characters involved in their stories. (Procházka, 2002)

4 Analysis of the novel *Ragtime*

In this chapter of the practical part, not only a summary of the plot of *Ragtime* is going to be described but also introduction of the main characters, the novel itself and finally the style of writing or the narrative method which is supposed to sound or look like staccato when playing piano – it means that the sentences and syntactic structure will be analysed.

4.1 Summary of the novel *Ragtime*

The storyline is set in a town called New Rochelle, New York and begins with introduction of an upper-class family containing Mother, Father, The Little Boy and Mother's Younger Brother. One day the famous escape artist Houdini drives through the town and suddenly his car broke down right in front of the house where the family lives. Houdini sees The Little Boy who admires him so much, so he shows The Little Boy a few tricks and Father invites Houdini in for a while before Houdini goes away again. Father prepares himself for the trip to the Arctic.

The next character who is involved in the story is a beautiful sex symbol of that time Emily Nesbit who is married to the successful architect Harry Kendall Thaw. He later found out that she had a lover called Stanford White who was murdered by Thaw after discovering the affair. The narrator also tells a story about immigrants who started to appear in New York City. There is one family which is a part of the second storyline of the book – the family of Jews including Mameh, Tateh and The Little Girl.

Mother's Younger brother seems to fall in love with Nesbit while she gives an evidence of his husband's guilt because Thaw is considered a violent man thanks to the murder of Stanford White, and therefore he has to be justified. Accidentally, Houdini is performing an escape during Thaw's imprisonment. The real name of Houdini, Erich Weiss, is mentioned as well as his relationship with his mother. It could be said that Houdini was literary obsessed with her mother and that she played an important role in his life. During this period of time Freud visited America for the first time to present his ideas to American society but he seems to be disappointed about America and American society. According to him, Americans are too loud and rude and they do not care anybody but themselves.

After returning from the Tombs prison, it is Nesbit who meets Tateh with his daughter and later on she starts to feel sympathy for The Little Girl. The Little Girl grabbed Nesbit's attention because of the rope she wears around her belly which is immediately explained by Tateh. He told Nesbit that he is the father of The Little Girl and he has to keep her daughter close because people sometime steal children from their parents. Nesbit cannot believe that The Little Girl is his daughter because Tateh looks more likely her grandfather. Despite this fact, Nesbit visits the family regularly and even wants to take care of The Little Girl because as she said she thinks she just fell in love with her. When Tateh starts drawing a silhouette of Nesbit, she becomes more famous later and her pictures are everywhere. Tateh with his daughter accompany Nesbit to a socialist meeting where the famous anarchist Emma Goldman has a speech. Goldman accused Nesbit of using her sexuality to make her more prominent. Meanwhile Tateh cannot believe what he has just heard and he leaves Nesbit in the crowd with Goldman and walks away disappointed. Goldman persuades Nesbit to get rid of everything that ruins her life.

After this chapter, the narrator moves into the family house again where a newborn black baby was found. Police find also the mother of the child and Mother decides that the child and his mother will be taken under her roof and she will also take responsibility for them. Father has already left home and taken part in the expedition to the Arctic. After his arrival, Taft becomes President and Father needs to deal with the changes occurred during his absence. Mother's Younger Brother had started to go out with Evelyn Nesbit but it is more about sex than talking. He helps her to find Tateh and Tateh's daughter but they have already left New York for their own good. Meanwhile Nesbit has to accept 25 thousand dollars for the divorce with her husband which does not seem as much as she thought.

Houdini prepares for his huge performance now and he discovers how to fly a plane which supports excitement in his life. He also meets a very significant person in our history, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, accompanied by the Countess Sophie, who congratulates him on invent of the plane. Then, the narrator returns to Tateh and his journey to Lawrence where he wants to stay with her daughter a while but he finds out that almost the whole city takes part in a strike against the textile mills and Tateh decides to send his daughter away in one of trains but suddenly he does not fancy leaving her, therefore he catches up the train, jumps in and travels with his daughter to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, he decided to present

his book with drawings in a store in order to gain some money. Tateh succeeds because the owner of the store supports this notion and is interested in more kinds of these funny books which begins Tateh's career.

A character of Henry Ford, taken the history, has invented a new car, Ford Model T and now he belongs to the richest men of America. J.P. Morgan is interested in meeting Ford because he thinks that they could become business partners. Morgan invites Ford to his residence in order to show him his library and to suggest him to join a trip to Egypt. Morgan also tells him that he believes in reincarnation and in ancient Egyptian culture. Hearing that, Ford agrees with the invitation but Morgan travels later alone any way.

One day a foreign black man stops by a family's house introducing himself as Coalhouse Walker Jr. and informs them he desires to speak with Sarah, the black girl who stays with the family. Yet she keeps rejecting him all the time and the family does not know why, Mother thinks they witness a kind of courtship between Coalhouse and Sarah. Every Sunday the young black gentleman arrives and parks his car in front of the house where the family and Sarah live and each time Sarah denies him until one afternoon when she finally agrees to meet him and to have a date. Coalhouse even proposes her to become his wife and to live with him.

When Coalhouse drives his car, Ford Model T, the leader of local fire fighters stops him and tries to convince him that he should pay a toll for the road he is driving on but Coalhouse denies it because he has never heard anything about paying for this part of the road. Therefore he tells two black boys to watch out his car while he asks someone else to make a justice. Despite the fact that another police officer did not want to help him, Coalhouse walks back to his car. Unfortunately, he finds his car totally destroyed and disgraced. Of course, when he complains about it, everybody tells him to let this thing go and do not ever care about it. Coalhouse does not intend to sit around and do nothing – he decided that he wants his car back in conditions just like it was and an apology for the behaviour of fire fighters' leader, Willie Conklin. Instead of apology, Coalhouse was arrested and Father had to pay fifty dollars to let Coalhouse free.

However, Sarah wants to help her fiancé, and therefore she visits an event where the Vice-President is supposed to appear and she is going to tell him about his fiancé's situation

but she mistook him for the President of the United States. Calling him Mr. President, she is suddenly hit and beaten by a bodyguard of the Vice-President that she has to be taken to a hospital where she later dies. This is the last straw for Coalhouse, and therefore he decides to take the responsibility in his own hands because of the death of his fiancée and of justice. Coalhouse spends all his money for the funeral of his love.

Meanwhile Harry Thaw escapes from prison but because of his violent character, he commits a few crimes and he is arrested again. Harry Houdini stays in Europe when his mother passes away. Finding out, Houdini is devastated because he loves her mother so much, and therefore he is doing his best during his outstanding performance. His performance is disturbed by an enormous explosion which comes from Emerald Isle Firehouse where the situation with Coalhouse happened and where he was also arrested. It is said that there was a black male who forced one of the fire fighters to reveal him Conklin's whereabouts. Father is sure that Coalhouse committed this and he starts to blame Mother for the whole situation but Mother's Younger Brother defends her as well as Coalhouse. Father feels that since he arrived from the expedition, he has alienated from the family and their opinions. He noticed that Mother has higher self-confidence and is more independent. He begins focusing on his son then. He invites him to a baseball game which The Little Boy admires. The narrator shows Father's attitude to traditions and nostalgia for good old times.

As a result of recent events, Father comes to a decision to move to Atlantic City for a while and for family's safety. Mother's Younger Brother disappears after the quarrel with Father and determines to locate Coalhouse in order to join him and to support him in behalf of justice. When finally meeting him, Mother's Younger Brother presents Coalhouse his reasons why he wants to join his group – he can construct bombs. After this statement, Coalhouse accepts him as a part of his team and Mother's Younger Brother paints his face black so that nobody could identify him.

Meanwhile Coalhouse and his followers are preparing for revenge; the family enjoy their holiday in Atlantic City and meet new people there. Baron Ashkenazy, in fact Tateh, is one of people whom the family meets and whom they become friends immediately with, especially The Little Boy and Girl. One day when playing on the beach, The Little Boy and Girl are forced to hide themselves because of the sudden storm. Mother and Tateh set out finding

their children and they start to be attracted to each other. On the other hand, Father becomes bored and when finding out that Coalhouse and his gang took over J.P. Morgan's residence, he does not hesitate and gets back to New York to try to solve the situation, leaving Mother on her own in Atlantic City.

Coalhouse and his accomplices originally planned that they take J.P. Morgan hostage and that they will negotiate with police in order to change him for Conklin. As shown, J.P. Morgan has been on the trip to Egypt, so the gang took over at least Morgan's library. Later on, Coalhouse begins to negotiate with the District Attorney of New York Charles Whitman about conditions. As a matter of fact, it seems that Whitman cannot convince Coalhouse to different opinions, so he calls a well-known orator Booker T. Washington as a representative of the black society to negotiate with Coalhouse and maybe convince him to give up. After entering the building, Washington expresses his concerns about Coalhouse's behaviour and reprimands him for such a crime but Coalhouse tells him that he understood nothing and that he wants people to behave towards the "Negros" with respect.

When Father finally arrives, he wants to enter the building and have a talk with Coalhouse. Doing so, Father sees Mother's Younger Brother to be one of Coalhouse's accomplices which is unpleasant discovery for Father. Coalhouse makes up his mind to change his conditions – he wants only his car, in the same condition it was, and safe departure for his friends. Then, he gives up to authorities and everybody gets what they wanted. Whitman agrees with Coalhouse's statement and commands to get the Ford Model T done. This is also the last time when Father and his brother-in-law talk to each other as well as the last conversation between Coalhouse and Father about Coalhouse's child.

When friends of Coalhouse leave the residence and Coalhouse finds out that they are somewhere safe and not being followed, he sets Father free and goes outside to face death. Mother's Younger Brother escapes to Mexico where he joins the revolutionary Francisco Villa and shows him how to make bombs. Despite the freedom that Mother's Younger Brother had, he died in the fight in Mexico.

In the last chapter, World War I is approaching and the world erupted into the war when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand with his wife was assassinated in Sarajevo. Many people die in this chapter – J.P. Morgan during his visit in Egypt, Franz Ferdinand, Mother's Younger

Brother and even Father. On the other hand, after Father's death, Mother finds love again and she marries Tateh.

5 *Ragtime* in context and its deeper analysis

One might say that in the novel *Ragtime*, there are biographical features which are somehow connected with the main author, E.L. Doctorow. As mentioned, the family lives in New Rochelle, New York City and has a big and spacious house which was built in 1906. Doctorow lives also in a very similar house in New Rochelle which the family in his novel owns. It is logical because Doctorow could write a story and involve the environment he had already known. Doctorow tried to pull the readers in, even though most of the story was made up. It has to be said that Doctorow does not write a documentary of the real characters and their history but he literary creates it with his own ideas.

5.1 Rhythm of staccato

Someone claims that the story or the way of writing *Ragtime* with short and simple sentences reminds them of rhythm of staccato, the fast and strike piano play, which represents destinies of historical and fictional characters and events. It seems that Doctorow wanted to verbally portray these two contrasts – history and fiction – and the society at that time into his novel. Everybody knows that if somebody wants to play piano, they need two hands and Doctorow used the left hand for describing the regular rhythm of historical social events with their real-life protagonists such as the escape artist Harry Houdini, the beauty Evelyn Nesbit, the anarchist Emma Goldman, Henry Ford or J.P. Morgan, the murderer Harry Thaw or the psychologist Sigmund Freud. (Jindra, 1982)

On the other hand, Doctorow's right hand creates three different families that are a figment of author's imagination: the family of Mother, Father, The Little Boy and Mother's Younger Brother who live, in fact, in better conditions and are considered an upper-class family; then the family of Jewish immigrants, Tateh, Mameh and The Little Girl who live in poverty at first but then they will transform and go through a life-changing experience which guarantees them a fulfilled American dream; and the last one is the family of the black ragtime pianist Coalhouse Walker. Unfortunately, he loses his family because of racial prejudice and disloyal society of Americans. It is worth writing that the two families do not have names and differ from each other in origin and social status, however, the black pianist does have name.

The main character in Doctorow's novel lived similar life like Scott Joplin and it does not sound like coincidence. Readers cannot tell what Coalhouse Walker is like. He seems a bit mysterious and out of that time. It also seems that Doctorow was inspired by Scott Joplin's life, so he assigned him a role of Coalhouse Walker, even though Coalhouse mentioned Joplin in the novel and even plays some of his most notorious songs. "On the other hand, Doctorow had been inspired by the hero of Keen Kleist's novel called *Michael Kohlhaas* as well and it is noticeable that there are some similarities between the names Coalhouse Walker and *Michael Kohlhaas*. They both have something in common – either they lose something or they become outcasts of the society." (Jindra, 1982:251)

It has to be considered that the character of Coalhouse Walker does not exactly come under ragtime age. Of course, ragtime was played by black people which can be found out from the plot but the era of resistance movement of black people had not been in progress yet – it means capturing of Morgan's mansion or killing people and devastating houses on behalf of justice. It is something that came later, a few decades later. It can be interpreted as Doctorow's attempt of warning against the political and racial disorder. (Jindra, 1982)

5.2 Narrative method

What should be mentioned as well is the narrative method which belongs to other important features of the novel. Interesting is that there are skips of narrators which might lead to misunderstandings or readers could be sometimes lost because they do not know whether he, she or they tell the story. A possible number one narrator, who remains one of the main characters of the novel, is definitely The Little Boy but the narrative voice sometimes occurs in the third person singular – so the question is who is the next narrator or maybe who are narrators. The novel contains sentences which describe environment and setting in real detail, therefore these descriptions are maybe related to Doctorow's youth or his memories from the time he was a child. (Jindra, 1982)

Neither quotation marks nor dialogs occur there which can confuse readers when reading or thinking who speaks in point of fact. Yet it should not happen when a reader focuses on the storyline properly. (Doctorow E. L., 1974)

Doctorow chose another technique of changing scenes, tenses, voices, and speakers which differed from other authors' way of writing. Doctorow writes about the period between the beginning of the 20th century and World War I. This time represents a period of change in car industry (Model T Ford), moving pictures (Tateh and his drawings) and ragtime music (Coalhouse Walker). (Cronin & Berger, 2013)

6 List of characters and their analysis

In this chapter some characters are chosen which are significant for understanding of the novel of E.L. Doctorow. There are characters like Mother, Father or Tateh which are nameless and symbolize two different families or two different social classes of the 20th century in America. Then, there are characters which were not created but really existed—real human beings in our history. However, character like Coalhouse Walker Jr. is crucial for the novel and for better understanding of life in American society.

6.1 Fictional characters

Mother, with a Victorian perspective, is a wife of Father and at the beginning they create a stereotypical upper-class family living in New Rochelle. She works as a businesswoman but on the other hand, she is able to help others and be sensitive to them. (Bloom, 2001) Throughout the novel she goes through changes which have an impact on the whole family and especially on her. After Sarah's death she is willing to take care of Sarah's baby which awakes mother feelings in her again. The main change, which Mother went through, is to start feeling life again and not to be just a stereotypical obedient wife who Father knows. There is also a change in her sexual life – she has a different point of view on the sexual life and she starts to notice her growing awareness of her sexuality which was something about what they were not use to talking.

Father works in a factory selling fireworks, flags, and other patriotic paraphernalia and is considered a contrast of Mother because Mother changes and transforms herself somehow throughout the novel; on the other hand, Father keeps his traditional point of view like many Americans that time. There is an allegorical meaning hidden in attitude of Father as well as stereotype rooted in his attitude to the baseball game or immigrants and this stereotype is also related to his mission to the North Pole and his return to normal life, however, it is actually never going to happen again. As feeling alienated from his family and his environment, Father has never entirely recovered from this isolation. (Bloom, 2001)

As mentioned, Father symbolises the traditions of late nineteenth century in America and the society that does not want to change anything and that would rather respect the law and old principles. (Bloom, 2001)

The Little Boy is the son of Mother and Father who is considered about nine years old, a spontaneous child who has his own world which is unfortunately not understood by his parents. However, he is curious, observant, and very clever and desires to discover the world about him. (Bloom, 2001) When he meets The Little Girl, in no time they become friends. One might say that they symbolise a new generation of Americans because they behave and think differently than their parents. The Little Boy also admires Houdini, the famous escape artist, who accidentally appears in front of his parents' house when his car broke down.

Mother's Younger Brother is a part of the family and also shares the house with them. However, he is eventually different than others, especially because of his behaviour and the way of thinking. He tries to find himself or just seek the right place or activity he could possibly do in order to be happy. He feels that he does not belong to the family or the society he is surrounded by. (Bloom, 2001) He falls in love with Evelyn Nesbit and is going out with her sometime until she leaves him which was a real disappointment for Mother's Younger Brother. After the incident with Coalhouse Walker, he decided to join him because he believes it could be the right choice to give his life a purpose. And being brave and reckless, he is not afraid to fight and maybe get killed in order to save his "true family".

Tateh comes from Latvia and is a Jewish immigrant as well as his wife Mameh and his daughter The Little Girl. After his wife's death, The Little Girl is the only one who remains him and he is willing to do everything for her which seems a bit impossible because they live in poverty. One might say that as immigrant he used to dream about better life or something like American dream which he has not fulfilled yet. One day he meets Evelyn and she turns his life upside down and he become a filmmaker and starts to earn money thanks to drawing pictures of Evelyn. (Bloom, 2001) He is one the characters that is changing throughout the book and finally begins to enjoy and transform his life. In some ways he is an opposite of Father because Tateh wants to do something about his life and he succeeds and fulfils his dream, on the other hand, Father is reluctant.

Mameh did not actually appear in the novel but she has a lot to do with fate of her husband Tateh and their daughter. She came to America as a Jewish immigrant but she was forced to work as a prostitute to support her family which unfortunately led to her death. She is similar to Mother but introduced from a different point of view. (Bloom, 2001)

The little Girl is the daughter of Mameh and Tateh who looks gorgeous and innocent and most of the book she is speechless. Evelyn feels an ineffable need to take care of her and gives her everything that her mother could not give her any more. With The Little Boy they create a possible new generation of Americans and The Little Girl symbolises hope. (Bloom, 2001)

Sarah is a black girl who serves in the family of Mother and Father in New Rochelle. She is described as an innocent and calm silent that gave birth to a child which belongs to Coalhouse as well. (Bloom, 2001) At first she does not want to meet Coalhouse, even though he goes by every Sunday but then she realises that Coalhouse has good intentions and they try to start a new life together. However, Sarah dies later because of her kindness to help Coalhouse to solve the process he is involved in.

Coalhouse Walker Jr. is a strange character, though. He is a ragtime pianist and he always behaves himself. He is considered as a man of good intentions and manners and he is polite to others and also good looking gentleman. One could say that he behaves differently for his social status and mostly he is not understood by others. His expectations of how he should be treated cause him only trouble because other people do not have enough respect to treat African American more politely, for instance the incident of destroying his new car, Ford Model T, by disrespect fire fighters led by officer Conklin. All that Walker wants is justice and then, he is willing to let the whole thing go. When nothing happens and his lover Sarah dies, Walker turns himself into an angry black man in order to make justice which all ends with his death.

However, the character of Coalhouse Walker has deeper meaning and it symbolises relations between races at the beginning of the 20th century. He also symbolises the whole race of African-Americans who had to struggle with some expectations of whites who have always had prejudice towards African-Americans and which is unfortunately deeply rooted in our history. (Jindra, 1982)

Willie Conklin is a chief of local fire fighters who is firstly responsible for destroying Walker's new car and for his bad behaviour towards Walker. Conklin acted with no respect and he even made fun of Walker. He symbolises the ordinary society which is not willing to accept minorities as a part of other people.

6.2 Historical characters

Harry Houdini is known as a famous escapologist, illusionist and magician originally named as Erik Weiss who was born in Budapest, Austria-Hungary and whose confession was Judaism. This character was actually taken from real life and transformed into the storyline of Doctorow's novel. Discipline, courage and inventive attitude belonged to his characteristics which made him a successful artist and admirable man. (Bloom, 2001) On the other hand, he is quite depended on his mother who later dies which really devastates him. In this situation, there is a spiritual or supernatural context because Houdini is trying to contact his mother through spiritual media but in fact he wants to reveal fake media who just want to earn more money thanks to cheating on people – and this revelation of cheaters becomes his new obsession.

Evelyn Nesbit is another real person who appears in the story several times. Being a famous beauty and artist's model, she is mostly connected with Marilyn Monroe who also belonged to sex symbols as well as Evelyn did. However, she is a proof that what goes around, comes around – it points to her beauty which is going to ruin her one day. Her husband is called Harry K. Thaw who is accused of murder of Stanford White, the famed architect and her lover. During the process of the trial, Evelyn meets Tateh with his daughter, she immediately falls in love with her because The Little Girl is really gorgeous and has something special that Evelyn attracts. She wants to visit them as much as possible and feels the need to take care of The Little Girl, even though they are from different social classes and Evelyn helps them to escape from their poor life of the Lower East Side.

Evelyn Nesbit also represents the sex symbol of American society at the beginning of the 20th century, for example her almost naked statue of a ballet dancer, even though the issue of sexual life or sexuality was taboo and people did not talk about it at all, especially in public. (Bloom, 2001)

Harry K. Thaw is a husband of Evelyn Nesbit and is responsible for the murder of her lover Stanford White. Thaw faces a trial because of the murder and Evelyn has to endure it for her sake. He owns a lot of money but unfortunately when he ends up in jail, money cannot solve all problems. Thaw belongs to other characters that are taken from the real life, yet he is one

the bad ones because of his violent and unstable manners. He really married Evelyn Nesbit and committed the crime on White indeed.

Stanford White is a famous architect whose murder is being solved at the beginning of the novel. It is said that White was the truly love of Nesbit but she was forced to marry the wealthy and violent Thaw. (Bloom, 2001)

Emma Goldman is another real character who is responsible for encouraging others to challenge important situations and to convince them that they are powerful as well as other people. She is known as a famous anarchist and for her well written speech. (Bloom, 2001)

J.P. Morgan is almost sixty years old wealthy businessman who is interested in an Egyptian culture and making trips to Egypt very often. He is a passionate collector of precious things and artefacts and even becomes obsessed with reincarnation which he confesses to the famous automobile manufacturer Henry Ford who is offered to join Morgan to the trip to Egypt and discovering new artefacts which happened only in the novel. Morgan is also a character taken from real history.

All these characters are crucial for the story because they create the main storyline and their fates mingle. Of course in the book, there are many characters that were part of the history and it is worth mentioning them. For instance, Henry Ford; the journalist Jacob Riis who supported the rights for the poor; Booker T. Washington who was an African-American educator and even advisor to presidents of the United States; Sigmund Freud or Carl Gustav Jung who were respectable psychologist; the 26th President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt or the successor to the Austria-Hungary's throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Este who was assassinated in Sarajevo belonged to real characters.

7 History and fiction

In this part of the work called history and fiction the analysis of the real persons or characters involved will appear and whether they actually met on real or the E.L. Doctorow made their meeting up.

The novel opens with love triangle of Evelyn Nesbit, Harry Kendall Thaw and Stanford White. All the three characters are taken from real life and are involved in the story with the same destinies as in their real lives. Nesbit is about 16 years old when she meets the famous architect White who seems actually the way older, more than 30 years, than she is. White becomes her lover and benefactor, however, a few years later she gets to know the wealthy Harry Thaw to whom she will later married. And as happened in history, Thaw kills White and Thaw has to face to the trial which was called as “the trial of the century.”

Mother’s Younger Brother falls in love with the beauty Evelyn Nesbit and he literary stalks her everywhere. It is no secret that Nesbit had a lot of lovers who she sometimes slept with and Mother’s Younger Brother could be possibly one of her lovers or admirers. They spent a few weeks together but Evelyn did not want Mother’s Younger Brother any more. Of course, he felt devastated because he loved her so much. This situation shows a mixture of reality (Nesbit) and fiction (Mother’s Younger Brother).

The Little Boy was playing in front of the house and suddenly the magician and escape artist Houdini showed up, driving around when his car broke down. Doctorow likes these mixtures of facts and fiction and the book is full of them – for instance the famous Houdini meets a boy who admires him and even the whole family talks to Houdini – that is just Doctorow’s imagination.

Peary expedition to Greenland was set in 1891 - 1892 and really happened.⁷ Doctorow mixed reality and fiction here and he connected the expedition with the character of Father in the book who was one of members who actually joined the expedition.

President Roosevelt became the 26th President of the United States in 1901 and left his office in 1909. He is also a part of the story as well as another real person.

⁷<http://www.ansp.org/research/library/archives/0100-0199/coll0145/> 2015-04-14

In the book the famous journalist and police reporter of the *New York Tribune* Jacob Riis meets Stanford White, the well-known architect of that time. Riis asks White whether he could participate in building a house for the poor because Riis comes from a poor family and he knew the felling living somewhere where poverty rules. On the other hand, White comes from a rich family and he always had what he wanted – so these two men originate from different social classes and despite the fact, they actually could not have met each other.⁸

Another situation when two real characters from the history met in the Tombs prison appears only in the novel, not in reality. It was Houdini who was supposed to escape from prison having tested new iron cuffs and meeting Thaw during Thaw's imprisonment.

The 27th President of the United States became William Howard Taft right after the President Theodore Roosevelt. Taft spent four years in his office (1909 – 1913) and after new elections in 1913 Woodrow Wilson was chosen as a new President. It could be seen that the storyline flows throughout the history and the novel with development of the main characters and events which happened during the election period of all three presidents of the United States.

It is true that Freud, Jung and Ferenczi visited America at the beginning of the 20th century, precisely speaking in 1909. Being in progress, Freud wanted to spread the psychoanalytic cause in the English-speaking countries.⁹ Doctorow writes about the same event in *Ragtime* and wants to point out a different opinion of European people on American society that is criticised by Freud in the novel. Basically, Freud complains about the noise from the street because everything seems too fast and noisy to him. He considers Americans rude and accuses them of gathering of European art and architecture regardless of origin of the art or architecture.

It is truth that Evelyn's photographs were posted everywhere and everybody knew her as a well-known artist model and sex symbol of that time. In the book there is a story about how Evelyn and the Jewish immigrant Tateh met. Later on Tateh started to draw Evelyn in order to make some money and, on the other hand, so that Evelyn could take care of Tateh's

⁸http://foundationsofamerica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=488:017-riis-and-white-differences&catid=34:ragtime-articles-of-interest&Itemid=62 2015-04-06

⁹ <http://chronicle.com/article/Freuds-Visit-to-Clark-U/48424/> 2015-04-06

daughter The Little Girl. Doctorow involved the fact about Evelyn's photos being everywhere in the storyline with Tateh. It means he combined history and fiction in the way of matching real and historical characters.

In the book there is a passage where Evelyn Nesbit and the anarchist Emma Goldman meet after the trial with Evelyn's husband. They are talking together while Goldman helps Nesbit to remove Evelyn's clothes. This scene was unlikely to happen, though. Of course, both persons existed in the same period of time but they have never met.¹⁰

Houdini was supposed to meet another significant person of our history – the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austro-Hungary, Austria-Este when the Archduke was sitting next to his wife, the Countess Sophie, in a white car and congratulated Houdini on the invent of aeroplane but it was just an effect such as aerial suspension and the main thing is that this invention had been already discovered.¹¹

An automobile maker Henry Ford is invited to J.P. Morgan and they speak to each other about new inventions and Morgan's contemporary possession – about reincarnation and travelling to Egypt. That is what happened in the book, however, even though these two characters truly existed, they have never met in real life, despite the fact that they belonged to the richest men of America.

At the very end of the book the attorney Whitman calls Booker T. Washington to negotiate and to agree with Coalhouse Walker about Walker's conditions. It is high likely that Washington and Whitman have met before because Washington used to help Whitman during Whitman's governor campaign and wrote him even a congratulation letter to his new post as a Governor of New York. (Harlan & Smock, 1984)

The last scene of mixture of fiction and history comes from an event in Mexico where Mother's Younger Brother escaped to after Coalhouse Walker's murder. He joins the forces

¹⁰<http://daragtime.blogspot.cz/2011/05/goldman-and-nesbit.html> 2015-04-07

¹¹http://foundationsofamerica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=176:105-archduke-franz-ferdinand&catid=34:ragtime-articles-of-interest&Itemid=62 2015-04-07

of the revolutionary Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata and reveals them how to construct bombs. These revolutionaries did really exist in Mexico in 1913.¹²

¹²<http://www.history.com/news/6-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-mexican-revolution> 2015-04-14

8 Miloš Forman

He was born in 1932 in Čáslav where his father taught as a local teacher at a primary school which Forman also attended. Forman was the youngest of 3 brothers and being in the age of 8, he lost his father because he was supposed to be a member of a resistance movement against the regime. His father was sent to a concentration camp where he spent most of the time of the war. Forman's mother was also taken to a concentration camp because of a suspicion based on a report of a salesman who worked in a shop in Čáslav. Both his parents died at the end of World War II.¹³

His carrier started in the theatre thanks to his elder brother Pavel. Forman applied for the Film and TV School of Academy of Performing in Prague and began to make a document together with Ivan Passer called *Konkurs* (1936).¹⁴

In 1967 Forman was allowed to fly to the USA where he made his first film thanks to the Paramount Company. The first success appeared in 1974 when Forman was offered to film an adaptation of the Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and this movie brought him many awards. In 1981 the Italian producer Dino Laurentis gave Forman the opportunity to work on the adaptation of the bestseller of E. L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*. (Forman & Novák, 1994)

Forman admitted that he had already read Doctorow's book before and he knew that it would be honour to film such a masterpiece and he also knew that many different films could be made from the storyline of *Ragtime*. He accepted the offer without hesitation. He said that the storyline of Coalhouse Walker Junior grabbed his attention the most. Being a new citizen of America, Forman sympathised with a complex fate of the character of Coalhouse Walker because it reminded Forman of a dilemma from Prague where people always had to confront with the fools during the era of the Czechoslovakia. If people had courage to face them, they took a risk of their living and sometimes even their lives. The film *Ragtime* reminds Forman his earlier integration into American society as well and it remembers him how he felt fighting for his rights in America. (Forman & Novák, 1994)

¹³<http://milosforman.com/en/about/biography> 2015-03-16

¹⁴<http://milosforman.com/en/about/biography> 2015-03-16

Year after he could finally go home to film the most famous movie called Amadeus (1982) which has been rewarded as well. (Forman & Novák, 1994)

9 Film adaptation analysis

Miloš Forman was asked to film the adaptation of the E.L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* and Forman agreed. Trying to keep going on in the spirit of Doctorow's novel, Forman had to gather as many people as possible because of overcrowdedness of the novel. He also created a scenes where the fictional characters mix with the real ones in the same time but the main storyline is dedicated to Coalhouse Walker. Forman was absolutely keen on making the film that he had to read all the biography of the real characters that he cast in the film. Despite the fact that the director Dino Laurentis wanted to cast a movie star or at least somebody famous in order to make more money, Forman did not share this idea with him because he did not like working with movie stars and he rather sought somebody new, an unknown actor. He held the view that new actors lends an authentic feel to the film.

Forman had to cooperate with Doctorow due to the screenplay but Doctorow was a bit disappointed. Of course, such a complex piece of work cannot be fitted in two and half hours but Forman tried to do all his best to satisfy Doctorow that even a twenty-minute scene of the story of Emma Goldman had to be edited out. (Forman & Novák, 1994)

This chapter of the bachelor thesis contains the analysis of the film and the comparison with the Doctorow's novel. The main aim of this chapter is to comment on the adaptation as a complex piece of work and whether Forman made the film well or not.

9.1 Comparison of the film and the novel *Ragtime*

Firstly, it has to be said that Forman adapted the novel for the screen excellently. To make a film based on a novel or on any book has to be extremely demanding and it is obvious that all scenes from a book cannot appear in a film otherwise the film would have to last more than two or three hours.

The film storyline revolves mostly around the life of Coalhouse Walker, who is also the main character, and around the two families – Mother, Father, Mother's Younger Brother and Tateh and his daughter. The film begins with the scene of a black male, Coalhouse Walker, playing piano with a ragtime melody and with some motion pictures with the famous escapologist Houdini or Harry K. Thaw and Evelyn Nesbit. Obviously, Forman cast

these actors into the motion pictures to make the scenes more realistic as if the actors are the real historical persons which make a trustworthy authentic impression. For example, Houdini will appear only in these motion pictures and at the end of the film, so he will not meet the family as it is written in the novel. Father also does not travel to the Arctic with the Peary expedition and no one speaks about it in the film. Father stays the whole time on stage. The scene of Harry K. Thaw breaking into the residence of Stanford White opens a story and the police officer Rheinlander Waldo is introduced by White. Waldo appears in the film at the end negotiating and handling with Coalhouse Walker.

The situation about a new born baby and Sarah appears in the film much sooner than in the novel and starts the storyline of the fate of Coalhouse Walker. After a short introduction of the family, the event of murdering Stanford White in Madison Square Garden by Thaw comes up which is also the moment when Mother's Younger Brother gets to know Evelyn Nesbit and falls in love with her. Then there is a skip in scenes and Forman takes Coalhouse Walker playing ragtime melody again and a few shots about J.P. Morgan making an attempt on the President Roosevelt's life, Henry Ford's success in creating a new Model T, facts about new arriving immigrants or the campaign of the Vice-President. In other words he is trying to put as many facts from the novel into the film as possible even in such short shots. Then, the process with Thaw is going on and Evelyn was forced to testify for her husband under a circumstance that a huge amount of money will be given to her. But she receives only 25 thousand dollars. As soon as the trial ends, she arrives in the Lower East Side where she meets Tateh and his daughter. The daughter looks different, though, because in the book she is about six years old and has beautiful long black hair but in the film she looks younger and has curly brown hair. She does not talk in the book but on the other hand, she talks in the film. What also differs from the book is that Tateh's wife is shown in the storyline alive cheating on him. On the contrary, in the novel, she died.

And finally, Forman shows some shots from Coalhouse's career and how he meets the family. To compare Doctorow's novel, Coalhouse behaves more differently in the film. He laughs more and he does not act like a gentleman in every situation. Apparently, he seems more relaxed than in the novel. Both, the film and the novel, have the same scene when Coalhouse play piano in the family house and meets Mother's Younger Brother in common.

While Mother's Younger Brother was supposed to meet Evelyn in a room of Emma Goldman in the novel, Emma Goldman does not even pass the film, even though there should be a scene about Goldman in the film but was unfortunately edited out, and Evelyn and Mother's Younger Brother meet in Tateh's apartment. He would like to introduce Evelyn to his sister and brother-in-law but she will never show up, so the family neither know Evelyn's name nor what she looks like when they see each other on the beach in Atlantic City.

In the book, the leader of fire fighters, Willie Conklin, and his co-workers destroy and violate Coalhouse's car and two young boys are asked to look after his car until he comes back with another officer. In the film, the fire fighters only violate Coalhouse's car, then they destroy it when Coalhouse is in custody. And there are no boys to look after the car.

After this incident, Father is upset because of Coalhouse's behaviour that he showed less respect than Father thought, however, Father begs Sarah to have a talk with her fiancée to calm him down somehow. Because wanting to help her fiancée, Sarah decides to attend the Vice-President's speech and she mistakes him for the President when calling on him. Then, she is beaten and dies in her bed in family's house. That is what happened in the film. In comparison to the book, Sarah only overhears a talk between Father and Mother's Younger Brother and as a matter of fact, she dies in a hospital where she was taken when police officers had taken her down.

Before the family moves to Atlantic City, Coalhouse's team shows up in front of J.P. Morgan's house where they put a box with bombs or fireworks which they let explode. Originally, Mother's Younger Brother was supposed to throw a grenade into the building in order to kill guards.

In comparison with the novel, there is another scene that is different from the film. Tateh with her daughter enjoy holiday in Atlantic City, where the family spends a while as well, and he works on a film with Evelyn Nesbit who accompanies Tateh and The Little Girl. And this is the moment when Nesbit meets the family without knowing that they are related to Mother's Younger Brother, her ex-lover. To add, Nesbit did not even take a trip to Atlantic City, she has never been there with Tateh according to the novel.

To turn back to Coalhouse and his friends, they still occupy Morgan's residence and this is the moment when the police headmaster Rheinlander Waldo turns up. Originally, the situation was led by someone else – by the District Attorney Charles S. Whitman. Forman just skipped characters but the main idea remained the same.

At the very end of the film there is a scene with Coalhouse and Father talking about Coalhouse's situation. Father wants to know whether he has not seen Mother's Younger Brother and whether his brother-in-law is involved in this outrageous situation. Coalhouse denies it and expresses his desire to know something about his son and tells Father how he feels now. In the novel, Father actually knows that his brother-in-law is involved because he confesses him in J.P. Morgan's residence. After Coalhouse's friends are somewhere safe, Coalhouse gives up and only one shot is heard – originally he was shot more than once.

In the last scenes, the improvement of events and fates of Father, Thaw and Nesbit is revealed. Father will not die, at least not in the film. Thaw is released from imprisonment, although in the book, he escapes and is killed. Nothing about the fate of Mother's Younger Brother is acknowledged.

To express my personal opinion, Forman adapted the main characters as precisely as I imagined them. He chose suitable actors so that they would look the same or at least similar to their real protagonists. I would say that Forman was trying to find a suitable actor even for the main character, Coalhouse Walker, in order to look at least similar like the most famed composer of ragtime style Scott Joplin. As a matter of interest, some Czech actors, friends of Forman, played in this movie, for instance Pavel Landovský as a wooer of Tateh's wife.

Conclusion

The bachelor thesis called *E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime: History and Fiction* describes one of Doctorow's most famous novels. The work is divided in two parts: theoretical and practical part.

The theoretical part contains a few definitions about what the word *ragtime* means and, of course, something about the most famous representatives that time such as Scott Joplin. Despite this fact, the origin of ragtime is also mentioned because this kind of music comes from Harlem and was very popular especially among the black people which also describes Doctorow's novel. The main part of the theoretical part consists of notes about the author, Edgar Lawrence Doctorow. Living in New Rochelle, Doctorow wrote a story from the environment which he already knows very well. That is why the descriptions of setting and places contained in the novel seem so accurate and also why Doctorow still belongs to the best American authors.

The next part of the theoretical part is focused on Jewish American literature and its historical context. Southern literature is mentioned as well because there are similarities between these two directions – for example both focus on minorities in America, finding one's identity or on discrimination which was, and still is, a serious topic. In every historical context, either Jewish American literature or Southern literature, there are a few well-known authors who devote to earlier issues.

The practical part is mainly focused on the distinguishing between history and fiction. The first chapter is dealing with the summary of the plot which was not easy to adapt because of the complexity of the storyline of the novel. One part of this thesis also focuses on the deeper analysis of the novel *Ragtime* and classifying it to the historical context. The analysis of musical style and narrative technique is summarised in one chapter – it means that the chapter explains Doctorow's intention to present a piano play, contained in the storyline, in two different ways – with his left hand he sets the rhythm of historical events with real characters involved and contrary, with his right hand he sets the rhythm of made-up characters and events that get together with each other.

Another part covers the topic with the list of characters, their analysis and what they actually symbolise in the novel. For example, Father symbolises the old traditions of Americans and reluctance to change. On the other hand, Mother represents a transformation and willingness to do something about her life and to become an independent woman.

The most contributively part is called History and Fiction where the real characters and events are described and where the explanation what has actually happened and what have not is given. The real characters, taken from the real life, are distinguished and analysed with respect to the fact whether they ever met in real life or not. The very true story of the love triangle consisting of Evelyn Nesbit, Harry K. Thaw and Stanford White is described in the novel and came really true as well.

The last chapter is dedicated to Miloš Forman and his film adaptation of the novel *Ragtime*. Miloš Forman belongs to the best directors in the world and he also agreed to make this film as another masterpiece. The main aim of this chapter remains to compare the film with the novel and see whether such a director like Forman is able to adapt such a complex masterpiece. As a result, he made the film as similar as possible and to express my personal opinion, it is very hard to adapt a film which is based on such a complex novel with so many destinies of main characters. The main point is that Forman cooperated with Doctorow on the film and they had to agree on the screenplay which could be sometimes difficult to come to the same opinion or decision. On the other hand, Forman tried to chose actors so that they would look like the real persons who lived in our history. In my opinion, Forman selected people who reminded me of real-life persons, for instance Evelyn Nesbit, Harry Kendall Thaw, Harry Houdini or Stanford White. I consider his job spectacular. The last part of this thesis includes attachment where pictures from the film *Ragtime* can be found. These photos were taken when Miloš Forman was making the film which shows the interaction between actors and their director.

To sum up, Doctorow wrote a story about fictional and historical characters dancing together in the rhythm of staccato in the background of American society. The main contribution of this bachelor thesis is the analysis of the whole novel and closer look at how Doctorow could create such a complex story with so many storylines, hide earlier situation

of American society in his novel and combine fates of real-life human beings with fictional characters. No wonder that Doctorow remains one of the most respected authors ever.

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Attachment

Three photos from the autobiographical book by Miloš Forman are attached in this section. These photos originate from the film *Ragtime*. One could see Forman as a director and his cooperation with actors involved in the film.



1) Forman and Mandy Patinkin as Tateh/Baron Ashkenazy in *Ragtime* (Forman & Novák, 1994)



2) Forman and James Cagney as Rheinlander Waldo in *Ragtime* (Forman & Novák, 1994)



3) Forman and Elizabeth McGovern in Ragtime (Forman & Novák, 1994)