

# Loose ends – the chosen analysis



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Some people say that the difference between real life and stories, is that real life always contains loose ends, unfinished plots, and indescribable feelings. It is when authors such as Chaim Potok embody these inexpressible feelings in their works, that realism in literature is created. Through his plot, character relationships, setting and imagery, Potok creates a realistic view of Reuven and Danny's lives and friendship. Though the thorniness of Danny's relationship with his father is extreme, it speaks of realistic tensions.

The novel illustrates Danny's relationship with his father as unique and interesting, yet difficult and hard to explain, as real life relationships often are. Danny tells Reuven about his father, " For years his silence bewildered and frightened me, though I always trusted him, I never hated him," (278). Danny's paternal relationship is one of independent learning, as his father never teaches him life skills, but only the talmud. Parents often leave children to figure things out on their own, as a way to teach them about being self-sufficient and not having to rely on others. Danny also explains about how he feels his father is pressuring him into being a tzaddik by saying, " It's like a dynasty: If the son doesn't take the father's place, the dynasty falls apart," (129). Children grapple with the possibility of disappointing their parents, just like Danny doesn't want to disappoint his father by confessing his conflicting feelings about his future. Parents pin hopes on their children and sometimes fail to mask their disapproval when that child takes another path. When asked whether he would raise his child in silence, as he was raised, Danny responds with " Yes, if I can't find another way," (284). All Danny has to go on is the way that he was raised by his father. Facing a difficult decision, he chooses to use the method that he

has seen work in the past, and instead of passing on the role of tzaddik, he passes on his father's silence. Danny and his father's relationship, as expressed by Potok is based on difficulties that echo the tensions found in most parent-child relationships.

Potok also displays realism through his diction and imagery in his character portrayal. Reb Saunders, for example, is described as having “ a reputation for brilliance and compassion,” (112). Although Reb is seen for most of the novel as the antagonist, being the driving force in the separation of Reuven and Danny, towards the end, he is portrayed as more of a father figure. In real life relationships, someone's story has many sides, and Potok displays the many aspects of Reb Saunder in his writing, shining a light on both the tzaddik, and the father in him. Reuven's character also deepens, as Chaim has him express, “ Suddenly I had the feeling that everything around me was out of focus,” (72). Even from the beginning of the novel, Potok's characters begin to develop and come alive. Reuven's metaphorical “ blindness” helps him to see Danny, not only as a Hasid, but also as a boy of his own age. Danny expresses about his career, “ The people expect me to be their rabbi. My family has been their rabbi for six generations now,” (129). His tough decision to not be a tzaddik parallels the difficult decisions that many young adults make in their lifetime. Danny is forced to choose between his bloodline, and what he himself wants. Chaim Potok eloquently fabricates believable characters in his novel, and supports them with authentic dialogue.

The novel also expresses the well-known conflict between tradition and modernity, that is found in everyday life. Reb Saunders says in one of his

speeches, “ We are commanded to study His Torah, it is for this that we were created...not the world, but the people of Israel,” (132). To be a Jew, he argues, is to accept the destiny and the set of responsibilities that Jews receive by virtue of their birth. By dismissing the secular world around him, Saunders implies that a truly faithful Jew should retreat to an exclusively Jewish community, immerse himself in Jewish study, and pay little attention to anything in the outside world. David Malter also urges, “ I learned a long time ago, Reuven, that a blink of an eye in itself is nothing, but the eye that blinks, that is something,” (201). In this passage, Malter explains that awareness of the world’s suffering makes a person empathize with others and therefore appreciate all life and every detail of God’s creation. He acknowledges the need for both religion and connection to the external world. Saunder’s opinion about tradition seems to shift towards the end of the novel, as he asks Danny, “ You will remain an observer of the commandments?” (281) He asks this, not only to Danny, but also to himself, as he tries to accept that his son will not be the next rabbi. His acceptance of Danny’s decision to become a professional psychologist suggests that he recognizes one can maintain ties with the outside world and be observant of one’s faith. Just as much as Jewish-American literature centers around traditional values versus American culture, Potok’s story does as well.

Chaim Potok does an excellent job at recreating and capturing a real-life issue into a novel. By doing so, he reveals to us the harsh reality of relationships and the immense effort required to surpass the conflict between tradition and modernity. However, Potok manages to Potok

perfectly describes an imperfect world, with all the authentic tensions and disputes contained in real life.