FIGHTING FATHERS/SAVING SONS: THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND ART IN PAUL AUSTER'S *NEW YORK TRILOGY*

by

JOAN ALCUS DUPRE

A Dissertation submitted to The Graduate Faculty in English
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Abstract

FIGHTING FATHERS/SAVING SONS:
THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND ART IN PAUL AUSTER'S *NEW YORK TRILOGY*

by

JOAN ALCUS DUPRE

Advisor: William P. Kelly

This study offers a new reading of the three novels that make up Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*: *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*. My claim is that in order to fully appreciate Auster's fiction, it is essential that we understand how the relationship between fathers and sons functions for Auster on three levels. The first level is biological paternity. We must be aware, I contend, of the significance of Auster's troubled relationship with his biological father, for this uneasy bond underlies — and is manifested in — all of Auster's work

The second level is literary paternity**,** which involves Auster's relationship with his literary forefathers, especially Cervantes, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Poe. These literary fathers are the ghosts that haunt the *Trilogy* — the positive father figures Auster wrestles with and ultimately embraces.

The third level is ethical and aesthetic paternity, the level on which Auster's progeny, his characters, operate. These are the father and son figures who are also detectives and writers who embark on quests to save — or at least fathom — a son or a father. These characters and their quests reflect Auster's struggle with his biological and literary fathers and his ethical and aesthetic agenda.

The novels in the *Trilogy* are fundamentally about identity: who we are, especially if we are writers, and how we should function in a world where random events seem to govern our existence and the chasms between us seem unbridgeable, even (or perhaps especially) with language. The novels explore the themes of loss and solitude — and the confusion we may feel in this postmodern age when the lines between reality and illusion are hopelessly obscured, the belief in the value of art is tenuous, and the battle to live as a solitary writer without severing human contact and destroying oneself can be torturous.

Finally, however, the *Trilogy* validates the heroism of its protagonists and ends with the very bridging of chasms that seems impossible at the beginning of the first novel. Therefore, this study underscores what I submit is foregrounded in the novels: the human relationships and the art that endures.

THIS DISSERTATION IS DEDICATED

WITH LOVE TO MY DAUGHTER,

JOCELYN LEIGH DUPRE

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Abbreviations

AH	*The Art of Hunger*
BR and F	*The Blithedale Romance and Fanshawe,* Centenary Edition
BI	*The Book of Illusions*
BF	*Brooklyn Follies*
CG	*City of Glass*
CLT	*In the Country of Last Things*
DQ	*Don Quixote*
G	*Ghosts*
HTM	*Hand to Mouth*
IS	*The Invention of Solitude*
L	*Leviathan*
LR	*The Locked Room*
MC	*The Music of Chance*
MP	*Moon Palace*
MV	*Mr. Vertigo*
NYT	*The New York Trilogy*
ON	*Oracle Night*
T	*Timbuktu*
TS	*Travels in the Scriptorium*

Introduction: Paul Auster's Ethical and Aesthetic Quest: Fathers and Sons in Conflict

Most writers lead double lives.
Paul Auster, Hand to Mouth

You do not stop hungering for your father's love**,** even after you are grown up.
Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

Much has been written about the three novels that make up *The New York Trilogy* since they were first published in the mid-eighties. Most of the criticism employs the usual suspects, Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault (to name three), and focuses on Auster's postmodern strategies, including the subversion of the detective genre,[1] the confusion of identities, and intertextuality.[2] Scholars have not, however, fully explored how Auster uses alter-egos and embedded texts to wrestle with the father figures who at various times mourn, abandon, torture, nurture, challenge, and embark on quests to rescue their sons, while the sons seek protection from, labor to fathom, or try to save the fathers. Therefore, the goal of this dissertation is the illumination of the struggles with, for, and against the fathers who, I will argue, represent for Auster both a biological father who did not support his son's literary ambitions and the literary men whose legacy he is claiming for his own.

There is a creative artist, usually a writer, at the center of all of Auster's novels. In the novels in the *Trilogy,* the battle with literary fathers takes place on more than one level. On

[1] See Carl Malmgren, Jeffrey Nealon, Patricia Merivale, Norma Rowen, Alison Russell, Madeline Sorapure, Richard Swope.

[2] Carsten Springer is an exception. He uses psychological and sociological theories to talk about crises of identity in Auster's work.

the primary level of the narrative, Daniel Quinn[3] in *City of Glass,* a former poet and current hack mystery writer whose wife and young son are dead, tries to reclaim the role of father by taking on the identity of Paul Auster, detective (who does not exist, though there is a writer by that name working on an essay on *Don Quixote*) in order to save a damaged poet-son from a deranged professor-father. Though Quinn does not succeed in his quest to save the son (who may not be in real danger after all) and in fact seems to succumb to madness[4] in the end, he does reclaim the role of poet: "He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower" (156).[5]

In *Ghosts,* the battle with literary fathers takes place on the primary level of narrative when Blue discovers that he is as much the writer to be watched as Black. Although Black and Blue are, I will argue, aspects of the same man, it is Black who plays the role of father in need of a son while Blue is a son whose biological father is dead and whose detective father/mentor Brown turns away from the young detective in his time of need.

In *The Locked Room*, the first-person, unnamed narrator (Fanshawe's alter-ego) takes his friend's place when Fanshawe disappears. Not only does the narrator become husband to Fanshawe's wife and father to his son, but he is transformed from an underachieving writer (a kind of son-figure) envious of his friend's brilliance to composer of the *Trilogy* itself: "The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end

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[3] Auster used the pseudonym Quinn when he wrote book reviews for what he calls a "shoddily put together publication" (*HTM* 48).

[4] Madness is ubiquitous in Auster's fiction. One of the sources of the trope is surely Auster's schizophrenic sister: "She was [as a child] a miniature Ophelia, already doomed, it would seem, to a life of constant inner struggle" (*IS* 24).

[5] This description of Quinn's poetry may remind us of the language poetry that became popular in academic circles in the eighties. It may also be worth noting that one of Auster's college friends, Bob Perelman, is one of the more successful and well-known of the language poets.

inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. These three stories are finally the same story" (346).

The quest of Quinn and Blue and Fanshawe's alter-ego is to fathom the father. Quinn must understand Peter Stillman Sr., the deranged professor, in order to save Peter Stillman Jr. Blue must understand Black (and Thoreau) in order to either solve the case or escape from it. The narrator of *The Locked Room* must understand Fanshawe (his double, but also, in a sense, his father) in order to write his biography, to feel justified in supplanting his talented but disturbed friend, and to write the *Trilogy*.

As compelling and revealing as the battles for personal and literary ascendancy (*author*-ity) fought by Quinn and Blue and Fanshawe's double are, the embedded texts and literary discourse worlds that function at another level of narrative in the *Trilogy* (as they do in all of Auster's novels) reveal Auster's struggle with his own paternal and literary inheritance — and his desire to be a father/hero. In *City of Glass*, for instance, it is primarily Cervantes whom Auster invokes as literary father. In *Ghosts* it is Henry David Thoreau, and in *The Locked Room*, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Edgar Allan Poe, as father of the detective story, haunts the entire *Trilogy*. My claim in this thesis is that the *Trilogy* is ultimately about the struggle of the artist, in this case Auster, to come to terms with his own personal history and to believe in the value of his art. This struggle involves battles with literary fathers who threaten to render the author at best derivative and at worst impotent. In his 1967 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion," John Barth wrote of the "used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" in fiction.

The fight to break free from overpowering influence is of course one in which all writers must engage. What makes Auster unique in this regard are two things. The first is that the writer's conflict is so clearly reflected in his fiction. The second is that Auster's search for his own absent father is detailed in the novelist's first work of literary prose, the memoir *The Invention of Solitude*, which he wrote shortly after his father's death. Auster is clear about how deeply it pained him to have an aloof and indifferent father who had no respect for his son's career as a writer. Sadly, the elder Auster did not live long enough to see his son's great success as a literary figure.

Though my argument applies to all of Auster's works, including the ten novels published after *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*, my primary focus will be on the *Trilogy*. The reason for this is twofold. One, these three novels, taken together, are still the most complex, multi-layered, and thought-provoking of Auster's fictional works. Two, they are a door into Auster's later fictions, all of which share much in common with the *Trilogy*. The struggle between fathers and sons that is so powerful in these first three novels continues to manifest in Auster's later works, including his most recent novel, *Travels in the Scriptorium*.

It is the triumph of life and art (in the form of stories) that makes Auster's novels so compelling in spite of their dark themes. In reading these works of fiction, one feels renewed, refreshed, inspired to go on. Even if we identify with the characters' sense of the world as filled with random, chance events, we also sense in the telling of the story a determination (on the part of the novelist and/or narrator, if not on the part of the protagonist) to find some meaning in the midst of the chaos. This meaning is primarily in the form of the connection between human beings that storytelling — or bearing witness —

can effect. The quests that Auster's protagonists embark on may be aborted, but in the end they arrive in a new place that I will argue is a fulfillment of their mission as writers. Even Quinn, who appears to dissolve into madness as he goes too far in testing the limits of human endurance, leaves behind his notebook as testimony to his quest. Though Auster makes much of identity as accident, the first person narrator of *The Locked Room*, who we learn is the composer of the three novels that make up the *Trilogy*, clearly achieves a hard-won selfhood.

Auster's *Trilogy* foregrounds the writer's quest for relevance. The need to inherit a legacy — to see oneself as a descendant of a line of forefathers — is essential for all writers. For Auster, however, the giving birth to one's father is a crucial part of his artistic agenda. He gives birth to Samuel Auster when he memorializes him in *The Invention of Solitude* where the following quotation from Kierkegaard appears: "He who is willing to work gives birth to his own father" (*IS* 68). Furthermore, Auster gives birth to his literary forefathers (Borges would say that he "creates his own precursors") when he integrates their voices by embedding their texts in his own. In a passage from *Pinocchio,* which Auster quotes later in the same memoir, we can see how his ethical and aesthetic agenda mirrors that of the puppet boy whom Collodi brings to life: "And it is in this darkness, where the puppet will eventually find the courage to save his father and thereby bring about his transformation into a real boy, that the essential creative act of the book takes place" (*IS* 163).

As other critics have noted, after Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault declared the author dead or absent, the relationship between writers of serious literature and their work — and the relationship between these writers and their readers — had to change.

Postmodern novels such as Auster's, which play with issues of authorial identity (by blurring the identities of characters, embedding texts, and using facts from the author's life in the fiction), imply a relation between writer and reader that foregrounds the life (not the death) and the artistic agenda of the author. It is not coincidental that Auster's novels often involve a quest, a narrative trajectory that, it seems, should have died in the postmodern age along with the belief in enlightenment progress and a coherent self. My claim is that the quest (this narrative teleology) is alive because it is a mode of reflecting the quest (the agenda) of the writer. The fact that the quests in Auster's fictions are often aborted may indicate the postmodern writer's ambivalence about his artistic agenda (in an age when all grand agendas are suspect), his anxiety about the impact his art may — or may not — have, and his uncertainty about how his fiction will be received by a jaded public.

It is a commonplace to claim that fiction writers have their obsessions, which tend to play out again and again, in a variety of ways, in their novels and stories. It is customary also to declare that fiction writers have their (stated or unstated) aesthetic principles. They are said to choose to, or find themselves compelled to, write novels of ideas, novels of character, novels of action, or perhaps some combination of the above. Writing out of an American male literary tradition fathered by Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Thoreau, and Melville, Auster's novels are all, in part, about America — the America of the Puritans (*City of Glass*), the abolitionists (*Ghosts*), Columbus (*The Locked Room*), the frontier (*Moon Palace*), the Statue of Liberty (*Leviathan*), vaudeville (*Mr. Vertigo*), silent film (*The Book of Illusions*), hard-boiled detective fiction (*Oracle Night*), and pre-9/11 New York City (*Brooklyn Follies*). But Auster is also a descendent of Cervantes, Kafka and Beckett,

and so his literary fathers are also European.[6]

Auster is different from American male contemporary writers like Updike and Roth, in that he is not primarily interested in the social scene. Though the moon landing and the anti-war protests of the sixties play a part in *Moon Palace*, and Ben Sachs in *Leviathan* (who goes to prison rather than fight in Vietnam) becomes a benign terrorist[7] to protest the direction of the country, it is not until *Brooklyn Follies* that contemporary (or near contemporary) politics plays a leading role in his fiction. The three novels of the *Trilogy* take place, for the most part, in contemporary New York City, but the worlds Auster creates in these fictions are severely circumscribed. He is much more interested in the inward quest.

Auster's texts have been accused of being more concerned with ideas than characters, but that is only partially true, for the ideas they explore involve identity and ethics — who we are and how we should function in the world. Characters, even when they are clearly allegorical, like Black and Blue in *Ghosts*, face existential crises that we recognize as human. Auster renders the experience of loss (particularly of fathers and sons) and the quest to become a father/hero in a way that is heartbreakingly real, in spite of the sometimes unreal circumstances in his fictions. The solitude that comes with loss is poignantly evoked, as is the very real struggle with a language that seeks to forge connections but is too often not up to the task. Characters such as Jim Nashe in *The Music of Chance* wander aimlessly, while others travel with the intention of comprehending or being reunited with the father: Daniel Quinn trails Peter Stillman Sr. in order to figure out

[6] The fact that Auster began in the seventies translating poetry from the French and then lived for several years in France after college certainly has contributed to his European sensibility, which has made him more popular overseas than he is in America.

[7] The oxymoron is appropriate, I believe, in that Sachs makes sure that no one is hurt when he blows up replicas of the Statue of Liberty.

what the old professor is planning and thwart him if he tries to hurt his son; Blue follows Black to come to some understanding of the enigma he has been hired to watch. Auster's ideal reader, I want to suggest, sinks into despair with the lost souls and rises in hope with the questers, all the time recognizing that the characters whose travels we follow are fathers and sons fighting to stay alive, tell their stories, and redeem themselves by saving another.

Auster seems of late to have given in to the title of novelist, but in the past he has rejected the appellation, claiming that storytelling — not creating the social worlds that exist in most books given the name novel — is his aim. Between 1970 and 1980 Auster wrote poetry, essays and plays in the style of one of his literary forefathers, Samuel Beckett. He also wrote, for much needed cash, a mystery novel called *Squeeze Play* under the pseudonym Paul Benjamin (Auster's first and middle names). And finally, he made his living during these years (for the most part) translating various texts from the French. *Squeeze Play* was published, but remained virtually undistributed until Auster included it in his 1997 memoir *Hand to Mouth.* The plays are not very successful as dramas, but *Laurel and Hardy Go to Heaven* became, in much-altered form, the novel *Music of Chance*, and *Blackouts* became *Ghosts*. And though it is the case that Auster wrote no poetry after 1980, he says that he had the ideas for some of his novels early on and that he was trying his hand at prose while he was publishing poetry. The fact that he stopped writing poetry altogether, however, is interesting, especially in light of the fact that he received prizes for his verse.[8] In any case, he tells the story of requiring a form more expansive to express the contradictions, the ambiguity, he wanted to represent. Apparently the circumscribed world of his condensed poetic lines did not allow Auster to manifest the negative capability that

[8] In 1978 Auster received a grant for poetry from Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) and in1979 the National Endowment for the Arts awarded him a literary fellowship for poetry.

his fiction would become known for. I wonder also if the acclaim for his poetry did not impress his father enough to make Auster feel some vindication for his chosen livelihood. Successful novelists, after all, are for the most part more famous and more richly compensated than poets.

It was at this juncture between poetry and prose[9] in the late seventies that Auster's first marriage, to writer Lydia Davis, fell apart and his father died. Auster had a young son, Daniel, whom he was terrified of losing in the divorce,[10] and severe money problems (the details he recounts in *Hand to Mouth)* that were solved by an inheritance from his father. Before the windfall, however, Auster says that he had stopped creating original work, though he continued to translate the work of others. This is one of two dry spells for Auster. After publishing eight novels in the span of ten years, beginning with *City of Glass* in 1985 and ending with *Mr. Vertigo* in 1994, Auster didn't publish another novel until 1999 when *Timbuktu*, a lesser work, was issued. Auster was not idle during this time, however. Taking advantage of his rising fame as a novelist, his publishers reissued *The Art of Hunger* with additional essays and published the memoir *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure,* which includes the early plays, the detective novel *Squeeze Play*, and a baseball game Auster created and tried to market in his early hungry days. More significant, though, was Auster's foray into the world of film. *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* came out the year after *Mr. Vertigo* (1995), and *Lulu on the Bridge* was distributed in 1998**.** Although Auster does not make a point of these years being lean ones for fiction, the fact is that many of Auster's characters fear they will never work again, stop producing art, or

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[9] See Finklestein for Auster's transition from poetry to prose.

[10] Auster writes of his dread upon hearing about a child, Etan Patz, who had gone missing. The boy disappeared on his way to school and was later found murdered. Auster lived not far from the boy at this time and the image of the child on posters in the neighborhood haunted the young father and author (*IS* 101).

give up hope of ever fulfilling their early promise, which tells us that this is a primal fear at work in these fictions**.**

In the background here is Hawthorne hiding away for years in his study not showing his work to anyone and being distraught over the publication of his *Fanshawe*; Melville living out his last years as a forgotten writer, not having published any fiction since *The Confidence Man* in 1857; Kafka's instructing his friend Max Brod to destroy the writer's letters upon his death; J.D. Salinger retiring to New Hampshire and refusing to publish again. These and other figures fascinate Auster when they forfeit fame (or even readers) to work in obscurity. For Melville, of course, the obscurity was neither chosen nor deserved, which leads Auster to include this literary father, in some manner, in all of his novels.

Another theme that clearly has its source in Auster's life experience is the unexpected sudden inheritance: the narrator of *The Locked Room* receives the money for Fanshawe's work; MS Fogg in *Moon Palace* receives money from his grandfather Julian Barber; Jim Nashe in *Music of Chance* inherits money from his estranged father; Ben Sachs in *Leviathan* finds Reed DiMaggio's money; David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions* receives payment from the insurance company when his wife and children die in a plane crash; John Trause in *Oracle Night* leaves money in his will to Sidney Orr. The unexpected windfalls in all of these cases bring freedom and guilt, themes that pervade Auster's fiction.[11]

The loss of lovers and children is another theme in Auster's work that clearly comes from his life experience. Quinn loses a wife and son (*CG*); Blue loses his fiancé (*G*); Fanshawe gives up his wife and son (*LR*); Julian Barber abandons his family (*MP*);

[11] A different kind of windfall came to Auster when he was a boy. His mother's sister and her husband, scholar and translator Allen Mandelbaum, were moving to Italy and needed a place to store their books. Auster's boyhood home in New Jersey was the serendipitous spot chosen for storage. "These boxes of books," Auster says, "probably changed my life. Without them, I doubt I ever would have dreamed of becoming a writer" (*AH* 292).

Solomon Barber loses Emily Fogg (*MP*); MS loses Kitty Wu and the child they may have had (*MP*); Jim Nashe abandons his daughter (*MC*); Ben Sachs loses his wife Franny (*L*); Master Yehudi loses Mrs. Witherspoon (*MV*); David Zimmer loses his wife and sons and later Alma Grund (*BI*); John Trause loses Grace (*ON*); and Nathan Glass loses his wife (*BF*). The intensity of feeling involved in all of these losses, I submit, is a result of their having arisen from the depths of the author's psyche. Auster confirms the latter part of my assertion in the following passage: "I'm not terribly interested in trying to track down the source of my ideas. Writing…helps me relieve some of the pressure caused by these buried secrets. Hidden memories, traumas, childhood scars — there's no question that novels emerge from those inaccessible parts of ourselves" (*AH* 295).

Another layer of the palimpsest that is Auster'work is certainly his task as a translator: How does the translator know where he ends and other begins? If translation is rewriting another's words in another language, is the work produced in some sense original? These questions — and some tentative, provisional answers — are reflected in the blurring of identities in Auster's fiction. In addition, if the writer being translated is one whom Auster holds in high esteem, he may function as a father figure, too. This is surely the case for Auster when he translates Sartre, Mallarme, Celan, Jabes, and Joubert.

Most of Auster's translation work, however, was drudgery and, as I have noted, he did in fact fear that his days as a producer of original creative work was over in the late seventies**.** What allowed him to move out of this dark space was seeing a dance performance and being moved to write about it. The result was the prose poem "White Spaces" (later collected in *Disappearances*, 1988, and in *Collected Poems*, 2004). It is telling that it was moving out into the world, not inward, that broke down the wall for

Auster. There was a longer piece, however, that served as a bridge between Auster's poetry and his fiction, and that was *The Invention of Solitude.* He was able, after publishing this biographical, autobiographical, philosophical meditation, to write *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986), the three novels that became *The New York Trilogy.*

The death of the apparently healthy Sam Auster at sixty-seven was a shock to the young writer (he was then in his early thirties and his son Daniel was eighteen months old) who had spent his life craving the attention of his cold, distant father. It is not surprising, then, that the father/son theme is ubiquitous in Auster's fiction. We learn many salient facts about Auster's father in *The Invention of Solitude*, but the most significant one is that, when Sam was a young boy, his mother shot his father to death. Though it is clear that she was guilty of the charge of murder, Anna Auster was acquitted because of extenuating circumstances (Harry Auster was apparently a philanderer and Anna Auster a hard-working immigrant mother who gained the sympathy of the jury) and allowed to raise her four sons who, with their mother, remained a close-knit group guarding a terrible secret. The destructive power of guilty secrets is another Auster theme, as is confronting — or running from — painful memories. The emotional deadness of Sam Auster, so hurtful to his son, is poignantly evoked in *The Invention of Solitude*. The many meanings of "alone" are explored and we are led to understand that solitude, though often painful, is not necessarily so, for it is often the precondition for creative production.

Auster's estrangement from his father clearly leaves him with a hunger for a father figure,

and that hunger is manifested in his fiction.[12] In addition, the fact that Auster lost his biological father at nearly the same time that he in some sense lost his young son because of the dissolution of his marriage could only have compounded the psychic effects of his grief. The fact that children are threatened or lost in much of Auster's fiction clearly has resonance beyond the fictional frame.

After agreeing on a child-sharing arrangement with his ex-wife and fellow writer Lydia Davis, Auster settled into a solitude unlike any he had yet experienced. He describes this as a very dark time, but one that, like many enforced solitudes, allowed him to test the limits of his endurance: "Christmas Eve, 1979. He[13] is in New York, alone in his little room at 6 Varick Street….He cannot call it home, but for the past nine months it is all he has had….The toilet is down the hall, but he uses it only when he has to shit. Pissing he does in the sink" (*IS* 77). Auster writes of climbing the ten flights of stairs when the elevator goes out and of the dysfunctional radiator, which blasts heat during the day and turns off at night. "In the void between the moment he opens the door and the moment he begins to reconquer the emptiness," he writes, "his mind flails in a wordless panic. It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole" (*IS* 77).

This sense of "the void," the attendant "panic," and the sense of disappearing will appear many times in Auster's fiction, as will his experience of the world outside his mind

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[12] Another fact is relevant here. Auster's parents divorced when he was a senior in high school and he and his mother and sister moved to an apartment in the Weequahic section of Newark. (*HTM* 17-18). Though Auster does not describe this as a painful time, the physical distance from his father could only have compounded Auster's sense of alienation from the man he wanted so desperately to notice him.

[13] Here Auster refers to himself in the third person.

as unreal. "The outer world," he writes, "the tangible world of materials and bodies, has come to seem no more than an emanation of his mind. He feels himself sliding through events, hovering like a ghost around his own presence, as if he were living somewhere to the side of himself — not really here, but not anywhere else either" (*IS* 78). This sense of being outside oneself is one that many of Auster's characters experience.

The next passage prepares us for Auster's trope of the locked room, which appears not only in the novel of that name, but in one form or another in nearly all of Auster's fiction. "A feeling of having been locked up," he reflects, "and at the same time of being able to walk through walls….These four walls hold only the signs of his own disquiet, and in order to find some measure of peace in these surroundings, he must dig more and more deeply into himself" (*IS* 78-79). And finally, there is the idea that the room — and the solitude it provides — is the necessary condition for the kind of self-awareness required by a philosophical writer: "The world has shrunk to the size of this room for him and for as long as it takes him to understand it, he must stay where he is. Only one thing is certain: he cannot be anywhere until he is here" (*IS* 79).

In addition, the trope of testing the limits is manifested in this memoir and in Auster's novels. The physical discomfort (the cold, the ten flights, the bathroom down the hall), Auster says, "does not disturb him. But it has the effect of keeping him off balance, of prodding him into a state of constant inner watchfulness" (*IS* 78). Whether it is possible to be so accepting of the lack of basic comfort is questionable, especially when "during the weekends, the heat is off altogether, both day and night, and there have been times lately when he has sat at his table, trying to write, and could not feel the pen in his hand anymore" (*IS* 78). However, as we meet Auster's protagonists and find that they too test

the limits of endurance, we come to understand that regardless of the physical discomfort, Auster and his characters see this kind of asceticism as an opportunity for a manner of spiritual growth.[14]

A year and a half after his father's death and his separation from his first wife, Auster met and married Siri Hustvedt, with whom he later had a daughter.[15] All of this is important in so far as it is reflected in Auster's fiction, and he remarks in an interview that Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass* is who Auster would have become had this new love not come into his life: "I think of City of Glass as an homage to Siri, as a love letter in the form of a novel. I tried to imagine what would have happened to me if I hadn't met her, and what I came up with was Quinn. Perhaps my life would have been something like his" (*AH* 313).

It has often been said that one of the ways humans have always borne the burdens of consciousness is with narrative of one kind or another. My contention is that Auster's postmodern narratives, though they employ narrative strategies peculiar (at least in the extent and purpose of their use) to postmodern fiction, still function in the way that narratives have always functioned — i.e., they help us to make sense of the world we live in, to understand more fully what it means to be human. Though chance seems to govern much of the action in Auster's fiction, a careful reading shows that (in spite of the fact that most of the characters seem rudderless and lacking in affect) it is the choices that characters

[14] Note also that Auster writes of Holderlin, schizophrenic in the second half of his life, living "alone in the tower built, for him, by Zimmer, the carpenter from Tubingen — zimmer, which in German means room" (*IS* 99). Auster's character Zimmer, when he saves Fogg in *MP,* plays a role similar to the one Auster ascribes to the nineteenth-century carpenter: "If not for Zimmer's generosity and kindness, it is possible that Holderlin's life would have ended prematurely" (*IS* 100). (Zimmer, himself in need of saving, reappears as a main character in *BI*.)

[15] Sophie Auster is now a singer/songwriter who recently appeared with her father at Barnes and Noble Union Square, New York. City.

make (choices that emanate from their desire to fulfill their quests) that determine many of the outcomes.

In three chapters, I will offer close readings of the three novels in Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*. At the end of all three novels, the reader is left in an epistemological void which, it would seem, renders any action hollow. *City of Glass* ends with the narrator (purportedly a friend of the Character Paul Auster's) telling us that Daniel Quinn, writer turned amateur detective, has disappeared, and that the red notebook he leaves behind tells "only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand" (158). The detective, in effect, cuts out, leaving the (sensitive) reader to solve the case.

At the end of *Ghosts,* detective Blue, after leaving the writer Black lying dead, or nearly so, on the floor of his Brooklyn Heights apartment, goes back home and reads Black's book. Kept in suspense throughout — along with Blue — regarding the contents of the manuscript, our curiosity is not satisfied. The reader, then, in order to solve the case, has to identify with Blue fully enough to learn all his lessons. But the story, the narrator tells us, does not end until Blue leaves the room. We do not learn where Blue goes, only that the narrator wishes him bon voyage (232).

The Locked Room, the third novel in the *Trilogy,* ends with the narrator (writer, amateur detective) tossing the crumpled pages of his friend Fanshawe's book into a trash can on the platform of a train station. As in *Ghosts*, the manuscript is read by the narrator, but the contents are not shared with the reader. "If I say nothing about what I found there," he tells us, "it is because I understood very little" (370). If we take him at his word we must assume that the narrator does not understand Fanshawe's manuscript because it is the writing of a madman. But the narrator himself warns us not to take him at his word: "I

could be wrong, however. I was hardly in a condition to be reading anything at the moment, and my judgment is possibly askew. I was there, I read those words with my own eyes, and yet I find it hard to trust in what I am saying" (371).

Throughout the *Trilogy,* the advisability of trusting one's "own eyes" is held up for examination. What seem to be facts turn out to be lies, and what seems like madness may in fact be wisdom. When the narrator says that in spite of the unintelligibility of Fanshawe's writing, "the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity" (370), and that "it is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it" (370), we are reminded (not so strangely) of Auster's postmodern technique. "He had answered the question," the narrator says of his friend and alter-ego, "by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again" (370). He could of course be talking about Auster himself and the three interwoven tales of the *Trilogy.*

In spite of the indeterminacy of these texts, however, and in spite of the epistemological void in which we are left at the end of the novels, the questions we are left with (about the meaning of action, connection, truth) are questions that if we read carefully we will find have been at least partly answered by the texts themselves. We are being asked to pay close attention to places in the novels where characters face moments of truth (and moments of falsehood — the text plays with the question of the difference between the two). These moments of truth are times when characters are alternately demobilized and urged to act and they instruct us in the ways of reading these texts.

The fog of identity in the three novels of the *Trilogy* — the blurring of boundaries between characters (and between Author Auster and Character Auster) — keeps

foregrounded the question of who is performing the action, or passively waiting for something to happen, and why he chooses to do this and not that, given who he is and how he conceives of himself and his "role" in the drama. An analysis of the relationship between the author of these novels and his characters; the relationship between the characters, the author, and the reader; and a close examination of the fictional quests that frustrate the characters (and often the reader) will yield, I submit, a deeper understanding of the dynamics and significance of postmodern reading and writing.

Auster's texts highlight the nature and role of identity (what does it mean to have a double or an alter-ego — to be a father and/or a son?); time and memory (how does who the characters were in the past determine who they are now — and how much courage does it take to remember?); solitude (is the narrator of the *Trilogy* really alone when his own voice is saturated with the voices of his literary fathers?); illusion (what is reality and how can the characters in these fictions tell the difference between reality and illusion?); language (is there a world outside of these words?); and chance (if there is no pattern, then why do I bother looking for clues?).

The protagonists in the *Trilogy* must ask all these questions because, as detectives of a sort, it is their *job* to know: to watch, wait, decipher clues, gather and sift through evidence, and come to conclusions about emerging patterns of behavior so that they can predict what the object of their surveillance will do next. By working to understand their pasts and their relation to fathers and sons, some of the characters at least are able to make sense of what seems incomprehensible.

The question of who the writer is, what it is that he actually *does,* what kind of *authority* his name carries, and what his relationship is with his readers, arises again and again in

these novels. In all three novels, it could be said that there is but one (male) character – one grand multiple personality who is also Paul Auster, author of the *Trilogy*. Auster keeps shifting the ground we stand on, so that the uncertainty his characters live with is our uncertainty too. We are in fact confronted with texts that refuse to yield even partial answers to their riddles unless we agree to play our part in the dramas.

The three tales (which are all, as the narrator of *The Locked Room* tells us, "finally the same story") contain moments of truth that require the survivor/narrator to move beyond language into action — though he must never forget that the world in which he acts is one in which "lives seems to veer abruptly from one thing to another" and where "nothing is ever known, and inevitably we come to a place quite different from the one we set out for" (297).

The relationship between self-knowledge and *knowing what to do* in a world in which there is an ever present "randomness…the vertigo of pure chance" (*LR* 351) is finally what the moments of truth are about. "For when anything can happen," the narrator of *The Locked Room* tells us, "that is the precise moment when words begin to fail" (355). And even if the words come, the same narrator says: "That does not necessarily make the words important. I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle" (346).

If the struggle in the postmodern age (and for the postmodern fiction writer) is indeed different in some way, perhaps this anecdote from Umberto Eco can serve to illustrate the difference:

> A man…loves a very sophisticated woman and knows he cannot say to her, “I love you madly,” because he knows that she knows (and that he knows that she knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still…he can say, “As Barbara Cartland would put it, ‘I love you madly.’” And…he will have said what he wanted to say…that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. (qtd. in Barth *Further Fridays* 122-3)

This little story, it seems to me, describes not only the way that love can survive in a world of lost innocence, but the way fiction writers can create characters who embark on journeys knowing that their quests (like the lover’s declaration of love) are different from those of the past. The fact that under these circumstances, quests (even unfulfilled quests) are still integral to these narratives says something important, I think, about the nature of narrative and the agenda of the author. This is especially true since, although the initial quests may be aborted, there is some redemption — even if it is only for the narrator who serves as witness and tells the story. This suggests to me that Auster is interested in representing — or at least in exploring the nature of — the postmodern ethic which emerges from these tales.

It is my suggestion that Auster’s novels are asking for the kind of deliberate reading that Blue, the private detective in *Ghosts,* cannot quite master. When Blue sees that Black is reading *Walden,* the detective picks up a copy and tries to read the text, but he cannot make any sense of it until he comes across a passage where Thoreau insists that books must be read as deliberately as they are written. Blue is somewhat enlightened by this directive, but as the narrator tells us, he can’t quite

"read the book in the spirit in which it asks to be read," and so will not allow himself to be altered by the experience (194). The texts we will be looking at are all asking for this kind of deliberate reading, and like Eco's lovers, the readers and the writer of these texts are in a relationship that, because it takes place in this historical moment, is both ironic and sincere.

In the title essay from *The Art of Hunger*, Auster makes a claim about a book published in 1890 by Knut Hamsun that could be made about Auster's fiction: "It is…an art that is indistinguishable from the life of the artist who makes it. That is not to say an art of autobiographical excess, but rather, an art that is the direct expression of the effort to express itself. In other words, an art of hunger: an art of need, of necessity, of desire" (18).

The postmodern nature of the quest is reflected more in the fact that the quest is aborted than in any alterations of the quest motif itself. The main characters in the *Trilogy* function as postmodern heroes of sorts (even though they alternate between passivity and active engagement) and thus the choices they make are just as important (if not more important) to the outcome of the action than the chance events that inspire the quests or serve as obstacles to their fulfillment. Auster's narrative strategies in the *Trilogy*: the blurring, the embedding, and the questing, instruct us how to read these texts, and shed light on Auster's artistic agenda and the role of art in the historical moment.

Chapter One: Cervantes & Auster/Quixote & Quinn: Biological and LiteraryPaternity in *City of Glass*

To a greater or lesser degree, every novel is autobiographical. What is interesting, however, is how the work of the imagination intersects with reality.
Paul Auster, *The Art of Hunger*

The relationship between Paul Auster and his father Samuel Auster has had a profound influence on the writing life of the author. This influence can be seen in all of Auster's work, but in this chapter I will show how it is manifested in the first work of serious fiction that he published, *City of Glass*. Although all writers, consciously or not, seek role models or author figures that they take on as literary parents, the fact that Auster felt rejected by his biological father compelled him, perhaps more than others, not only to seek out father figures in the world of literature and wrestle with them in ways that are manifested in his fiction, but also to create protagonists who embark on quests[16] to understand an alter-ego/father-figure in order to save a son (*City of Glass*), destroy an alter-ego/father figure in order to claim the authority of a writer (*Ghosts*), or fathom and then replace an alter-ego/father figure who has abandoned his son (*The Locked Room*).

Several critics[17] have claimed, with good reason, that *The Invention of Solitude*, the memoir Auster wrote right after his father's untimely death, is the seminal text in Auster's oeuvre. Auster himself has said the following in an unpublished interview with

[16] See Ilana Shiloh for a detailed overview of the quest and where Auster's work fits into the genre.

[17] See especially Pascal Bruckner.

Christopher Bigley: "In retrospect I can see that everything I have done has come out of that book. The problems and questions and experiences that are examined there have been the meat of the things I have done since" (qtd. in Varvogli v.12). Auster has also said that *IS* was "an obligation that began to impose itself on me the moment I was given the news. I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish along with him" (*IS* 6). This idea of saving the father is one that Auster brings up in *IS* in connection to *Pinocchio*. After Auster is separated from his first wife, and to some extent therefore from his small son, the book that he and young Daniel read again and again is the work originally penned by Collodi. "In effect," Auster writes, "Pinocchio and Gepetto are separated throughout the entire book" (*IS* 131). The passage in which they are reunited is one that Auster and his son find "deeply satisfying" (*IS* 131). Auster writes that he "has watched his son's face carefully during these readings of *Pinocchio* [and] he has concluded that it is the image of Pinocchio saving Gepetto (swimming away with the old man on his back) that gives the story meaning for him" (*IS* 133). Reflecting further, Auster says, "The son saves the father. This must be fully imagined from the perspective of the little boy. And this, in the mind of the father who was once a little boy, a son, that is, to his own father, must be fully imagined. *Puer aeternus*. The son saves the father" (*IS* 134).

The fact that Auster was unable to break through his own father's powerful defense against emotion — the wall he presumably built to protect himself from the pain of knowing what he should not have known — was surely a source of frustration and heartache for the writer as a boy. Long before Auster learned of his father's childhood trauma, it would have been natural for the young sensitive boy to have had the desire, albeit certainly unconscious, to "save" his father, this puzzle of a man who could not feel, from

his crippling solitude. After his death, Samuel Auster's son would note that his father was so alone that there was "no one whose life would be altered by his absence" (*IS* 6).

And so *Pinocchio* is relevant in the two relationships: Auster's desire to save his father — and thereby be reunited (or in this case united for the first time) with him and become a real boy, and Auster's desire to save his young son and be saved by him.

Although I will not deal with *The Invention of Solitude* in any detail (I would recommend reading Pascal Bruckner and Derek Rubin for that purpose), I believe that it is difficult if not impossible to fully comprehend Auster's ethical and aesthetic quest without some understanding of the role his father, his father's death, and the memoir that followed from it have played in the son's life. Auster has said himself that *IS* led directly to the first novel in the *Trilogy*: "*City of Glass* was a direct response to *The Invention of Solitude*, particularly the second part, the section called 'The Book of Memory'" (*AH* 307). My claim is that it is impossible to fully appreciate Auster's work (and though I am dealing here in detail with only three novels, I would make the claim for his entire oeuvre) without an understanding of his complicated relationship with his biological father. "If, while he was alive, I kept looking for him," Auster writes, "kept trying to find the father who was not there, now that he is dead I still feel as though I must go on looking for him" (*IS* 7). I would say that Auster uses his characters in the way he claims Collodi uses Pinocchio:

> [He] is using him as the instrument (literally, the pen) to write the story of himself. This is not to indulge in primitive psychologizing. Collodi could not have achieved what he does in Pinocchio unless the book was for him a book of memory….In an autobiographical sketch written late in life, long after the completion of Pinocchio, Collodi leaves little doubt that he conceived of himself as the puppet's double. (*IS*

163)

Auster speaks of his father as "A man without appetites. You felt that nothing could ever intrude on him, that he had no need of anything the world had to offer" (*IS* 20). To understand the relationship between father and son one must understand who the father was long before he married and became a father himself. The only evidence I will offer here is that which Paul Auster himself offers in *The Invention of Solitude*, in interviews, and in a later memoir, *Hand to Mouth*.

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster reveals facts that he learned at the age of twenty-three when his cousin accidentally came upon the information:

> On January 23, 1919, precisely sixty years before my father died, his mother shot and killed his father in the kitchen of their house on Fremont Avenue in Kenosha, Wisconsin….A boy cannot live through this kind of thing without being affected by it as a man….A.[18] read these articles [about the murder] as history. But also as a cave drawing discovered on the inner walls of my own skull. (*IS* 35-37)

According to one newspaper article, Auster's father, who was seven years old at the time, "declared that he did not see his mother take a revolver from under the mattress as he was tucked into bed for the night" (*IS* 38).

After surviving a suicide attempt and an attempt on her life by her brother-in-law Sam Auster, Anna Auster gained the sympathy of the jury and was eventually acquitted of the crime, though everyone, including Anna herself, agreed that she had killed her thirty-six year old husband Harry (*IS* 47). [19]

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[18] In this section of *IS* Auster refers to himself in the third person as "A."

[19] Auster uses his grandmother's name for his only female protagonist, Anna Blume in *CLT*. (She also appears in Auster's latest novel as Mr. Blank's nurse.) Aliki Varvogli says that Anna Blume

Following the trauma of the trial, at which all the boys were called to testify, the family moved east and buried their terrible secret (*IS* 48). "Brotherhood was the first principle," Auster writes (*IS* 49). "At the center of the clan was my grandmother…fierce, refractory, the boss….She lived for her children….At the same time, she was a tyrant, given to screaming and hysterical fits. When she was angry, she would beat her sons over the head with a broom" (*IS* 50). Trying to understand what his father endured as a child, Auster comes to the conclusion that "he could never be sure of anything. Therefore, he learned never to trust anyone. Not even himself….[And] he learned never to want anything too much" (*IS* 50).

If this were a psychological, rather than a literary study, one would need to examine all the ramifications of Auster's relationship with his unfeeling father. One would also deal in some depth with the consequences to a boy when he, to some extent at least, "wins" the oedipal struggle:

> I was my mother's boy, and I lived in her orbit. I was a little moon circling her gigantic earth, a mote in the sphere of her gravity, and I controlled the tides, the weather, the forces of feeling. His [the father's] refrain to her was: Don't fuss so much, you'll spoil him. But my health was not good, and she used this to justify the attention she lavished on me. We spent a lot of time together, she in her loneliness and I in my cramps, waiting patiently in doctors' offices for someone to quell the insurrection that continually raged in my stomach. Even then, I would cling to these doctors in a desperate sort of way, wanting them to hold me. From the very beginning, it seems, I was looking for my father, looking frantically for

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is named after a character in a poem by Kurt Schwitters. As with much in Auster, perhaps both things are true.

> anyone who resembled him. (*IS* 21)

Suffice it to say, then, that the winning of the mother necessarily involves the killing of the father and the attendant guilt. The need to be punished is a theme in Auster most pronounced in *Music of Chance*, *Leviathan*, and *Mr.Vertigo*. In the *Trilogy,* though, Peter Stillman Jr. is punished in *City of Glass*, Blue is punished by the case in *Ghosts*, and the narrator in *The Locked Room* is punished by the letters from Fanshawe. In all of these instances, the one supposedly guilty of a crime is largely innocent – as would be the case with a young boy who wins the oedipal struggle.

I want to spend a minute on the closeness of Auster's uncles, for this too is manifested in his fiction, more specifically in the alter-egos ubiquitous in his novels. About the four brothers Auster has this to say:

> I think of them not as four separate individuals but as a clan, a quadruplicate image of solidarity….There was scarcely a day that my father did not see his brothers. and that means for his entire life: every day for more than sixty years….They picked up habits from each other, figures of speech, little gestures, intermingling to such a degree that it was impossible to tell which one had been the source of any given attitude or idea. (*IS* 49)

Because Auster's father was the youngest of the four boys, his older brothers were clearly father figures to him: "My father was the baby, and for his whole life he continued to look up to his three older brothers" (*IS* 48). Certainly this conflation of fathers and brothers in his mind plays a part in Auster's creation of character-doubles who seem to be like brothers, yet are clearly unequal in terms of life experience and the authority that

experience brings.[20]

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster gives us a stinging portrait of his father. In the following passage he describes his reaction to a photograph he comes across when he is going through the deceased man's things:

> A trick photograph taken in an Atlantic City studio sometime during the Forties. There are several of him sitting around a table, each image shot from a different angle, so that at first you think it must be a group of several different men….Each one is condemned to go on staring into space, as if under the gaze of the others, but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man. (*IS* 31)

It is this photograph that Auster uses to grace the cover of his memoir and, given what we learn of the man in the photo, it is indeed an apt choice. "One could not believe," Auster writes, "there was such a man — who lacked feeling, who wanted so little of others" (*IS* 20). The main characters in the *Trilogy* are faced with enigmatic men whose psyches must be plumbed in order for the protagonists to fulfill their quests. Daniel Quinn must understand Peter Stillman Sr., Blue must understand Black, and the unnamed narrator of *The Locked Room* must understand his childhood friend Fanshawe.

If we imagine that Auster found some solace in writing about his father in *IS*, he offers the following as a corrective to our faulty assumptions:

> There has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep….Instead of burying my father for me, these words have kept him alive, perhaps more so than ever. I not only see him as he was, but as he is, as he will be, and each day he is

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[20] These doubles include Blue and Black in *Ghosts*; Fanshawe and the narrator in *LR*; Ben Sachs and Peter Aaron in *Leviathan*; and John Trause and Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night.*

> there, invading my thoughts, stealing up on me without warning: lying in the coffin underground, his body still intact, his fingernails and hair continuing to grow. A feeling that if I am to understand anything, I must penetrate this image of darkness, that I must enter the absolute darkness of earth. (*IS* 32-33)

My contention is that the loss of the father who was never there to begin with is one that permeates all of Auster's fiction. It is there in his male protagonists and in their alter-egos; it is in his plots, which always spring from (and often head toward) some tragic loss; and it is there in the literary fathers who spread their ghostly mantles over his work, haunting and enriching it beyond measure. All of this I will show in more detail in the pages that follow, but first I want to explore the connections between Paul Auster and his protagonist Daniel Quinn.

Paul Auster and Daniel Quinn are fathers whose experience of losing, in one sense or another, their sons, defines to a great extent the grounds for their quests.[21] During a period when Auster "continued to hope for a reconciliation with his wife," their young son Daniel was diagnosed with "pneumonia with asthmatic complications" and spent three days and nights in the hospital (*IS* 107-8). "Merely to have contemplated the possibility of the boy's death," Auster writes, "to have had the thought of this death thrown in his face at the doctor's office, was enough for him to treat the boy's recovery as a sort of resurrection, a miracle dealt to him by the cards of chance" (*IS* 108):

> It was only at that moment, he later came to realize, that he had finally grasped the full scope of his own fatherhood: the boy's life meant more to him than his own; if dying were necessary to save his son, he would be willing to die. And it was

[21] See pages 97-99 of *IS* where Auster reflects on other fathers, Raleigh and Mallarme, who lost sons.

> therefore only in that moment of fear that he had become, once and for all, the father of his son. (*IS* 109)

Though Daniel Auster survived his childhood illness, his parents' marriage, as I have noted, did not endure, and so Auster's fear of losing the boy was confirmed in a sense when the couple's separation became final and Auster had to share custody with his ex-wife. I want to suggest that this biographical fact is the reason that Daniel Quinn's wife and son are dead before the action of the novel begins. Furthermore, my argument is that the separation from his son leads Auster to create a character, Quinn, whose quest it is to save a boy in danger — Peter Stillman Jr.

As I have stated, Auster was a poet who stopped publishing poetry when he started publishing fiction. Auster's first volume of poems appeared in 1974 when he was twenty-seven and four more volumes followed in the next six years. No new poems, however, have been published since that time. In 1988 the early poems were collected and published as *Disappearances: Selected Poems* and in 2004 Auster's publisher issued a volume entitled *Collected Poems*. In an interview, Auster talks about the move from poetry to fiction:

> My poems were a quest for what I would call a univocal expression. They expressed what I felt at any given moment….They were concerned with essences, with bedrock beliefs, and their aim was always to achieve a purity and consistency of language.[22] Prose, on the other hand, gives me a chance to articulate my conflicts and contradictions. Like everyone else, I am a multiple being, and I embody a whole range of attitudes and responses to the world. (*AH* 304)

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[22] As we will see, there are echoes of Peter Stillman Sr. here.

At this point the interviewer suggests that Auster may be characterizing Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, and Auster responds by saying, "Exactly. Of all the theories of the novel, Bakhtin's strikes me as the most brilliant, the one that comes closest to understanding the complexity and the magic of the form" (*AH* 304).

After the loss of his wife and son, Daniel Quinn can no longer bring himself to write poetry (his last book was appropriately titled *Unfinished Business*) and so he makes a living as a writer of mysteries. The narrator tells us that Quinn read a great many mystery novels as a matter of course, not caring very much about the quality of the writing:

> Quinn had been a devoted reader of mystery novels…what he liked about these books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant….The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions…. nothing must be overlooked….The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end. (*CG* 9)[23]

Quinn is a man who is going through the motions of living. More than five years after his tragic loss, Quinn "no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it….[It was] as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life" (*CG* 7). When he gets a third call from a disturbed Peter Stillman Jr. asking for detective Paul Auster, Quinn takes on the case and a new identity. Like Alonso Quijano dubbing himself Don Quixote, Daniel Quinn is reborn as detective Paul Auster and finds that "imagining himself as Auster had become synonymous in his mind with doing good in the world" (*CG* 62).

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[23] Note that *Squeeze Play* is parallel to Quinn's mysteries.

Ilana Shiloh argues that “chance, not causality, has determined the object of Quinn’s quest in the same way that the chance phone call has set off the entire detective assignment. And chance remains the only ruling principle” (5). I differ with Shiloh here, especially on her last point, and would remind the reader that Quinn *decides* to answer the call in the way he does and take on the identity of detective Paul Auster. In spite of the fact that it is chance that Auster emphasizes, even insists on, as the force that moves the action in the world of this novel and in the world at large, I believe that the evidence leads us to a contrary conclusion. Quinn’s decision to take the case is only the first of several instances when Quinn’s choices make the difference in the outcome.

The first embedded text in the novel appears on the first page when we learn that Daniel Quinn’s pseudonym — the one he uses to write mystery novels — is William Wilson, the name of the title character in Edgar Allan Poe’s story about a man with a double. As I proposed in the introduction, Poe, as the creator of the detective story genre that Auster is subverting in the *Trilogy*, is the literary father who hovers ghost-like over the three novels. It may also be useful to know that one of Poe’s biographers was named Quinn.

In addition to the pseudonym William Wilson and his new identity as detective Paul Auster, Quinn has another alter-ego, the detective/protagonist of his mystery novels, Max Work. Though Auster has insisted that he does not write allegory, [24] I would suggest that the use of the name Max Work is an example of a character in a kind of postmodern allegory. The correspondence, though not absolute, is highly suggestive:

> Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves

[24] “Allegory seems to imply a specific intention on the author’s part, a plan. I myself never have one” (330 *AH).*

> that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself to Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude. (*CG* 6-7)

Work (or work) has taken over Quinn's life To say that Max Work is the "animated voice" and Quinn the "dummy," is to say that Quinn's protagonist is the more real of the two — he is the man of action — the one who inspires Quinn to take on the case:

> If he lived now in the world at all, it was only…through the imaginary person of Max Work. His detective necessarily had to be real….If Quinn had allowed himself To vanish…Work continued to live in the world of others….Whereas Quinn tended to feel out of place in his own skin, Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself….That night, as he at last drifted off to sleep, Quinn tried to imagine what Work would have said to the stranger on the phone. (*CG* 10)

What it means to say that Work is the most important of the "triad of selves" is to put work (writing) ahead of everything. This is what Quinn must do to survive — and he will find that in his trailing of Peter Stillman Sr. writing takes on a whole new dimension.

In an allegory of the struggle that is the writer's life, we learn of Quinn's attempt to write in the red notebook and follow mad professor Stillman at the same time: "Walking and writing were not easily compatible activities….It was especially difficult to write without looking at the page, and he often discovered that he had written two or even three

lines on top of each other, producing a jumbled, illegible palimpsest" (*CG* 76). After trying several positions, Quinn "decided to rest the notebook on his left hip, much as an artist holds his palette…and his right hand could hold the pen unencumbered by other duties....Quinn was now able to divide his attention almost equally between Stillman and his writing" (*CG* 76-77).

Here our attention is drawn from the primary narrative to the author of *City of Glass* and his quest to find the balance between life and art. That we are led to this reflection can be said to be a violation of ontological boundaries. Brian McHale argues, along with Dick Higgins, that what distinguishes the modern from the postmodern is the shift from epistemology to ontology. For Higgins, artists of the first half of the twentieth century (or thereabouts) ask "cognitive questions" such as "How can I interpret the world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" After this time, he claims that the questions become "postcognitive" ones such as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?"

Like most neat dichotomies, I find this one useful, but problematic. The shift for which Higgins and McHale are making a claim can occur only if we have resolved for ourselves all questions about the nature of subjectivity and our relationship to a world we have come to believe we cannot *know* in any absolute sense. Though we may no longer believe in the way we did before in an external, knowable reality, nor in an essential, knowable self, we still *live as if we do* and our fictions — even self-reflexive, indeterminate texts like the novels in the *Trilogy* — reflect this. Despite the widespread loss of faith in the Enlightenment project, we (readers and writers) have not stopped desiring or searching for

self-understanding (however we understand the word "self") and a way of being in the world that is consistent with our sense of who we are.

In this postmodern period, that is, epistemological questions about the world are not abandoned but are rather compounded by epistemological questions about the self, even if we believe that the self is no longer (and presumably never was) unitary, coherent, or stable. In this time of belief in a radically fragmented subjectivity, when it is difficult to say anything of substance — anything verifiable — about what it means to be human, the most important question may be, How do I know how to act (what to choose)? I would affirm that Auster's texts offer an answer of sorts. If the world and the self are equally illegible, equally cryptic, Auster's fiction seems to suggest, this need not lead to postmodern despair and its attendant paralysis. On the contrary, this state of affairs only highlights the need for acting in the service of others and for gaining whatever insight we can gain into our own fractured psyches so that we know what to *do*. Daniel Quinn sets off on his quest without this insight, but he is no less a hero for it. In this first novel in the *Trilogy*, it is saving the Other (in this case the son) that must come first.

Just before Quinn receives the first telephone call from young Peter Stillman, we meet another literary father who permeates Auster's work. When the phone rings, Quinn is reading from Marco Polo's *Travels*: "We will set down things seen as seen, things heard as heard, so that our book may be an accurate record, free from any sort of fabrication. And all who read this book or hear it may do so with full confidence, because it contains nothing but the truth" (*CG* 7). From the first page of *City of Glass*, when we are introduced to William Wilson, we have been warned that we are in a world where nothing can be taken for granted, and where accuracy and fabrication are not at all transparent terms. We may

take this passage from Marco Polo, therefore, as an ironic warning *not* to believe what we read in this novel. We are being instructed, I suggest, to question the grounds for belief and action as we follow Quinn on his quest.

On the other hand, the narrator of *City of Glass* maintains that we should have faith in his objectivity and believe that the tale he tells is indeed Quinn's: "I followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. There were moments when the text was difficult to decipher, but I have done my best with it and have refrained from any interpretation" (*CG* 158). We are given many hints throughout *City of Glass* that this story is *not* to be believed, however, and that it may be, like Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a story about the dangers of make-believe. We find ourselves repeatedly face to face with the fact that what seems to be happening cannot be happening, even within the frame of the fictional world.

One example of this confusion is when Cervantes himself enters the text (as an example of transworld identity)[25] on the day Quinn makes his first (and, as it turns out, his only) visit to the Stillmans. When young Peter has finished his mad monologue, his wife/caretaker Virginia Stillman tells him that "Mrs. Saavedra is waiting for you" (*CG* 27). We are told that Quinn sees a "middle-aged woman dressed in a white nurse's uniform" waiting for Peter whom he "assumed…was Mrs. Saavedra" (*CG* 27-28). And when Quinn, at the end of their visit, asks Virginia Stillman who it was that suggested that she use Paul Auster, she says that it was "Mrs. Saavedra's husband, Michael. He used to be a policeman, and he did some research. He found out that you were the best man in the city for this kind of thing" (*CG* 35). Thus another father, this time the central one in this novel,

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[25] This term was used first by Umberto Eco in *The Role of the Reader.*

enters the picture, recommending Paul Auster detective for the job. The father, in other words, hires the son.

The fact that Quinn does not try to find the detective that Virginia Stillman tells him exists is another example of a choice that Quinn makes — a choice, that is, not to act. Of course in this case if Quinn had done his research, we would, needless to say, not have this novel.

And so like heroes of old, Daniel Quinn gets an unexpected call, rousing him to action. Since the first call is a wrong number, Quinn does the sensible thing and informs the caller of his mistake and hangs up (*CG* 8). But again like heroes of old, Quinn finds it difficult to ignore a call for help: Even after the first telephone call, Quinn "for a brief moment…regretted having been so abrupt with the caller. It might have been interesting, he thought, to have played along with him a little. Perhaps he could have found out something about the case — perhaps even have helped in some way" (*CG* 8).

Ilana Shiloh claims that "Quinn is engaged in two quests which proceed in opposite directions: to find Stillman and to lose himself….Private Eye Quinn is motivated by the wish to lose himself" (*CG* 45). I would offer two pieces of evidence to contradict this argument. The first is that Quinn (albeit with a new name) has taken on a hero's role and therefore is primarily motivated by the desire to be a savior. Although we never learn the circumstances of his son's death, we can assume that he could not protect the boy from his untimely demise. To save — or at least protect from further harm — another son could be for Quinn a means of redemption. "He knew he could not bring his own son back to life," Quinn thinks after his meeting with Peter Stillman Jr., "but at least he could prevent another from dying" (*CG* 41).

As he stands in front of young Peter Stillman's Upper East Side building, Quinn feels "remarkably calm as if everything had already happened to him" (*CG* 15). He is detached, emotionally shut down, but "as he opened the door that would lead him into the lobby, he gave himself one last word of advice. 'If all this is really happening,' he said, 'then I must keep my eyes open'" (*CG* 15). This, of course, is the detective's job, the hero's job, and the writer's job**.** And although the question of whether "this is really happening" remains with us, we are still drawn in and identify with our detective/protagonist Quinn, even though we suspect already that he may not succeed in solving the case.

Howard Haycraft, writing about the work of G. K. Chesterton in 1941, was the first to use the term "metaphysical detective story" (Holquist 154), a term that may be used to describe these novels. Patricia Merivale uses the phrase in 1967 in an essay on Nabokov and Borges**.** Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney give the following definition in their 1999 book *Detecting Texts*:

> A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions — such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader — with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot (2).

In his essay "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction," Michael Holquist writes that the traditional detective story is familiar and "reassuring," while the metaphysical detective story is strange and disturbing (155). William Spanos speaks of the "anti-detective novel" (another useful term for Auster's *Trilogy*) and sets it in contrast to the neat epistemology of the traditional detective tale:

> The paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story (and its anti-psychoanalytical analogue), the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to detect and/or to psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis). (154)

In 1984 Stefano Tani in *The Doomed Detective* (1984) prefers Spanos' term, though he goes further and divides the "anti-detective" novel into three categories: the "innovative," the "deconstructive," and the "metafictional." The term appropriate for our purposes is "deconstructive," for it is this type of anti-detective story in which, "instead of a solution there is a suspension of solution" (44). And so I will use Tani's term, "deconstructive anti-detective" to describe Auster's novels.

Quinn's determination is unmistakably the determination of the detective. He has just begun writing in the red notebook and this leads Quinn to the following reflection: "I have not been hired to understand — merely to act. This is something new. To keep it in mind, at all costs.... And yet, what is it that Dupin says in Poe? 'An identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent.' But here it would apply to Stillman Senior. Which is probably even worse" (*CG* 47-48). There is more to say about Quinn's identifying with the mad professor, but first let us note that another embedded text has dropped in with the allusion to Poe's "The Purloined Letter."

Quinn accepts the call to aid the ones in distress: in this case, the young Peter Stillman and his caretaker/wife Virginia. The detective is, in effect, a knight on a quest, and the modern-day damsel, Virginia Stillman, is described as a "woman [of] thirty, perhaps thirty-five; average height at best; hips a touch wide, or else voluptuous, depending on your point

of view; dark hair, dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was at once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick" (*CG* 16). The narrator tells us that "the smell of Virginia Stillman's perfume hovered around [Quinn], and he began to imagine what she looked like without any clothes on" (*CG* 16-17). And later, when it comes time for their first (and as it turns out, only) face to face meeting to end, "Virginia Stillman suddenly threw her arms around Quinn, sought out his lips with her own, and kissed him passionately, driving her tongue deep inside his mouth. Quinn was so taken off guard that he almost failed to enjoy it" (*CG* 37). Note that this seems to be a parody of the lascivious detective, which foregrounds the fictionality of the text. It also, if we have Cervantes in mind, leads us to make a connection to Quixtote's Dulcinea.

We suspect right away that Quinn, taking on his Max Work persona to impersonate detective Paul Auster, likes playing the hero who makes the grand gesture to save the pretty damsel. Our suspicion is confirmed somewhat later when the narrator tells us that Quinn is smitten with young Peter's caretaker/wife:

> The memory of the kiss was still sharp in Quinn's mind….For the fact was, he had started lusting after Virginia Stillman the moment he saw her, well before the first kiss took place….Much later…he realized that deep inside he had been nurturing the chivalric hope of solving the case so swiftly and irrevocably, that he would win Mrs. Stillman's desire for as long as he wanted it. (*CG* 77)

That no fire arises from this romantic spark is appropriate given Quinn's status as a kind of errant knight. Cervantes' hero, we remember, never consummates his love with Dulcinea.

But it is a man — or a boy in a man's body — who is the one in the most distress. And

it is clear not only that Quinn's main concern is that he save the damaged young man from his homicidal father, but that our hero sees in this "puppet boy" his own dead son. When Quinn first meets the young Stillman, he sees "a young man, dressed entirely in white, with the white-blond hair of a child. Uncannily, in that first moment, Quinn thought of his own dead son" (*CG* 17). The fact that young Peter is all in white is repeated twice, and we learn that for Quinn "the effect was almost transparent, as though one could see through to the blue veins behind the skin of his face [and]…as their eyes met, Quinn suddenly felt that Stillman had become invisible" (*CG* 18). We wonder if Stillman is "real" or a figment of Quinn's imagination.

Young Peter's speech gives Quinn a pretty good idea of what happened to the boy: "The father…wanted to know if God had a language….Thought a baby might speak it if the baby saw no people….Of course, Peter knew some people words….But the father thought maybe Peter would forget them….Every time Peter said a word, his father would boom him….At last Peter learned to say nothing" (*CG* 24).

Virginia Stillman gives the new detective a fuller picture of the father, which helps us to see the opponent with whom Quinn must match wits. After studying religion and philosophy at Harvard, she says, Peter Stillman Sr. wrote a dissertation on "sixteenth and seventeenth-century theological interpretations of the New World," which got him a teaching job at Columbia. He did well until his wife died[26] mysteriously when Peter was two years old. Some months later, Virginia Stillman tells Quinn, he resigned from his job, fired Peter's nurse (Miss Barber)[27] and took over his son's care. "I think…he began to

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[26] Note that detective and criminal have both lost a wife and son.

[27] Auster may be winking at Cervantes once again when later he tells us that Peter Stillman Jr.'s childhood nurse is named Miss Barber.

believe in some of the far-fetched religious ideas he had written about. It made him crazy, absolutely insane….He locked Peter in a room in the apartment…for nine years" (*CG* 30-31). Thus we enter, with Quinn, our first locked room in Auster, a trope that will reappear frequently hereafter in his fiction.

"I am the last of the Stillmans," Peter Stillman Jr. tells Quinn. "From old Boston, in case you might have heard of it. I am the last one. There are no others. I am the end of everyone, the last man" (*CG* 23). Virginia Stillman tells Quinn that in the family were "several governors back in the nineteenth century, a number of Episcopal bishops, ambassadors, a Harvard president" (*CG* 30).[28] Auster is almost certainly alluding to the famous Lowell family of Massachusettes, which shares much in common with the Stillmans.[29]

As we might expect of a boy who, for so many years, was denied human contact except for the beatings he received when he spoke, Peter's nonsense speech is filled with repetitions and contradictions: "I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name….I say this of my own free will" (*CG* 18-25). Quinn feels that "Stillman's presence was a command to be silent" (*CG* 18). And indeed the first words of Peter's lengthy monologue are "No questions, please" (*CG* 18). This speech of the damaged boy, the boy destroyed (to put it in Bakhtin's terms) by his father's authoritative discourse, cannot be dialogical. The locked room saw to that:

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28 In the Lowell family there was Rev. Charles Russell Lowell 1782-1861; James Russell Lowell 1819-1891 (friend of Emerson and Hawthorne and ambassador to Spain); Abbot Lawrence Lowell 1865-1943, Harvard President; and Robert Lowell 1917-1977, confessional poet, who is said to have suffered from schizophrenia and what was then called manic-depression.

29 Another allusion is most certainly to Poe's Usher family in "The Fall of the House of Usher," another text of doubling and madness, with its own embedded texts.

> I say what they say because I know nothing. I am only poor Peter Stillman, the boy who can't remember. There was this. Dark. Very Dark[30]….They say: that was the room…for nine years….I am Peter Stillman….That is not my real name….A little boy….Barely a few words of his own. And then no words…and then no one….Anymore….I am mostly now a poet….I make up all the words myself….I am the only one who knows what the words mean. They cannot be translated.
> (*CG* 19-22)

This world is one of darkness, of silence. It is a world without language or memory. Peter is given a name, but the connection seems arbitrary to him. "I know I am still the puppet boy," Peter tells Quinn, "but sometimes I think I will at last grow up and become real" (*CG* 26). The allusion to Pinocchio here leads us to ask how this story about a man attempting to save a boy is like the fairy tale of the boy who must save his father to become real. In Paul Auster's psychic and fictional worlds, it seems clear, the two must save each other. Quinn wonders, though, if he needs to identify with the son to save him:

> Little Peter. Is it necessary for me to imagine it, or can I accept it on faith? The darkness. To think of myself in that room, screaming. I am reluctant. Nor do I think I even want to understand it. To what end? This is not a story, after all. It is a fact, something happening in the world, and I am supposed to do a job, one little thing, and I have said yes to it. If all goes well, it should even be quite simple.
> (*CG* 47)

After the initial meeting with the Stillmans, Quinn recalls some research he once did about language experiments similar to the one Peter Stillman's father apparently conducted

[30] Peter Stillman Sr.'s pseudonym for his mad treatise is Henry Dark.

on young Peter:

> It had been years now since Quinn had allowed himself to think of these stories. The subject of children was too painful for him, especially children who had suffered, had been mistreated, had died before they could grow up. If Stillman was the man with the dagger, come back to avenge himself on the boy whose life he had destroyed, Quinn wanted to be there to stop him.…He thought of the little coffin that held his son's body and how he had seen it on the day of the funeral being lowered into the ground. That was isolation he said to himself. That was silence. It did not help, perhaps, that his son's name had also been Peter. (*CG* 41-42)

And so the hero has his dragon to slay (or in this case, he must keep the dragon from slaying). When Quinn crosses the threshold of the Stillman apartment, we get the sense that he has entered a world that renders him disoriented and bewildered:

> As he crossed the threshold and entered the apartment, he could feel himself going blank, as if his brain had suddenly shut off. The apartment loomed up around him as a kind of blur….He found himself sitting on a sofa, alone in the living room…. He couldn't say how long it had been. Surely no more than a minute or two. But from the way the light was coming through the windows, it seemed to be almost noon. It did not occur to him, however, to consult his watch. (*CG* 15-16)

Once again Auster is reminding us that all of this may be happening only in Quinn's mind. The fact that we are not inclined to heed this warning and instead follow Quinn on his quest is a tribute to Auster's power as a storyteller. It is the fact that the professor[31]

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[31] Sources for Peter Stillman Sr. likely include Holderlin, Knut Hamsun, Hugo Ball, and Laura Riding (see *AH*). Auster quotes Holderlin's friend Matthison's description of the poet in 1802: "deathly pale, very thin, with hollow wild eyes, long hair and a beard, and dressed like a beggar"

never moves beyond certain boundaries (110th St. on the north, 72nd on the south, Riverside Park on the west, and Amsterdam Avenue on the east) on his daily jaunts that leads Quinn to draw the maps that spell out (or nearly spell out) TOWER OF BABEL[32]: "Such precision baffled Quinn, for in all other respects Stillman seemed to be aimless" (*CG* 72). Perhaps this precision can be seen as Stillman's mad structuralism. Or, put another way, perhaps it is his way of creating order in the world of chaos he sees around him. Similarly, the objects that Stillman picks up and puts in his bag[33] are another reminder that in a world where big abstract concepts like God and Truth are called into question, attention to detail — to the concrete, the tangible — takes on a greater importance, a profundity of meaning it lacks in a world of grander vistas where faith in a transcendent universe is taken for granted. Of course the irony here is that Stillman believes in such a transcendent universe — a universe from which man has fallen but to which he may return if the professor succeeds in his quest. And lest we rest too comfortably in our manichean view of the father/son pair, we are reminded that the elder Stillman goes to a locked room, too:

> The terrible father who did all those things to little Peter. Rest assured. They took him to a dark place. They locked him up and left him there….For thirteen years the father was away. His name is Peter Stillman, too. Strange, is it not? That two people can have the same name? I do not know if that is his real name. But I do

(*IS* 99). Daniel Quinn is described similarly, as are other Auster characters. Aliki Varvogli posits that Stillman represents Emerson.

[32] When Quinn completes the drawing of Professor Stillman's wanderings and concludes that the old man has been spelling out THE TOWER OF BABEL his "thoughts momentarily flew off to the concluding pages of *A. Gordon Pym* and to the discovery of the strange hieroglyphs on the inner wall of the chasm" (85). Note this additional embedded text by Poe.

[33] Auster says this of Holderlin after he began to suffer from mental illness: "During those years, it is said, Holderlin rarely went out. When he did leave his room, it was only to take aimless walks through the countryside, filling his pockets with stones and picking flowers, which he would later tear to shreds" (*IS* 99).

> not think he is me. We are both Peter Stillman. (*CG* 21-22)

We should call attention to the fact that Quinn's quest is like his predecessor Don Quixote's. The latter sees windmills and thinks they are giants and the former sees a man walking aimlessly and believes that he is spelling out "The Tower of Babel."

Quinn reflects on some reading he once did about children who had been raised — or had accidentally grown up — without the benefit of hearing human language: "In the days of his other life, not long after his own son was born…had written a review of a book about the wild boy of Aveyron, and at the time…had done some research on the subject" (*CG* 39).

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster writes the following, speaking of himself in the third person**:** "He can go no further than this. Children have suffered at the hands of adults, for no reason whatsoever" (*IS* 159). In all of Auster's work, the suffering of children is nowhere more evident than in the example of young Peter Stillman in *City of Glass*.[34] Though Auster's father did not lock him away, in the author's first memoir he says that as a young boy, he felt invisible to his father**:** "It was not that I felt he disliked me. It was just that he seemed distracted, unable to look in my direction. And more than anything else, I wanted him to take notice of me" (*IS* 21). This passage, poignant in its understatement, makes it evident that just as young Peter Stillman develops (if the word is not perversely inappropriate) an original relation to language and declares himself a poet, his creator first forges his identity as a writer in the face of silence.

And though Auster's poetry will not attract the attention or admiration of the elder Auster, the father's silence must have, in a sense, provoked the writer/son. In other words,

[34] In *Ghosts*, however, there is the story of an unsolved mystery involving a murdered boy; in *LR* Fanshawe abandons his son; in *MP* Julian Barber abandons his son; in *MC* Jim Nashe abandons a daughter; in *MV* young Walt's uncle and guardian sells him to Master Yehudi.

the damaged boy (Peter Stillman Jr. and/or Paul Auster) is inspired to speak/write as he does not merely in spite of, but because of, the father's refusal to listen or speak. "If there is nothing but silence," Auster writes, "is it not presumptuous of me to speak? And yet: if there had been anything more than silence would I have felt the need to speak in the first place?" (*IS* 20). And so, paradoxically, it is the father's inability to talk to or hear his son that acts as muse to the writer.

The loss of his father and the fear of losing his son are woven, as I have observed, into the fabric of Auster's fiction. "When the father dies," Auster writes, "the son becomes his own father and his own son. He looks at his son and sees himself in the face of the boy. He imagines what the boy sees when he looks at him and finds himself becoming his own father. Inexplicably, he is moved by this….It is a nostalgia for his own life that he feels, perhaps, a memory of his own boyhood as a son to his father" (*IS* 81).

At first glance, the idea that the evil professor Peter Stillman could be an alter-ego of the author seems ludicrous. This character is the abusive father who locks his three-year old son in a windowless room for nine years in order to conduct an absurd and cruel language experiment. On the other hand, this character is a professor, an intellectual, and a writer who, like all good writers, is obsessed with language and frustrated by its contradictions and inadequacies:

> I am in the process of inventing a new language….For our words no longer correspond to the world. When things were whole, we felt confident that our words could express them. But little by little these things have broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos. And yet our words have remained the same….Hence, every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely,

> distorting the very thing we are trying to represent….Unless we can begin to embody the notion of change in the words we use, we will continue to be lost. (*CG* 92-94)

"I'm on the verge of a significant breakthrough," the mad professor insists to Quinn, "and it's all because of my cleverness, the dazzling clarity of my mind" (*CG* 92). Stillman, clearly a Promethean character, dazzles himself; his extreme narcissism and grandiosity are still evident after his years in the asylum: "If all goes well, I believe I will hold the key to a series of major discoveries…no one has understood what I have understood. I'm the first. I'm the only one" (*CG* 91). The professor's quest, put simply, is to restore man to the prelapsarian state when words — thanks to Adam — had some essential connection to the things they named. Peter Stillman is something of a mad semiotician. His "experiment" — the one that did irreparable damage to his young son — was, as he saw it, a religious quest.

Stillman's book was called *The Garden and the Tower: Early Visions of the New World*, and was divided into two parts: "The Myth of Paradise" and "The Myth of Babel." In trying to understand the mad father, Quinn reads the treatise and quotes from it in his red notebook:

> If the fall of man also entailed a fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the fall, to reverse its effects by undoing the fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden? If man could learn to speak the original language of innocence, did it not follow that he would thereby recover a state of innocence within himself? (*CG* 57).

When we read, with Quinn, Stillman's description of the postmodern world (the action in the novel takes place in 1982), we know that his yearning for a time when words were

transparent is pure nostalgia. Still, the professor's desire, as he expresses it to Quinn, cannot help but appeal to writers (including Auster) who struggle to make their words mean what they intend:

> The world is in fragments, sir. Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it….My brilliant stroke has been to confine myself to physical things, to the immediate and tangible. My motives are lofty, but my work now takes place in the realm of the everyday….I am in the process of inventing a new language….A language that will at last say what we have to say….Every time we try to speak of what we see, we speak falsely, distorting the very thing we are trying to represent….But words…are capable of change. (*CG* 91-93)

Stillman is reacting against the poststructuralist view of language. The Book of Genesis and the story of Adam naming things according to their essences is a lovely tale, but from a poststructuralist vantage point, it has no value as truth. Words (signifiers) for Derrida and other deconstructionists have always been divorced from the objects or concepts (the signified) to which they refer. Accusing Claude Levi-Strauss of "an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech," Derrida sounds as if he could be talking about Stillman (qtd. in Richter 970).

When the professor tells our hero that he will give "anything for the truth. No sacrifice is too great" (*CG* 91), we are aware that it is this very notion of an absolute truth that forms the basis for the poststructuralist critique. And when Derrida cites the "Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign" (qtd. in Richter 961) as the

precursor of his own brand of deconstructive criticism, we hear echoes of a critique of Stillman's insistence on "truth."

Yet we will be remiss if we do not admit the (albeit twisted) logic and seductive quality of Stillman's theories. He is attempting to recapture a time when words were at least believed to be transparent, suggesting to Quinn that "the clue to our salvation is to become masters of the words we speak, to make language answer our needs" (*CG* 98). This is a tantalizing idea — for again, does not every writer (or speaker, for that matter) seek to be a master of his words — even if he knows that this mastery exists only in the land of Humpty Dumpty? Quoting Lewis Carroll,[35] Stillman reminds Quinn of the wisdom of the talking egg: "When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less" (*CG* 98). Of course *City of Glass* is continually calling this idea into question, and the title may be the best example of all, for "glass" can refer to a transparent window (like Humpty Dumpty's words) or to a mirror. The metaphor of the mirror is useful in helping us to visualize the relationship between alter-egos or doubles in these texts. In other words, one or both of the pair sees himself in the other.

It was Stillman's contention that the first men to visit America believed they had accidentally found a new Garden of Eden. The professor acknowledges, however, a counterargument:

> If some saw the Indians as living in prelapsarian innocence, there were others who judged them to be savage beasts, devils in the form of men….The debate…went on for several hundred years, culminating on the one hand in the 'noble savage' of

[35] Lewis Carroll must be added to our list of Auster's literary fathers.

> Locke and Rousseau — which laid the theoretical foundations of democracy in an independent America — and, on the other hand, in the campaign to exterminate the Indians. (*CG* 51)

The parallel here is between the "utopian" discourse that required the elimination of the Indians and the Promethean discourse of Stillman that required the elimination (so to speak) of his son. Both are, in Bakhtin's terms, authoritative discourse.

The second part of Stillman's book, like the first, includes many examples of embedded texts, reminding us that Peter Stillman Sr., like Paul Auster, has many literary fathers: the writers of the Bible and John Milton are the primary ones here. As Quinn paraphrases "The Myth of Babel" for us, it appears to be the world of Genesis by way of Milton and reinterpreted by Peter Stillman, posing as Henry Dark. Quinn reads that Stillman finds in *Paradise Lost* a "view of language" that suggests that the meanings of words changed after the fall when they were "informed by a knowledge of evil" (*CG* 52). Adam is important here, of course, not only for his sin, but for his prelapsarian task of naming the things and creatures of the world:

> In that state of innocence his tongue had gone straight to the quick of the world. His words had not been merely appended to things he saw, they had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life. A thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God. The story of the Garden, therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language.(*CG* 52)

According to Stillman, the Tower of Babel episode "was an exact recapitulation of what

happened in the Garden — only expanded, made general in its significance for all mankind" (*CG* 53). And Stillman created Henry Dark to espouse his notion that the story of the Tower was meant to be prophetic: "If man could learn to speak this original language of innocence, did it not follow that he would thereby recover a state of innocence within himself?" (*CG* 57). There was one more link in the chain for Dark/Stillman and that link was the New World: "If Babel lay to the west of anything, it was Eden, the original site of mankind. Man's duty to scatter himself across the whole earth…would inevitably move along a western course. And what more western land in all Christendom, Dark asked, than America?" (*CG* 58). The fact that the Puritans did indeed see America as a kind of Eden, lends an air of authenticity to Stillman's crazy treatise. In Bakhtin's terms, we have Stillman's seeming authoritative discourse reflecting (as all discourse must, according to Bakhtin) the utterances of many others.

Another transworld appearance by father Poe occurs when we learn that Quinn and Stillman have their third meeting on a "knobby outcrop" in Riverside Park called "Mount Tom." This is where Poe, we are told, "in the summers of 1843 and 1844…spent many long hours gazing out at the Hudson" (*CG* 100). Auster never tires of reminding us of father Poe, but another effect of Poe's appearance here is to connect him to Peter Stillman Sr. The creator of the detective story, remember, is also the creator of tales of terror and uncanny fictions such as "William Wilson," where the reader is unsure of what is real and what is illusory.

The unreality of the meetings between Quinn and father Stillman, therefore, is highlighted by the reference to Poe. We have been warned not to believe, and so we are not surprised when the question of what we see, or do not see, is dramatized when Quinn

approaches Stillman for the third time and the old man does not recognize him: "Each time it was as though Quinn had been someone else" (*CG* 100). Our detective is stunned at Stillman's apparent lack of memory, and the professor clears nothing up when he tells him that "memory is a great blessing…the next best thing to death…[and] when the bad days come, I think of the ones that were good" (*CG* 101). This third meeting continues the dark comedy (no pun intended) when Quinn presents himself as young Peter Stillman, the professor's son. Stillman rattles off a series of cliches involving children, eggs, and chickens, before going off on an extended riff on the importance of truth: "Never say a thing you know in your heart is not true…lying is a bad thing. It makes you sorry you were ever born" (*CG* 102). It is clear that for Stillman, as for Humpty Dumpty, there is no ambiguity. In the professor's solipsistic universe, words mean just what he wants them to mean — and that is the truth. The danger of this view is evident in the result of the father's experiment: Peter Stillman Jr.

Before Stillman departs after the third meeting, apparently satisfied that he has imparted important truths to his "son," he tells Quinn that "a father must always teach his son the lessons he has learned. In that way knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, and we grow wise" (*CG* 103). Quinn tells the old man (whom he now calls "Father") that he will not forget anything he has told him and Stillman says that he will "die happily now" that this mission has been accomplished. The fact that the opportunity to fulfill this mission has presented itself at least seemingly by accident is not addressed by either "father" or "son."

This final meeting also turns out to be a crucial juncture in the novel, for it is the last time that Quinn sees Stillman, and it is yet another passage in the text asks us to reflect on

reality vs. illusion — revelation vs. disguise. I want to suggest that these prompts to reflection, embedded as they are in the fiction, may function on at least two levels. Most superficially, they seem to be a game with which the reader is being asked to play along. For the more careful reader, though, the shifting roles and identities, and the focus on naming bring up several questions, such as what the relationship is between truth (reality, revelation, knowledge) and falsehood (illusion, disguise, ignorance). And this crazy quest of Stillman's foregrounds questions raised elsewhere in the novel about the connection between vision, memory (or re-cognition), language, and knowledge — especially self-knowledge. These questions, needless to say, (for we are reading a deconstructive anti-detective novel) remain unanswered.

This brings us to literary father Cervantes' famous novel, about which something similar may be said. "For Kundera," David Richter writes, "the Quixote is narrative as 'inquiry,' an emblem of Cartesian Man heroically seeking meaning in a world without lights, where there are no answers, only questions" (Richter 15). Auster himself says the following about Cervantes' novel: "Don Quixote is consciousness gone haywire in a realm of the imaginary" (*IS* 147).

Countless critics have made the case for *Don Quixote* as the first modern novel, the central text of western fiction, the work with which all serious fiction writers must come to grips. Paul Auster declares more than this; he uses *Don Quixote* to father his own first work of literary fiction and in doing so claims Cervantes for his literary father. Harold Bloom, in his introduction to the Edith Grossman translation of *DQ* asserts that Cervantes' most famous work "stands forever as the birth of the novel out of the prose romance, and is still the best of all novels" (xxiii). In his essay "In Praise of the Novel," Carlos Fuentes

notes that in 2005, fifty out of one-hundred writers asked to name the best novel ever written named *Don Quixote* (1). Fuentes agrees with those who place *Don Quixote* at the forefront of modern fiction: "I consider Cervantes' book to be the founding cornerstone of the novel as it has evolved since the 17th century….Don Quixote…wanders through an Erasmian universe in which all truths are suspect, everything is bathed in incertitude and the modern novel thus acquires its birth-right" (4-5). Nabokov, who reluctantly taught a series of lectures at Harvard on *Don Quixote*, had a somewhat different take on Cervantes' seminal text:

> *Don Quixote* has been called the greatest novel ever written. This, of course, is nonsense…but its hero, whose personality is a stroke of genius on the part of Cervantes, looms so wonderfully above the skyline of literature…that the book lives…through the sheer vitality that Cervantes has injected into the main character of a very patchy haphazard tale….He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish, and gallant. The parody has become a paragon. (27-28, 112) [36]

Don Quixote is, perhaps, the first meta-fiction: a book about books — and the power of books to affect real-life actions. Fuentes suggests that "Cervantes…proposes that we read a book about a man who reads books and then becomes a book about a man who knows that he is being read" ("In Praise" 7-8). We could, it seems, dub *Don Quixote* the first proto-postmodern novel. [37]

According to Foucault, words and things for Cervantes' hero are divided:

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[36] Nabokov, as you may expect, is another of Auster's literary fathers.

[37] Although the idea that life and books are inextricable permeates Auster's fiction, this trope becomes especially relevant in *Oracle Night* when Sidney Orr seriously considers whether what he has written in the past has created his current reality and in *TS* where Mr. Blank is visited by the characters he created and then abandoned.

> Words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness; they are no longer the marks of things….The written word and things no longer resemble one another….Don Quixote has achieved his reality – a reality he owes to language alone, and which resides entirely inside the words ("Don Quixote" 794).

I would counter this argument by suggesting that the knight's reality, because it makes things happen in the world, between and among people, merges the world of words with real-life adventures that he creates by force of his imagination. Foucault, however, draws a sharp distinction between the madman and the poet:

> The poet is he who, beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinships between things, their scattered resemblances. Beneath the established signs, and in spite of them, he hears another, deeper, discourse, which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things…his is the allegorical role; beneath the language of signs and beneath the interplay of their precisely delineated distinctions, he strains his ears to catch that 'other language,' the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance. (795)

About the madman, Foucault has this to say: "he groups all signs together and leads them with a resemblance that never ceases to proliferate….[He] loads all signs with a resemblance that ultimately erases them" (795). Is Don Quixote a poet, then, or a madman? For Foucault, Cervantes' novel is about "the sign of a modern divorce between words and things. Don Quixote is desperately searching for a new coincidence, for a new similitude in a world where nothing seems to resemble what it once resembled" (qtd. in Fuentes 778). This is certainly true. It is also true, however, that Cervantes' knight finds

resemblances — windmills are giants, for example — and behaves accordingly. The signs are not, therefore, "all erased" as Foucault suggests. If this were the case, the knight's adventures would be meaningless, a conclusion that would render the novel and its hero ridiculous, a conclusion we must reject.

Moving now to a comparison of Cervantes and Auster, my intention is to shed light on the literary son's claiming of his Spanish precursor. I begin with one minor point, but one which Auster must be aware of and delight in as he does all significant matters of coincidence: Both authors were thirty-eight years old when they published their first novels. Auster feels that his worldly success came late in life for an author who began to take himself seriously as a writer when he was still quite young. "All along," Auster writes in his second memoir *Hand to Mouth,* "my only ambition had been to write. I had known that as early as sixteen or seventeen years old" (3-4). In this same memoir, subtitled "A Chronicle of Early Failure," Auster writes of some early success followed by years when he feared that he would never achieve his promise: "In my late twenties and early thirties, I went through a period of several years when everything I touched turned to failure" (3). It was not until the publication of *City of Glass* in 1985, when Auster was nearing forty, that his success seemed assured.

For Cervantes, the recognition could be said to have come even later if we take into account the life-expectancy at the time. In any case, both writers published poetry and wrote plays before they published their novels. Auster was more successful as a poet than Cervantes, while Cervantes had more success as a playwright. The Spaniard did not impress all critics with his drama, however. Nabokov says, "Let us keep in mind that Cervantes was a frustrated playwright who found his medium in the novel" (29).

Auster, we have already noted, modeled the three short plays he later published in *Hand to Mouth* on another literary father, Samuel Beckett. Here is Auster in an interview talking about Beckett's effect on him early in his career: "The influence of Beckett was so strong," he says, "that I couldn't see my way beyond it" (*AH* 275). [38] About the four plays he wrote in 1976 and 1977, Auster expresses some dismay, but he also recognizes that experimenting in this form allowed him to plant a seed for his later prose: "One of them, to my everlasting regret, was even performed. There's no point in talking about that now — except to say that the memory pains me. But another of those plays eventually came to life again. Six years later, I… reworked it into a piece of prose fiction. That was where *Ghosts* came from" (*AH* 301).

In the same interview, Auster shares more of his writing history:

> My first published works were poems, and for ten years or so I published only poems, but all along I spent nearly as much time writing prose. I wrote hundreds and hundreds of pages, I filled up dozens of notebooks. It's just that I wasn't satisfied with it, and I never showed it to anyone….Poetry is like taking still photographs, whereas prose is like filming with a movie camera. (*AH* 303-4)

He describes writing *The Invention of Solitude* as a kind of breakthrough that loosened something in him so that he found he could go back to an idea he had earlier for a work of fiction. This became *City of Glass*, which was published by Sun and Moon Press after being rejected by seventeen publishers. Before these works of prose, however, Auster

[38] See Bernstein, Saltzman, and Varvogli on connections between Beckett and Auster. Bernstein: "Auster's intertextual debt to Samuel Beckett is as great as that he has to the American Renaissance" (qtd. in Barone 100). Saltzman: "The absurd dance of detective and detected in *City of Glass* parallels that of Beckett's *Molloy*, in which agent Moran is first professionally, then psychologically, and finally physically absorbed by Molloy" (59). Varvogli (79-87) goes into some detail about the parallels between Beckett's trilogy and his literary son Auster's.

published the following four books of poetry:[39] *Unearth* (1974), *Wall Writing* (1976), *Fragments from Cold* (1977), *Effigies* (1977), *White Spaces* (1980) and *Facing the Music* (1980); critical essays (most of which are published in *The Art of Hunger* and later in *Collected Prose)*; and translations of French poetry. Some of this I have said before and I reiterate it here to highlight a connection between Auster and Cervantes.

The many voices in Cervantes and Auster attest to the fact that these writers needed the prose form to express the multiplicity of identities they felt compelled to invent. Harold Bloom has a valuable insight regarding the difference between poetry and prose. "Poetry," he argues, "teaches us how to talk to ourselves, but not to others" ("Intro." xxiv).

Manuel Duran suggests that the reason Cervantes was unsuccessful as a poet may have had to do with his psychology:

> He refused to reveal his inner self — and without such a commitment true lyrical poetry becomes impossible….His talent was projected towards…a flow of events in which other individuals would reveal their inner selves through their thoughts and conversations, and by interacting with each other….His poems tell us nothing about…his love or lack of love for his wife or any other woman, his feelings of elation, anger, or despair when faced with important events in his own existence or in the life of his friends, his enemies….He remained to the end extremely discreet, almost secretive, with respect to his private life. (34-35)

Though one cannot say that Auster's poetry was unsuccessful, I would make a claim regarding Auster's poetry similar to the one Duran makes about Cervantes' verse. That is, Auster's poems are so oblique, so constricted, that they, like Cervantes' lines, reveal little

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[39] Another poem included in *Disappearances* is "Spokes," originally published in *Poetry* magazine in 1972.

about the author's life. In his essay on Auster's poetry, Norman Finklestein asserts the following about Auster as poet:

> More an heir of Charles Reznikoff and George Oppen than Charles Olson or Jack Spicer, Auster seeks to renew the balance between the writing subject and the world outside; the stormy loss of the self (or as it is now fashionable, its smooth deconstruction) never interests him, despite the obvious pain involved in achieving the desired equilibrium (qtd. in Barone 47).

With objectivists Charles Reznikoff and George Oppen[40] as his poetic forefathers, Auster's spare style is in stark contrast to literary father Walt Whitman, who makes an appearance in *Ghosts*. It is this temperamental and philosophical resistance to self-revelation, I would argue, that keeps Auster's poetry abstract even when its focus is on the most concrete of objects, such as the stones and walls that reappear in his fiction.

Finklestein's analysis is useful here. In the same essay on Auster he contends that "the conventions of fiction are such that the authorial voice will in most instances obliterate itself willingly, giving over entirely to narration" (qtd. in Barone 57). The freedom that comes with creating such a voice to speak in one's stead cannot be overstated. And although the authorial voice in Auster's fiction can often be conflated with the narrator's or the protagonist's, so that the distance between Auster and his characters is as narrow as it can get in a work of fiction, it is still the case that the creation of a narrator and other characters, who may or may not stand in for the writer, gives him at least the illusion of

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[40] See Auster's essays on these figures in *AH*: "The Decisive Moment" is his reflection on Charles Reznikoff. "Much of his writing," Auster suggests, " is a direct response to, almost a translation of, his reading" (45). The following quotation is from"Private I, Public Eye," Auster's essay on George Oppen: "Again and again he poses awe of the physical world, a wonder in the sheer this-ness of things, against the confusion and brutality of the social world, as if seeking the basis for a new kind of language" (116).

distance and, perhaps more importantly, the opportunity to bring in more aspects of himself than can be easily integrated into a poem — or even a book of poems. Finklestein puts it this way: "[It is] the freedom of self-dispersal, which fiction offers its most skillful practioners" (qtd. in Barone 57).

As Michael Holquist describes it in his introduction to his (and Caryl Emerson's) translation of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination,* "The novel…has a completely different relationship to languages from other genres since it constantly experiments with new shapes in order to display the variety and immediacy of speech diversity" (xxix). And Bakhtin himself claims for Cervantes famous text a special place in the canon: "The classic and purest model of the novel as genre — Cervantes' *Don Quixote*…realizes in itself, in extraordinary depth and breadth, all the artistic possibilities of heteroglot and internally dialogized novelistic discourse" (324).

How these two writers found the genre that best suited them deserves its own study. Here I have only enough space to hint at the reasons Cervantes and Auster found their greatest achievement in fiction and how one genre may have led to and informed another.[41] Manuel Duran suggests that "It is not in vain that Cervantes had spent countless hours writing plays…and would again write excellent plays after finishing Part I of his novel. The stage had taught him how to handle fast dialogue, how characters should move, how to end a scene" (118-119).

Auster's plays may have failed, but his screenplays have met with success. *Smoke* received critical acclaim[42] and *Blue in the Face*, which Auster co-directed with Wayne

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[41] Cervantes came back to drama and verse after *DQ* and achieved what some say is great success with several short plays.

[42] In 1995 the film won several prizes at the Berlin Film Festival: The Silver Bear, Special Jury Prize; The International Film Critics Circle Award; and the Audience Award for Best Film.

Wang, also won some praise. *Lulu on the Bridge* was less successful and Auster gave up film for a while, but a new motion picture, *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* was shown recently at Lincoln Center in New York. In keeping with Auster's love of the intertext, it is named after — and presumably based on — a fictional film created by a fictional silent-film-star-in-exile in Auster's *Book of Illusions*.

Another point of comparison between the Cervantes and Auster is what we might call the dry spell or the publishing drought**.** Before the publication of the first part of *DQ*, Cervantes, though he surely was writing at least some of this time, had published nothing for *twenty years* (Duran 88). For Auster, the droughts were not so lengthy, but in an interview he shares his struggles with fiction — and then with writing generally: "By about the mid-Seventies, I stopped writing fiction altogether. I felt that I was wasting my time…and so I decided to restrict myself exclusively to poetry" (*AH* 299). Then a few years later, the picture is even darker: "I had a small child, a crumbling marriage, and a miniscule income that amounted to no more than a fraction of what we needed. I became desperate, and for more than a year I wrote almost nothing" (*AH* 297).

The theme of the dry spell, of a writer or other artist not being able to work, no longer wanting to work, or insisting on the destruction of his work runs through all of Auster**.** Daniel Quinn in *CG* gives up writing poetry after his wife and son are killed; in *The Locked Room* Fanshawe writes for years without showing his work and then disappears, stops writing, and gives instructions for his work to be published or destroyed; Julian Barber in *Moon Palace* gives up painting; Jim Nashe in *The Music of Chance* sells his piano; Ben Sachs in *Leviathan* stops writing to blow up replicas of the Statue of Liberty; Walter Clairborne Rawley in *Mr. Vertigo* gives up flying; David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions*

gives up translating Chateaubriand; Hector Mann in the same novel makes films he knows no one will see and then gives instructions for them to be destroyed upon his death; Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night* suffers from writer's block after an illness and does not resume composing fiction until he finds a magical blue notebook; and Nathan Glass' nephew Tom Wood in *Brooklyn Follies* abandons his dissertation on Melville. Because this theme of drying up, of not being able to write again, pervades almost all of Auster's work, as does the trope of the artist destroying his own work or not allowing it to be seen, we can conclude that this is not only an issue that fascinates Auster, but one that may be one of those "cave drawings" he refers to as existing "on the inner walls of my own skull" (*IS* 35-37).

In addition to the time referred to above when Auster says he wrote nothing, there is also the period I mentioned earlier from 1994 to 2002. Auster did not publish another major novel until *The Book of Illusions in* 2002.

Another connection between Cervantes and Auster may be Judaism.[43] Several critics argue that the Spanish writer was likely descended from Conversos. Duran sees the possibility of a Jewish background in Cervantes' style: "A critical, ironic bent, plus an affinity for the ideas of Erasmus seem to point in the direction of a *converso* ancestry. The documentary proofs are lacking. Yet some of the best modern Hispanists…lean towards the idea that Cervantes came from a *converso* family. (29)

The philosophy of Erasmus evident in Cervantes' text is also a piece of evidence for Fuentes: "Cervantes was steeped in this forbidden philosophy. Erasmus searched for reconciliation between Faith and Reason….Cervantes, who was a disciple of the Spanish

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[43] See Carston Springer, Stephen Fredman, Norman Finklestein, and Derek Rubin.

Erasmists, had to disguise his intellectual allegiance" (4-5). The fact that there were several physicians in Cervantes' family is cited as more evidence of Jewish ancestry (Duran 29-30). If Cervantes were confirmed as a converso, Duran argues, this would explain the "official neglect [and] his failure to achieve social status….Be it as it may, he was a 'marginal man,' according to the sociologists' cliché, and his work bears witness to this fact" (30).

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster describes a secular childhood: "I…was being brought up as an American boy, who knew less about my ancestors than I did about Hopalong Cassidy's hat" (28). However, after the *Trilogy*, most of Auster's central characters are Jewish. Here they are in order of appearance: Marco Stanley Fogg (*MC*), Ben Sachs (*L*), Peter Aaron (*L*), Master Yehudi (*MV*), Willie G. Christmas[44] (*T*)**,** David Zimmer (*BI*), Hector Mann (*BI*), Sidney Orr (*ON*), John Trause (*ON*), and Nathan Glass (*BF*).[45]

Cervantes and Auster are writers steeped in philosophy. Though they create characters who embark on adventures, it is the inner life of the characters — and their relationship to the fictions and realities on which those fictions are based – that is the central focus of this literary father and son. In the following quotation Auster reflects with some dismay on the disappearance of the philosophical impulse in American fiction after the nineteenth-century:

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[44] The "G" stands for Gurevitch. Willy is indeed Jewish.

[45] In terms of his public life, Auster is not active in Jewish causes. However, in 2004 he appeared on a panel entitled "Secular Jewish Culture: Radical Poetic Practice" at the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan. Not having published (or as far as we know, written) any poetry in over twenty years, Auster seemed an odd choice for the panel, except for the fact that he is friends with the moderator, Charles Bernstein — and has published (again, though, in the distant past) essays on several Jewish poets.

> The fact is…that the American novel changed. The novels of Melville and Hawthorne, the stories of Poe and the writings of Thoreau for example. All of whom I am passionately interested in, were not about sociology, which is what the novel had come to concern itself [with] in the United States. It's something else. They had a metaphysical dimension, a philosophical dimension to them which I think has been forgotten and ignored. (qtd. in Varvogli 4)

Clearly Auster's own bent is philosophical. Here he reflects on that tendency in his work:

> *City of Glass* was a direct response to *The Invention of Solitude*, particularly the second part, the section called 'The Book of Memory.' But, in spite of the evidence, I wouldn't actually say that I was writing about myself in either book. *The Invention of Solitude* is autobiographical, of course, but I don't feel that I was telling the story of my life so much as using myself to explore certain questions that are common to us all: how we think, how we remember, how we carry our pasts around with us at every moment….Even the first part, which is ostensibly about my father, is finally concerned with something larger than one man's life. It's about the question of biography, about whether it's in fact possible for one person to talk to another person. (*AH* 307)

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster reflects on the thinking of Pascal (76, 120), Giordano Bruno (76), Kierkegaard, Augustine, Leibniz (114), and Descartes. In his novels, in addition to the philosophers above, Auster alludes to Spinoza (*MV*), Locke, Rousseau, Heraclitus, Hume (*MP*), Berkeley (*BI*), Hobbes (*L*) and others. Some critics argue that *City of Glass* is primarily about the philosophy of language. [46] "The father is equated with

[46] See Russell, Rowen, and Shiloh.

logos," comments Aliki Varvogli, "and a recovery of him in words is a recovery of signification" (10). I submit that these analyses (which use Derrida among others to argue for the radical indeterminacy of the text), though intriguing, can go only so far in helping us to gain insight into Auster's ethical and aesthetic agenda, which I believe is more complex than many critics allow. It would take a book-length manuscript to do justice to the philosophical underpinnings of Auster's novels. Here I have space only to allude to the voices of the philosophers — the philosophical heteroglossia — in this writer's work, so I will end this part of the discussion with Auster's words: "Each man," Auster writes …is the entire world, bearing within his genes a memory of all mankind. Or, as Leibniz put it: 'Every living substance is a perpetual living mirror of the universe'" (*IS* 114).

That Cervantes' text is philosophical has never been questioned by any serious reader. Duran says this of *DQ*: "Beneath the veneer of farce, parody, and laughter there are philosophical problems about appearance and reality, truth and illusion, subjective fantasy and objective knowledge. These are at bottom intellectual problems" (119). And then there is the question, which came up earlier in our discussion, of Erasmus. Duran asks if Cervantes was a follower of Erasmus: "[He] who had tried to breach the gap between Catholics and Protestants and preached an 'inner religiosity' almost devoid of external ceremonies?....It is typical of his art not to offer us any clear-cut theories, and also not to offer us one-sided moral speeches after the fashion of many of the writers of his time" (136-140). Angel del Rio contends that Cervantes' philosophy is in part in the relationship between the hero and his loyal companion:

> Because he juxtaposes and …partially fuses ideal truth, created by Don Quixote's faith, with the pragmatic truth of Sancho, and in the subtle game of truths and

> illusions, of madness and of common sense, he permits us to see how the squire becomes more and more like his master while his master begins to accept in the course of his disenchantment Sancho's vision….Cervantes did not even try to give us solutions…rather he wanted to present human life in all its richness, its ripeness, its constant contradictions. (qtd. in Duran 136-140)

And to those rationalists who would call Cervantes' novel a critique of fantasy, Duran has this to say**:** "The counterpoint of poetry and fantasy is needed, Cervantes thought, so that our world does not become too practical rational, ultimately dry. He did not, and could not, turn against poetry and imagination: only against its abuses" (133).

Duran writes also of Americo Castro's emphasis on the philosophical as well as the literary intention of dialogue in *Don Quixote*:

> What is most typical of Cervantes' style is not to attempt the solution of a given problem by applying logic to it (syllogisms were the main tool of the 'rationalists' and pseudointellectuals of that period), but rather to attempt to show the projection of a problem in two or more human beings, reflecting their attitudes through a dialogue that does not attempt to be exhaustive nor try to reach a solution. (106-7).

In addition to the philosophical impulses in Auster and Cervantes, there is also the evident psychological depth. In his novel *Leviathan,* narrator Peter Aaron reflects on his friend Ben Sachs' use of autobiography in his novel: "Since that book is filled with references to the Statue of Liberty, it's hard to ignore the possibility of a connection — as if the childhood experience of witnessing his mother's panic somehow lay at the heart of what he wrote as a grown man twenty years later" (20). Auster has been accused of being a

coldly intellectual writer, and/or one who is interested merely in playing precious postmodern games. I want to affirm that his fiction is profoundly moving to many readers because it comes from a place deep in his psyche, the place from which all profound literature comes, the site of primal desires and fears that move us to act in ways we often do not understand. Auster talks in an interview about stories coming from the unconscious with the power of dreams:

> If you're able to tell a story that resonates with the same power it has for you, it's almost as if it's coming out of your dreams. It comes from a place so dark and inaccessible if it's done well that it will resonate with that same power for the reader….I would almost say that to the degree the writer does not understand them [the 'irreducible elements' of which a book is composed], that is the degree to which the book is allowed to become itself, to become human and not just a literary exercise. (*AH* 330)

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster more explicitly aligns himself with Freud's conception of the unconscious and the nature and function of memory:

> It would be impossible to say that we are not haunted. Freud has described such experiences as 'uncanny,' or unheimlich — the opposite of heimlich, which means 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'....By definition we are lost in that world…..Freud argues that each stage of our development co-exists with all the others. Even as adults, we have buried within us a memory of the way we perceived the world as children. And not simply a memory of it: the structure itself is intact. (148)

Certainly language, or the failure of words to achieve their intended effects, is one of Auster's central themes. And the fact that his characters so often fail to breach the chasms that separate them should not be understated. Auster confesses, in fact, that his despair in the face of the human condition is a driving force behind his fiction: "At bottom, I think, my work has come out of a position of intense personal despair, a very deep nihilism and hopelessness about the world, the fact of our own transience and mortality, the inadequacy of language, the isolation of one person from another" (*AH* 335).

In spite of this revelation, I would argue that Auster's work does not rest in the despair, but rather rises in the struggle to connect with and believe in the power we have to heal one another through the sharing of our stories. In fact, in the interview from which the above quotation is taken, Auster concludes on a more positive note: "And yet, at the same time, I've wanted to express the beauty and extraordinary happiness of feeling yourself alive, of breathing in the air, the joy of being alive in your own skin" (*AH* 335).

The figure of Don Quixote is arguably the most well-known and enduring of all questing figures, which may tell us all we need to know to conclude that Cervantes' knight taps into something primal in the human psyche. Though some see only the absurdity in the Don's adventures, more sympathetic readers recognize — even in the most ridiculous of battles — a vulnerable yet brave knight employing, not only his rational faculties, but the imagination whereby he transcends mundane reality**.** Duran makes this claim for Cervantes as a writer with psychological depth: "What Cervantes achieves is even harder than writing a good comic scene: the philosophical and psychological underpinnings are always present, giving each scene a greater depth" (119).

In his essay "Cervantes: The Play of the World," Harold Bloom asserts that "no writer

has established a more intimate relation with his protagonist than Cervantes did" (781). In highlighting the connections between Auster and his protagonists, I am making a similar claim for Auster. Duran asserts for *Don Quixote* what I would also say is true for *City of Glass*:

> The traditional purposes of literary innovation have developed along two different yet complementary lines. The first, which can be called technical or artistic, aims at developing at the same time a new sensitivity, new ways of seeing our environment. The second, perhaps most important, by discovering new ways of probing the human psyche and exploring the human condition: this being psychological and philosophical. Only occasionally does a work of art appear in which the technological approach and the philosophical viewpoint are fused: *Don Quixote* is a case in point. (107)

One of the ways that Cervantes and Auster fuse the "technological" and the "philosophical" is by playing with issues of authorship. Diana de Armas Wilson, in her introduction to the Norton *Don Quixote,* points out how Cervantes amuses himself and the reader by surrendering authorship:

> In the Prologue to Part One of the novel, a fictionalized Cervantes announces his abdication of literary paternity…allowing himself to be drowned out by numerous surrogates: a phantom author, editors, translators, censors, an apocryphal novelist attempting to capitalize on the success of Part One, and even ourselves….Not unlike hypertext today, Cervantes urges us to participate in authoring his book: 'Reader, you decide,' is one of the narrator's most engaging imperatives. (xi)

Auster does something very similar in the *Trilogy*, though he does not reveal to us until

the third novel that all three texts have one narrator.

One of the consequences of complicating the question of authorship is to alter the traditional reader-writer relationship. In *The Art of Hunger*, Auster explains a fundamental principle of his aesthetic: "The one thing I try to do in all my books is leave enough room in the prose for the reader to inhabit. Because I finally believe it's the reader who writes the book and not the writer" (282)

Like Auster, Cervantes expects the reader to participate in the creation of the text. In his essay "Why Write?" Sartre describes it this way: "The writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work….Reading is a pact of generosity between the author and reader" (qtd. in Richter 1177-80).

Bloom says that "Cervantes invented endless ways of disrupting his own narrative to compel the reader to tell the story in place of the wary author" ("Cervantes" 781). Auster's Chinese-box narratives, though they also require the reader's attention in ways that more traditional texts may not, are not mere postmodern exercises. Auster, like Cervantes, is interested in the relationship of stories to one another. As the narrator of *City of Glass* says of Daniel Quinn, "What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories" (*CG* 8).

Once again Bakhtin's voice begs to be heard. In the following passage, I would substitute "story" and "stories" for "word" and "words": "The word…enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire

stylistic profile" (276).

It was literary father Borges, though, who created for us the ideal reader – one who creates a new and richer text as he reads: "I have taken on the mysterious duty of reconstructing literally his spontaneous work," Borges' Menard says of his rewriting of *Don Quixote* (851). The narrator's approval of the project is manifest: "Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer" (852). The idea of the integration and manifestation of the earlier works is cleverly expressed in the following words of the narrator: "I have reflected that it is permissible to see in this 'final' Quixote a kind of palimpsest, through which the traces — tenuous but not indecipherable — of our friend's 'previous' writing should be translucently visible" (853). It is this very kind of palimpsest that I have tried to show is available to the careful reader of Auster. "Menard (perhaps without wanting to)," Borges' narrator concludes, "has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading" (853).

In an interview with Christopher Bigsby, Auster talks about including the voices of other writers in his work. Though he is referring specifically to the second half of his first memoir, it is evident that these voices permeate all of Auster's ouvre: "I think in that second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, 'The Book of Memory,' the reason I quote so liberally from other writers is because I wanted it to be a collective work. This is the hoard of voices which inhabits my skull. These are the voices that I live with and I wanted them to come out and share the work with me" (qtd. in Varvogli v. 11).

Auster and his Spanish forefather are associative, digressive writers. Part of the pleasure in reading both authors is following them on their detours and back to the main story line, realizing that if we take the trouble as readers we can see how what may seem at

first to be an aimless divergence, is in fact not only essential to the primary narrative, but enriches it in ways that a more linear style could not. It is also the case that how we see the relationship between the embedded texts and the novels in their entirety may be different for each of us, thereby giving each reader a unique connection to the novels and their authors.

About the countless, and often contradictory interpretations of *DQ*, Bloom says, "No critic's account of Cervantes' masterpiece agrees with, or even resembles, any other critic's impressions. Don Quixote is a mirror held up not to nature, but to the reader" ("Intro." xxvi). For Nabokov, reader-response is, perhaps, even more personal: "All readers can be separated into Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas" (24), he says. Nabokov may be right about this stark choice, though others have argued that Cervantes' most famous pair may not be as separate as they seem. The point to be made here about Auster is that our easy identification with the protagonists in his novels becomes problematic for us when we realize that other figures in his fictions are alter-egos of the main characters. For example, what happens when we realize that the evil professor Peter Stillman is a quixotic figure himself? Or put another way, are we the father or are we the son?

Diana de Armas Wilson questions Cervantes' sincerity when he asserts that his text is meant to invalidate the romances that have driven his hero mad: "Cervantes announces that Don Quixote is aimed at 'demolishing the whole false, irrational network of those chivalric romances,' a claim repeated, with laborious insistence, throughout the text. Not all readers take that claim literally" (xi).

In a similar vein, Auster's deconstructive anti-detective novels are not true parodies of the more conventional detective story. As Auster has said, he uses the form to move in a

different direction, not to discount the predecessor. Discussing his use of the detective novel in the *Trilogy*, Auster makes his connection to Cervantes explicit:

> In the same way that Cervantes used chivalric romances as the starting point for *Don Quixote*, or the way that Beckett used the standard vaudeville routine as the framework for *Waiting for Godot*, I tried to use certain genre conventions to get to another place…altogether…the question of who is who and whether or not we are who we think we are. The whole process Quinn undergoes in the book — and the characters in the other two, as well — is one of stripping away to some barer condition in which we have to face up to who we are. Or who we aren't. It finally comes to the same thing. (*AH* 279)

Thus neither Cervantes nor Auster is simply parodying the earlier form. As Auster says of the archetype created by father Poe:

> The detective is a very compelling figure…he's the seeker after truth…the one who tries to figure things out. But what if, in the course of trying to figure it out, you just unveil more mysteries?....We're surrounded by…mysteries, and in the books these are people who suddenly come face to face with them. It becomes apparent that they're surrounded by things they don't know or understand. So in that sense there might be some psychological resonance. Even though the situations aren't strictly realistic, they might follow some realistic psychology. (*AH* 280)

Just as the detective is not a figure of mockery in Auster, the knight is not a figure of ridicule in *Don Quixote*. Foucault puts it simply when he says that "The chivalric romances have provided once and for all a written prescription for [Quixote's] adventures" (793). In this same way, detective fiction has provided the "written prescription" for

Daniel Quinn's adventures. Just as Auster's deconstructive anti-detective novel cannot be said to be a mere parody of the form, Cervantes' text is not a mere parody of the romance genre. He uses it, as Auster does, to raise questions about the nature of reality and consciousness. What makes Auster's *Trilogy* so intriguing is the same thing that makes Cervantes' text an endless delight. It is "unusual," as Manuel Duran says, "in containing the object of the parody within itself, as a vital ingredient" (122).

Of the embedded texts in *DQ*, Duran has this to say: "The reader seems to be faced with a Chinese nest of boxes, or a Russian Easter egg, or an onion with layer upon layer of of tales inserted" (129). Though there is no claim in *City of Glass* that we are reading history, when we immerse ourselves in the novel we are continually unpacking boxes, removing embedded eggs, or peeling onions, to use Duran's metaphors.

Fuentes' observations about the intertextuality in *Don Quixote* assist us in drawing another parallel with Auster's texts:

> Here the linearity of narration is broken down, encircled, put on fast forward or in reverse by the tale-within-the-tale interrupted by the pastoral interlude and then by the novel of courtly love and the strands of Moorish and Byzantine tales woven into the tapestry of a novel that, finally, proposes itself as both the identity and the difference of its verbal universe. (7)

Critics hypothesize about the reasons for Cervantes' many inclusions or digressions. Duran believes that the writer is somewhat unsure of how his audience will receive the embedded texts and so has the Canon of Toledo argue for the appropriateness of the strategy: "Cervantes was aware that his love of short stories might interfere in the composition of his novels. He expected that many of his readers would criticize him for

introducing these tales in his novel and felt the need to justify himself" (Duran 52). This justification, according to Duran is in Part I Chapter 47 when the Canon of Toledo, discussing works of fiction, says that they "should be…written…to create surprise and astonishment while at the same time they divert and entertain so that admiration and pleasure go hand in hand" (qtd. in Duran 52). This passage, Duran suggests, is evidence that Cervantes expected a particular kind of criticism:

> [He] knew that they [his novels] might be reproached for lacking in unity, since so many separate tales were woven into the main story, and yet he was unable to restrain himself. His creative mind was always at work introducing new elements….Cervantes knew that his talent for imagining new characters and new situations could not be restrained. He was a born storyteller. (52)

That Cervantes is a literary critic himself is evident in how much criticism he includes in his novel. As Duran says, "Several chapters are devoted almost exclusively to literary criticism: several secondary characters — the Curate, the Barber, the Canon, among others, and certainly Don Quixote himself — discuss in detail the merits and demerits of books. Slowly a theory of the novel emerges from the pages of this novel" (Duran 98). This is also the case in *City of Glass*, where Character Auster (whom we will meet in a few pages) is a critic and where Daniel Quinn, you may recall, reflects in some detail about the value of the mystery novel.

Long before Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia was articulated, Cervantes's novel embodies the idea. Duran affirms that "it is impossible to deal with it [*DQ*] without realizing that many of the materials from which it is built come from literature. Its very conception is based upon a synthesis (not a compromise) of two different subgenres of

fiction: the romances of chivalry and the picaresque novels" (120).

The following passage from Duran **c**ould have been written about Auster's *Trilogy*:

> The power of books over a man's life is…the constant theme of Cervantes' novel….When we realize how much men's lives have been changed by the power of books, whether the Bible or Mao's Little Red Book, whether the Homeric epics inspiring Alexander the Great to his endless conquests, or the romantic romances that troubled Madame Bovary, we come to the conclusion that literature and our daily lives are like two distorted and shifting mirrors placed in front of each other. Each change of perspective, each shift in the mirrors, opens up new vistas and compels us to new actions. (124-125)

These are worlds of discourse. The *Trilogy* is a Bakhtinian heteroglossia, with authors, texts, literary fathers, biological fathers, characters, and readers interanimating one another in a chaos of intersections. The multiple discourse worlds in *City of Glass* overlap. As Bakhtin says, "Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other" (354). Bakhtin's principle of heteroglossia is evident everywhere in these intersecting or overlapping worlds.

The relationship between the writers and their protagonists is as central to our understanding of these works as is the relationship between the novels and the other worlds with which they intersect. The question arises, then: Does Cervantes appear in his text — as the hero or in other characters? Manuel Duran believes he does:

> Cervantes…places here and there discrete clues pointing toward himself (as in the tale of the Captive, I, 39-41), which make us aware that Cervantes is at the same

> time outside the novel, manipulating cleverly the unseen strings, and inside it, very much like a modern film director who not only creates a film, but also appears briefly in it as one of the most obscure secondary characters. (129-130)

For Harold Bloom there is no question that the author of *Don Quixote* lives in the text: "Cervantes inhabits his great book so pervasively that we need to see that it has three unique personalities: the knight, Sancho and Cervantes himself" ("The Introduction" xxii). Gerald Brenan makes this claim about the Spanish writer's famous novel:

> [It] was conceived in prison at a low-water mark in Cervantes' life and he tells us that in writing it he "gave play to his melancholy and disgruntled feelings." Something more then than a skit on the novels of Chivalry must have been intended. I think therefore, that we ought to take note of the fact that the famous knight had many features in common with his creator. (qtd. in Duran 95)

"Many of these features," according to Duran, "are evident even to the reader who is not a specialist on Cervantes or a professional critic, but who keeps his eyes open":

> We learn, for instance, that Don Quixote was of the same age as Cervantes when he set out on his adventures. The portraits of Cervantes show him as a man with a narrow and long face, a spacious forehead, somewhat melancholy eyes. Cervantes was the eternal optimist, always ready to crack a joke even during his numerous personal crises. (95-96).

Gerald Brenan sees the autobiographical impulse in Cervantes' novel as a basis of its ability to affect us: "One of the sources of Don Quixote's power to move us comes from his being a projection of a discarded part of Cervantes himself: that is to say, of the noble intentions and failure of his life" (qtd. in Duran 96).

If the autobiographical impulse is strong in Cervantes and Auster, the question of whether their heroes are mad or sane is certainly significant. Doubts about the rationality of Quixote and Quinn permeate the two novels. Here is Cervantes on the mental confusion of his hero: "And so he went on, stringing together absurdities, all of a kind that his books had taught him, imitating insofar as he was able the language of their authors. He rode slowly, and the sun came up so swiftly and with so much heat that it would have been sufficient to melt his brains if he had had any" (qtd. in Nabokov 114). Do we believe Cervantes when he disparages his knight in this manner? Certainly a truly brainless figure would not so capture our sympathy and imagination – or represent his creator.

Harold Bloom seems to have a higher opinion of Cervantes' hero than does the author himself: "Don Quixote's madness," the critic insists, "is deliberate, self-inflicted, a traditional poetic strategy" ("Intro." xxvii**).** Character Auster appears to agree: "Don Quixote, in my view," he tells Quinn, "was not really mad. He only pretended to be" (*CG* 119).

The relationship between Paul Auster and Character Auster deserves closer examination. The chapter alluded to earlier in which Quinn meets another of his alter-egos is a world of embedded texts (Character Auster is writing an article on *Don Quixote*) and mise-en-abyme (the article on *Don Quixote* clearly mirrors the text of *City of Glass*)**.** Blurred identities call out for recognition**:** Don Quixote and Daniel Quinn have the same initials; Paul Auster seems to have Daniel Quinn's former life as writer and husband and father; Cervantes and Paul Auster/author of *City of Glass* appear to have written novels with similar intentions. And finally, the law of the excluded middle (CharacterAuster both is and is not Paul Auster/author of *City of Glass*) compels us to consider the impossible.

In 1993 Auster published an anecdote about the catalyst for his first novel. The "Red Notebook" (published in *The Art of Hunger* in 1997 and then reissued separately in 2002) includes thirteen short narratives about chance and coincidence. These are stories of rescue, of betrayal, and of unexpected gifts, but the last account is about the origin of *City of Glass*:

> My first novel was inspired by a wrong number….To tell the truth, I felt that I had squandered a rare opportunity….Most of all, I wanted to remain faithful to my original impulse. Unless I stuck to the spirit of what had really happened, I felt there wouldn't have been any purpose to writing the book. That meant implicating myself in the action of the story (or at least someone who resembled me, who bore my name), and it also meant writing about detectives who were not detectives, about impersonation, about mysteries that cannot be solved. For better or worse, I felt I had no choice. (*AH* 377-378)

The connection to Quinn here is transparent, but author Auster also binds himself to Character Auster when the latter reassures Quinn by telling him he would probably have taken the same action (impersonating a detective) had he been in Quinn's place. Auster has said he believes that "the world is filled with stories, that our lives are filled with stories, but it's only at certain moments that we are able to see them or to understand them" (*AH* 329). Perhaps we must also be able — and willing — to live them. Though Auster did *not* in fact impersonate a detective, the power of the novel *City of Glass* may be in his impulse to do exactly that.

Auster tells more than one story about his reasons for creating Character Auster and having his real-life wife and son make an appearance as the character's family. In an interview in 1987 Auster says that *City of Glass* is "a kind of fictitious subterranean

autobiography, an attempt to imagine what my life would be like if I hadn't met [my wife]. That's why I had to appear in the book as myself, but at the same time Auster is also Quinn, but in a different universe" (*AH* 278). He gives a similar, but more detailed explanation in an interview two years later, when he reveals the following about the break-up of his marriage and separation from his son:

> [This] was the emotional source of the book….My first wife and I split in 1979, and for a year-and-a-half after that I lived in a kind of limbo…[but] by the time I started writing *City of Glass*, my life had undergone a dramatic improvement. I was in love…my inner world had been utterly transformed. In many ways, I think of *City of Glass* as an homage to Siri, as a love letter in the form of a novel. I tried to imagine what would have happened to me if I hadn't met her, and I came up with Quinn. (*AH* 312-13)

Yet Auster has also said that *City of Glass* was a direct response to *The Invention of Solitude*, particularly the section called "The Book of Memory" and he gives the following reason for creating the Auster figure:

> I wanted to implicate myself in the machinery of the book. I don't mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, that mysterious other who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books. What I was hoping to do, in effect, was to take my name off the cover and put it inside the story. I wanted to open up the process, to break down walls, to expose the plumbing…for the author of a novel can never be sure where any of it comes from. The self that exists in the world — the self whose name appears on the covers of books — is finally not the same self who writes the book….So the Auster on the cover and the Auster in the

> story are not the same person. They're the same and yet not the same.
> (*AH* 307-9)

We have already examined the relationship between Paul Auster and Character Auster, but we must also look closely at the connections between Daniel Quinn and the character who, though clearly an alter-ego of our detective, seems to represent his life before the unbearable loss that leads him to his quest.

When Daniel Quinn has a conversation with Character Auster, who is writing an article on *Don Quixote*, the two men are of one mind on the Spanish author's reasons for denying that he is the author of the book. When Character Auster says that Cervantes claims to have found the manuscript and had it translated into Spanish (*CG* 117), Quinn makes it clear that he has reflected on the issue of authorship. "Cid Hamete Benengeli's," Quinn adds, "is the only true version of Don Quixote's story. All the other versions are frauds, written by imposters. [Cervantes] makes a great point of insisting that everything in the book really happened in the world" (*CG* 117). Character Auster agrees: "Because the book…is an attack on the dangers of make-believe, [Cervantes] couldn't very well offer a work of the imagination to do that" (*CG* 117).

We have heard this insistence on the veracity of a story before in the passage from Marco Polo that Quinn was reading when he got the first call from young Peter Stillman. Quinn's response is absolutely in sync with Character Auster's thinking: "Still," Quinn says, "I've always suspected that Cervantes devoured those old romances. You can't hate something so violently unless a part of you also loves it. In some sense, Don Quixote was just a stand-in for himself" (*CG* 117). Here we are reminded of two things. One is the passage in which Quinn tells us how he devours mysteries, and two, the idea that Quinn is

"just a stand-in" for the author of *City of Glass*. But before we have a chance to bask in our cleverness as readers, we are thrown again when Auster agrees with Quinn by saying: "What better portrait of a writer than to show a man who has been bewitched by books?" (*CG* 117).

Character Auster, as I have suggested, seems to be on the same wavelength as Quinn, the two almost finishing each other's sentences when they discuss Cervantes. Auster says this about his essay on *Don Quixote:*

> [It is] speculative…tongue-in-cheek. An imaginative reading….It's about the authorship of the book. Who wrote it, and how it was written….I mean the book inside the book Cervantes wrote, the one he imagined he was writing…. Cervantes…goes to great lengths to convince the reader that he is not the author. the book, he says, was written in Arabic by Cid Hamete Benengeli ….Cervantes…hires someone to translate it…into Spanish, and thereafter he presents himself as no more than the editor of the translation. (*CG* 117)

Ah, indeed, we say. *City of Glass* is a portrait of just such a writer, Auster (author of the novel), his character Quinn (bewitched by mysteries), and Character Auster (clearly bewitched enough by books to write critical essays about them). Then in yet another dip on the roller-coaster, Character Auster brings up the issue of the narrator of *Don Quixote*:

> In any case, since the book is supposed to be real, it follows that the story has to be written by an eyewitness[47] to the events that take place in it. But Cid Hamete, the acknowledged author, never makes an appearance….[So] the theory I present…is that he is actually a combination of four different people: Sancho Panza…the

[47] If we have been keeping our eyes open, as we have been instructed to from the beginning of the novel, this passage leads us to reflect on the narration of *CG*, which is clearly not a mere transcription of the red notebook.

> barber and the priest…[and] Samson Carrasco, the bachelor from Salamanca. (*CG* 117-118)

In answer to a question from Quinn about why the four characters would go to such trouble, Character Auster reminds his guest that "the idea was to hold a mirror up to Don Quixote's madness, to record each of his absurd and ludicrous delusions, so that when he finally read the book himself, he would see the error of his ways" (*CG* 118-119).

Quinn expresses his approval of this idea and Character Auster offers one last twist when he argues that Don Quixote knew exactly what he was doing:

> He orchestrated the whole thing himself….[He was] conducting an experiment. He wanted to test the gullibility of his fellow men. Would it be possible, he wondered, to stand up before the world and with the utmost conviction spew out lies and nonsense? To say that windmills were knights, that a barber's basin was a helmet, that puppets were real people?….In other words, to what extent would people tolerate blasphemies if they gave them amusement? The answer is obvious, isn't it? To any extent. For the proof is that we still read the book. It remains highly amusing to us. And that's finally all anyone wants out of a book — to be amused. (*CG* 119-120)

Whatever resonance this passage has for us may depend on which identity we put in the place of Don Quixote's. The most fruitful substitution is the author of *City of Glass* himself, who has written this amusing book. The allusion to puppets takes us back to young Peter Stillman's monologue when he says that "I am still the puppet boy…[though] sometimes I think I will at last grow up and become real" (*CG* 26).

What kind of relationship is established between an author and a reader when such a hoax is perpetrated? I want to propose that it is a relationship of collaboration. As Wolfgang Iser suggests, "There is a "virtual dimension [that] is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (279).

I would venture to say that the sympathetic reader of this text never feels tricked, for there are plenty of hints that we are being played with, clues for us to use in our detective work as readers, and so we play the game willingly if we keep on reading.

The blurring of identities — the doubling, the twinning (the reminder that there are parallel and overlapping worlds here) — goes on when Quinn is introduced to Character Auster's son and learns that the boy's name is Daniel. "Everybody's Daniel!" the boy yells and Quinn responds by saying, "That's right….I'm you and you're me" (*CG* 122).[48]

Any readers who are still trying to keep the walls between identities in place, must throw their hands up at this point and let them come tumbling down, for as Barthes says, there are "textes de plaisir," readerly texts whose underlying order can be determined, and there are "textes je jouissance" or texts of bliss, which give pleasure even as they frustrate our attempts (and who can help but make the attempt?) to *figure them out.*[49] Auster's novel is undeniably in the latter category.

Stepping back from Auster's Chinese-box-world, we see a text-within-a-text-within-a-text: *Don Quixote* is packed inside the article by Character Auster, who is packed inside the red notebook, which is packed inside the narrator's replication of and embellishment on the original red notebook, which is packed inside author/Auster's *City of Glass.* We notice the levels of authorship: Cervantes is inside of Character Auster, who is inside Quinn, who

[48] I would remind the reader here that the real-life Auster's son's name is Daniel.

[49] See Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text.*

is inside the narrator, who is inside Auster/author of *City of Glass*. This is embedding at its most provocative. Literary father and son interanimate one another, even as they live and breathe through their characters and the texts these characters create.

In another ironic twist, Character Auster recognizes Quinn as the poet who published a book and then disappeared from the scene. Auster says he wondered what had become of Quinn. Not surprisingly, this connection between writers seems to be Quinn's entree into the apartment, since it is then that "Auster opened the door wider and gestured for Quinn" to come in (112).

Yet another example of doubling comes into the foreground when we consider the relationship between Daniel Quinn and Don Quixote. The detective and the knight — doubles on quests — have much in common. Daniel Quinn and Don Quixote are both redressers of wrongs and defenders of damsels. Both heroes take on new identities in order to embark on their quests. The creators of the detective and the knight make clear that who these men were before they adopted their roles is not at issue here. The only thing we need to know is what kinds of books they read. "As for Quinn," the narrator of *CG* says, "there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance" (3).

Duran reminds us that in Cervantes's novel, "The gentleman's name is left in doubt" (Duran 97). Duran makes an even more salient point about the allegorical nature of *DQ*: "He [DQ] often spoke of his enemies in terms of giants, dragons, evil enchanters. We should know better: they should be named hypocrisy, mediocrity, lack of imagination, obtuseness, greed, cruelty, despotism" (138).

It is important, however, that our heroes decide who they will be. They name

themselves, and the names they choose are significant. Quinn, the poet, chooses William Wilson, Max Work, and Paul Auster. Don Quixote, a poet too, "takes great pains with words, with language — the hallmark of a poet. He chooses his own name, the name of his horse, the name of his lady, with exquisite care: he knows that names do matter, that, in a way, they are or can be the essence of the person, object, or action they stand for" (Duran 125). Once again we hear echoes of Peter Stillman Sr.

The taking on of a new identity is the beginning — for Quinn and Quixote — of a life of action. The question of letters vs. arms is one that is vital to both Cervantes and Auster. *City of Glass* and Cervantes' novel both question the value of the unlived life: can a writer (or a reader) be a hero or is the "lived life" and heroism only possible in action in the world? Foucault makes the following claim about the hero of Cervantes' novel: "His whole being is nothing but language, text, printed pages, stories that have already been written down" (792). Yet the inspiration of the novel is that Don Quixote takes the texts seriously enough to act on them. When the knight believes that windmills are giants, he is in effect fighting giants. He is not a ridiculous figure as some have suggested, because his existential crisis is real. It is true that he struggles with the gap between words and things, but he often bridges the chasm. As Nabokov points out, Don Quixote does not lose all his battles.[50]

Don Quixote is an ethical hero. There *are* damsels in distress — there *are* people in need of heroes — and after reading countless tales of adventure, the knight feels he must act in the world. Nabokov reminds us that Quixote "considers the profession of letters less lofty in its purpose than the profession of arms. The former has for a goal human

[50] See pages 89-157 of *Lectures*, where Nabokov painstakingly recounts all of the Don's adventures in terms of victories and defeats.

knowledge which leads to the formulation of just laws, but the profession of arms, he says, has for its purpose peace, which is the greatest blessing that man can wish in this life" (102).

This is, of course, the writer's dilemma. Is his life worthwhile if it is spent in a room putting words on paper? Is he merely a passive observer of life rather than an active participant? This is what drives Daniel Quinn to embark on his quest to save Peter Stillman Jr. Bloom says this of the man who dubbed himself a knight: "A poor gentleman of La Mancha, Alonso has only one vice: he is an obsessive reader of the popular literature of his day, which crowds reality out of his mind. Cervantes describes Alonso as a pure case of the unlived life" (qtd. in Norton *DQ* 782). But Alonso becomes the Don and though many see this self-proclaimed man of chivalry as a madman, Bloom sees a visionary: "Romantics (myself included) see Quixote as hero, not fool; decline to read the book primarily as satire; and find in the work a metaphysical or visionary attitude regarding the Don's quest" (81).

It seems that literary father Borges, too, sees a distinction between a life of the mind and a life in the world: "It is well known that Don Quixote," he writes, "decided the debate against letters and in favor of arms" (qtd. in *Norton DQ* 851).[51]

Cervantes plays with reality vs. illusion over a century before literary son Auster. Lionel Trilling famously asserted that "all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*…the problem of appearance and reality" (qtd. in Fuentes in Norton *DQ* 778). And Harold Bloom acknowledges that nothing in the Spaniard's famous novel is to be taken at face value:

> Are we to believe everything Don Quixote says to us? Does he believe it? He (or Cervantes) is the inventor of a mode now common enough, in which figures, within a novel, read prior fictions concerning their own earlier adventures and have to sustain a consequent loss in the sense of reality….To ask what it is that Don Quixote himself believes is to enter the visionary centre of his story. ("The Knight" 6).

"Thus Cervantes," writes Duran, "at certain moments in which Don Quixote's fantasy seems to go too far, takes care to warn us that it is impossible to vouch for the authenticity or verisimilitude of the knight's descriptions" (128). This, I maintain, is also true of the latter Don Quixote, Daniel Quinn. Though answers may not be forthcoming, we can be sure that if we are pondering how porous the borders are between reality and illusion, we are at the very least in the proper frame of mind to ask the right questions.

In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster contemplates how difficult it can be to distinguish between the real and the fantastic: "And he wondered at this trick his mind continued to play on him, this constant turning of one thing into another thing, as if behind each real thing there were a shadow thing, as alive in his mind as the thing before his eyes, and in the end he was at a loss to say which of these things he was actually seeing" (*IS* 135).

Paul Auster does not always make explicit the parallels he presumably would like us to see in his fiction. The correspondences between Cervantes' novel and *City of Glass*, however, are ones that Auster makes exceedingly transparent. In an interview, Auster speaks of the essential connection between the two texts:

> Quinn's story in *City of Glass* alludes to *Don Quixote*, and the questions raised in the two books are very similar**:** what is the line between madness and creativity,

> what is the line between the real and the imaginary, is Quinn crazy to do what he does or not? For a time, I toyed with the idea of using an epigraph at the beginning of *City of Glass*. It comes from Wittgenstein: 'And it also means something to talk of 'living in the page of a book.' (*AH* 281)

The question of what is real and what is imaginary is in the foreground when we consider what it means to embark on a quest that is ultimately aborted. *Don Quixote*, I want to claim, is the first aborted quest novel. And because Auster's hero blurs the lines between fiction and reality, we know that his quest will not be fulfilled. Daniel Quinn is not a typical hero and neither is his predecessor:

> He is not young, handsome, and dashing; he does not possess the appealing grace of the very young heroes of picaresque novels….Alonso Quijano gives birth to Don Quixote in the first chapters of Cervantes' novel. Thus an element of unreality is introduced from the very beginning in a realistic novel: we are dealing with a fictitious character, one that has been superimposed upon an aging *hidalgo* by the will of the *hidalgo* — and of Cervantes. (Duran 97)

The idea of what constitutes a successful quest is an issue in Cervantes and Auster. Fuentes asserts that Quixote is aware of his failure, but that it is through this awareness that he "help[s] us save, the nature of life itself, human existence and its values as lived and proposed and remembered by all the ages, all the races, all the families of humankind, without alienating themselves to an illusion of unending, certified progress and felicity" (14).

It is Daniel Quinn's failure, too, that forces us to acknowledge the impossibility of some quests. We are being asked to recognize that it is in the fighting of the windmills or the

tracing of the steps of a mad professor that heroism is achieved. Nabokov observes that "Within his [Don Quixote's] soul he carries the most dread enemy of the visionary: the snake of doubt, the coiled consciousness that his quest is an illusion" (68). It is the fact, then, that the knight's doubts do not defeat him that should be our focus, and I would make the same claim for Daniel Quinn, who clings to his quest beyond all reason and only aborts it when he learns that the object of his surveillance has self-destructed.

It is after meeting, in a sense, his former self — complete with wife and child — that Quinn begins to lose sight of his quest**:** "Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing" (124). When Quinn leaves Auster's apartment, though, his first thought is of his responsibility to Virginia Stillman, and he wrestles with the decision to call — or not. He claims that it is "etiquette that decided" (125), but I would claim more and say that the decision to call is an ethical one that shows our hero is reluctant to give up on his quest. "It would not be fair to disappear without telling her first," Quinn reflects. "After that it would be perfectly acceptable. As long as you tell people what you are going to do, he reasoned, it doesn't matter. Then you are free to do what you want" (125).

If Quinn's reasoning here seems flawed to us, it is perhaps evidence that, in spite of his desire to behave ethically (to continue on the path of the hero)**,** he is losing his sanity and so his behavior becomes truly irrational. Though the Stillmans' phone is busy for hours, Quinn does not go to the Stillmans' apartment (the most rational course of action), but watches a Mets game, writes in his red notebook, slams the phone down so hard it breaks (so then no one can get in touch with him), and goes to bed.

Although what he does (or does not do) this day could be chalked up to a temporary cowardice — he does notice that the walls of his apartment have "turned a curious shade of yellow" (124) — Quinn's behavior the next day convinces us that there has been a significant psychic shift. Quinn has a dream that night in which "he found himself walking down Broadway, holding Auster's son by the hand" (126).

The question of the courage and responsibility of the hero does not go away, though, for Quinn spends the next day walking aimlessly around the city, stopping periodically to call the Stillman apartment: "Virginia and Peter Stillman were shut off from him now. But he could soothe his conscience with the thought that he was still trying. Whatever darkness they were leading him into, he had not abandoned them yet" (127). He stops only to eat and write in his red notebook: "For the first time since he had bought the red notebook, what he wrote that day had nothing to do with the Stillman case…he felt an urge to record certain facts, and he wanted to put them down on paper before he forgot them" (128-129).

Quinn records what he sees, which seems to be the darker side of the city — the broken, the homeless. The quest, it seems, is all but abandoned. But just as we are ready to give up on our hero, another strange twist throws us back into uncertainty. During a brief respite from his wanderings, Quinn *decides* what he should believe:

> He realized that he had come to a decision about things….The busy signal, he saw now, had not been arbitrary. It had been a sign, and it was telling him that he could not yet break his connection with the case….He had tried to contact Virginia Stillman in order to tell her that he was through, but the fates had not allowed it…. Fate in the sense of what was, of what happened to be. It was something like the word "it" in the phrase "it is raining" or "it is night." (132-33)

There is an interesting contradiction here. If things in the world are not arbitrary/random/chance-driven, but are signs instructing us on how to live, then the universe is indeed easier to read, the terrain easier to negotiate. But what does it mean to say "fate in the sense of …what happened to be?" In the examples Quinn gives, like "it is raining" or "it is night," there is clearly a lack of choice, or rather, human beings have no effect on such things. When it comes to a busy signal, however, the human involvement is obvious. And though the human response to a busy signal may be temporarily the same as the human response to rain (helplessness, acceptance, inaction), after a reasonable period of time, if one needs to make contact with a person whose phone is inoperative, one presumably finds another way. The fact that Quinn does not find another way, that he equates the busy phone with "it is raining," tells us that he has moved more fully into the realm of the irrational:

> It was fate, then…there was nothing he could do about it….One problem still remained. If he was unable to contact Virginia Stillman — if, as he believed, he was meant not to contact her — how exactly was he to proceed? His job was to protect Peter, to make sure that no harm came to him….He could proceed, then, as he wished. He would no longer have to telephone Virginia Stillman….From now on, there would be no stopping him. It would be impossible for Stillman to come near Peter without Quinn knowing about it. (133-34)

A world in which one is "meant" to contact someone or not is a world that makes sense. There are signs (the busy signal, for example) that one reads and the course of action at any given moment is, if not immediately clear, then at least *knowable.* The irony is that this world in which Quinn finds himself (and I consciously use this phrasing) does not at all

seem to make sense.

And so when Quinn settles into an alleyway to keep an eye on the Stillman building, not knowing (but presumably believing) that young Peter Stillman is alive and well in his luxury apartment, Quinn believes he is doing the right — the responsible — thing by this mad act of surveillance. He does not believe that he has given up the quest. Later, when Quinn learns that Stillman committed suicide shortly after their last meeting, he tries the Stillman phone again and finds it has been disconnected. He learns also that he has lost his apartment and this is when Quinn's despair takes him to the smallest darkest room of the empty Stillman apartment, where he settles in on the floor with his red notebook.[52]

Shiloh insists that Quinn's quest is "to lose himself. And this is the only quest which succeeds — at the end of *City of Glass*, not only Quinn, but everything around him, disintegrates" (40). Once again, I differ with Shiloh in her characterization of Quinn's quest. Quinn does not seek to lose himself, I would say, but to risk death (and his sanity) in the service of saving a life.

We do not know what becomes of Quinn at the end of the novel, only that when he leaves the Stillman apartment he leaves behind the red notebook, which is found by Character Auster and the narrator. The only thing we can be sure of is that the quest has been aborted. We do know, however, as we noted earlier, that Quinn becomes a poet once more. He "no longer had any interest in himself. He wrote about the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind. He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large….Nothing mattered now but the beauty of all this" (156).

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[52] Quinn survives, we learn in *LR* (see pp. 239,333,362). He is the detective Sophie Fanshawe hires to find her husband. And in Auster's most recent novel, *Travels in the Scriptorium,* Quinn appears as a lawyer defending Mr. Blank (alter-ego of Paul Auster) who is being held on charges that he treated his characters badly.

Ilana Shiloh's sense of this ending is that "Nothing has been left; there is only the indifferent beauty of the universe, a voice in darkness and despair" (55). Though the voice is indeed speaking from the darkness, I would suggest that if there was nothing left but despair, the narrator and his friend would have come upon a corpse rather than a notebook. Yes, the quest has been aborted: "the case was far behind him now, and he no longer bothered to think about it" (156). However, we are also told that the case "had been a bridge to another place in his life" (156). This idea that the aborted quest is not the end of the story of Quinn is confirmed when we meet him in the third novel in the T*rilogy*.

Don Quixote's aborted quests can also be seen in a more positive light. Duran maintains that in spite of his failures "Don Quixote is a free man, one of the few men that have ever existed…and this is one of the sources of his happiness. For there can be no doubt about it: during almost all of the first part of the novel, Don Quixote is a happy man" (125). The knight *and* his squire, Duran contends, are able to endure their trials because of their existential freedom:

> The breath of the air of freedom, the knowledge that each one of them is fashioning his own life not according to tradition or routine, but rather by following the dictates of his heart and — especially in the case of Don Quixote — by becoming a poetic being, a novel-turned-into-man, is what sustains the couple in the most dangerous and painful adventures. (126)

The intermingling of life and books — in the life of Cervantes' hero and in the lives of Auster's protagonists — means that much is expected of both. Duran makes the following claim for the knight: "For him life must be as beautiful and fulfilling as literature; literature must lend itself to the daily needs of human life. Needless to say, this confusion is at the

source of endless practical problems for the knight and his squire" (126).

Cervantes' knight's determination to cling to his quest beyond all reason is what defeats him, but it is also what makes him a hero. "[DQ's] heroism," observes Robert Alter, "consists in his brave, pathetic, noble, and of course mad attempt to force the indifferent things of his world into consonance with his own heroic ideals — basins into helmets, windmills into dragons, broken-winged nags into fiery steeds" (qtd. in Duran 127). Speaking of the damsel Dorotea whom Quixote rescues in chapter thirty of volume one, Nabokov reminds us that "We do not appreciate the subtle difference between her real plight and the plight of a damsel in distress in books of chivalry. It seems all one to us, and Don Quixote consequently becomes a real knight errant, a real helper and avenger, since Dorotea is really a damsel in distress" (138). Nabokov quotes Cervantes: "A strange thing! But he felt impelled to defend her as if she had been his own lady, to such a pass had those unholy books of his brought him" (133).

Foucault reinforces this idea when he argues that for Quixote "victory is not really important….[He] reads the world in order to prove his books….His whole journey is a quest for similitudes: the slightest analogies are pressed into service as dormant signs that must be reawakened and made to speak once more" (793).

In chapter six of volume two of *DQ*, Cervantes' knight speaks to his housekeeper and his niece about the choice between letters and arms: "My two daughters, there are two roads a man can take, to become rich and honored: one is learning, and the other is war. There is more of war than of learning in me; I was born under the influence of the planet Mars, which leads me to take war as my way of life" (391).

The transformation here is remarkable: the mild-mannered voracious reader of

romances, Alonso Quijano, becomes a knight on a quest. In a parallel universe, a voracious reader of mysteries, Daniel Quinn, becomes Paul Auster, detective. The word, in a sense, is made flesh. Words make things happen. We should applaud, then, these heroes, Quixote and Quinn, for whom the world of books becomes a world of action in which a knight — or a detective — dedicates his life to rescuing the wretched and the oppressed.

Chapter Two: Thoreau Lives on Orange Street: Fathers and Sons in the Colorful World of *Ghosts*

In the mythus a superhuman intelligence uses the unconscious thoughts and dreams of men as its hieroglyphics to address men unborn.
Thoreau, *A Week On The Concord and Merrimack Rivers*

"Every man," says Emerson, "is a bundle of his ancestors" (qtd. in Ruland 34). Henry David Thoreau is the central literary father in *Ghosts*, and *Walden* is the key embedded text. Both books are about the lives of writers who need to come to terms with who they are in relation to their fathers — biological and literary. Many other ghosts, however, haunt this second novel in the *Trilogy*. Poe is here once again as father of the detective story and Whitman surfaces for the first time on the third page of the novel when we learn that Orange Street is where the poet "handset the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855" (163). Later the Brooklyn bard reappears when Blue dons a disguise and is told by Black that he looks like Whitman. Henry Ward Beecher turns up a couple of times in the novel, first when the narrator informs us that Orange Street is where the preacher "railed against slavery from the pulpit of his red-brick church" (163) and later when Black tells Blue that Thoreau came to Plymouth Church to hear Beecher's sermon.[53]

Hawthorne makes his first appearance via his story "Wakefield"[54] when Black paraphrases the tale for the dumbfounded Blue. Melville materializes via one of his characters when Blue (looking like Whitman) introduces himself to Black as "Jimmy

[53] Black also mentions Lincoln, to whom Auster's father was said to bear an uncanny resemblance, as another visitor to Orange Street.

[54] Richard Swope suggests that Hawthorne's story "functions as a mise-en-abyme for the larger narrative — and for the entire trilogy" (4).

Rose," Melville's eponymous character. There are several Browns to whom Auster may be alluding with retired detective Brown who trained Blue and whom the younger man thought of as a father. There is Father Brown of Chesterton's Father Brown mysteries; Sir Thomas Browne, whom Thoreau is said to have read with pleasure and whom Auster refers to in other works; abolitionist John Brown, whom Thoreau admired greatly; and finally, Charles Brockden Brown, credited with penning the first American romance. All of these ghosts produce for us a haunting heteroglossia. Moreover, we may imagine that Auster has taken Nietzsche at his word — "When one hasn't had a good father, it is necessary to invent one" (qtd. in Bloom *Anxiety* 56) — and decided that one cannot have too many good fathers, especially if they are steeped in mystery and romance.

John C. Broderick writes that in *Walden* Thoreau "recapitulates the archetypal Romantic theme of rebirth" (71). My argument in this chapter is that Auster's detective Blue in *Ghosts* experiences his own rebirth, though it is no doubt a more violent one than Thoreau's. But first let us place Auster in the history of the American novel as a writer of these fictions which may be called "romances." Hawthorne's preface to *The House of Seven Gables* defines the genre:

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former — while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may

> swerve aside from the truth of the human heart — has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. (3)

This description of the genre, it will become clear, is a fitting one for *Ghosts*. As Richard Chase says in his history of the American novel, "One may point to the power of romance to express dark and complex truths unavailable to realism" (xi). The "dark and complex truth" in this novel is that Blue (detective/reader/writer) must understand and then integrate his alter-ego Black and the literary fathers that haunt them.

Chase also declares that "The American novel tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience [and] when it attempts to resolve contradictions, it does so in oblique, morally equivocal ways" (1). Certainly Auster's work, and *Ghosts* in particular, falls into this category. Blue trapped alone in a room for months on end reading and writing in the hope of solving the case is indeed extreme. Stephen Fredman highlights the postmodern writer's anxiety when he says that the "primal condition of the writer in the present age [is] imprisoned, facing a blank page without the structures of story, plot, or action to support him" (3). Though writers have always required solitude and have always faced a blank page, the challenge for Blue and Black (and Auster) is to have faith that what one is writing will make sense to a reader in a world that, as Professor Stillman says, "is in fragments" (92). Thus Blue's dilemma is personal, but it is also universal for artists in the postmodern period. But let us return to the room with Blue.

Our detective wants to be a man of action: "He's not used to sitting around like this, and…now, it's beginning to get on his nerves. He likes to be up and about, moving from one place to another, doing things. I'm not the Sherlock Holmes type, he would say to

Brown, whenever the boss gave him a particularly sedentary task" (166).

What Blue must learn, however, is that the most important action must take place inside his head. The part of Blue that he has split off — the part that stares at him from across Orange Street, must be confronted. Until he understands this, he will remain bewildered:

> When he looks through it [his notebook] to see what he has written, he is disappointed to find such paucity of detail. It's as though his words, instead of drawing out the facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear….He looks across the street and sees Black….Black, too, is looking through the window at that moment, and it suddenly occurs to Blue that he can no longer depend on the old procedures. Clues, legwork, investigative routine — none of this is going to matter anymore. But then, when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere. At this point, Blue can only surmise what the case is not. To say what it is, however, is completely beyond him. (175)

Mark Ford, in an essay on Auster and Thoreau, asserts that the two authors, "are obsessively concerned with the powers of solitude to convert the socially induced anxieties of self-division into the creative forces of self-awareness" (204). From this perspective, Blue is trapped in the room (imprisoned by the case) in order to become more conscious and thereby able to create original work. Stephen Fredman, commenting on Auster's naming (in *The Invention of Solitude*) of the belly of the whale as the site from which imagination springs, calls this idea Auster's "masculinist fantasy of self-generative creativity" (2). In other words, no woman's womb is necessary for this procreation; the only requirement is the room in which the writing can take place. In the same vein, Pascal Bruckner posits that the room in Auster can be "a kind of mental uterus, site of a second

birth" (28). Thus we have Auster's insistence on trapping Blue in a Brooklyn studio until he has the courage to face the father and become himself.

There is one way, however, in which *Ghosts* does not fully conform to the romance genre. The form, Chase reports, "tends to prefer action to character" (13). This second novel in the *Trilogy* will never be accused of being action-packed. Almost all of the action, in facet, takes place in Blue's head. When it comes to character, however, *Ghosts* is clearly in the romance category. Chase explains that "where the novelist would arouse our interest in a character by exploring his origin, the romancer will probably do so by enveloping it in mystery…the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolist forms" (13). We must conclude, then, that in *Ghosts* there is neither action (or very little of it in the usual sense) nor character as it is typically understood. Though we learn more about Blue's origins than we do about Quinn's — his father was a cop, he was trained by Brown — we are not presented with a fully fleshed-out man, but an enigma. His behavior, like Quinn's, does not make sense. Blue suspects that the man who hires him is in disguise, yet he does not question him. Our detective remains "on the case" for years, we are told, losing track of his former life as a man engaged to the future Mrs. Blue, even though he suspects that something is amiss. As readers, we can only accept this unreality if we are willing to see Blue as a hero in a psychic drama that is also Auster's psychic drama. That is, we already know Blue's "origins," not because the narrator tells us, but because we know that Blue is born in this novel. It is not insignificant that February 3, 1947, the day the novel begins, is Auster's birthday.

Daniel Hoffman, in *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, suggests that the early romances "reflect the isolation of the individual, his rebellion against authority and

tradition, his solitary confrontation of primal forces, his consequent need to discover or redefine his own identity" (354). Once again, I am claiming that *Ghosts* fits the definition, even though the primal forces exist only inside the head of the solitary individual Blue. It helps to be reminded, too, that Henry James believed romance presents us with "the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire" (323).

In suggesting that Blue is not a fully-rounded character, but a representation of a writer struggling with an alter-ego and literary fathers, I have hinted that our detective is akin to a figure in a fairy tale or fable. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, writing of Thoreau's seminal text, asserts that "*Walden* is not of course, merely a sophisticated sermon. It is the story of an experiment; a narrative; a fable" (76). And so the central embedded text in *Ghosts*, which in so many ways seems worlds apart, is in this significant way parallel to Auster's novel.

Like the first novel in the *Trilogy*, *Ghosts* uses the form of the detective novel to subvert the genre and tell a very different kind of story. Although we had our doubts about Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass* as a realistic character, the fact that the main characters in *Ghosts* are named Black and Blue is an early transparent announcement that we are dealing with *types* rather than individuals. In a 1989 interview Auster claims that fairy tales have been his greatest influence:

> The Brothers Grimm, the *Thousand and One Nights* — the kinds of stories you read out loud to children. These are bare bones narratives, narratives largely devoid of details yet enormous amounts of information are communicated in a very short space, with very few words. What fairy tales prove, I think, is that it's the reader — or the listener — who actually tells the

> story to himself. The text is no more than a springboard for the imagination….But the mind…fills in the details itself, it creates images based on its own memories and experiences which is why these stories resonate so deeply inside us. (*AH* 311)

We have, you may remember, discussed allegory before, in the chapter on *City of Glass*. In *Postmodernist Fiction* Brian McHale suggests that allegory is a useful device for postmodernist writers because the form "offers itself as a tool for exploring the ontological structure and foregrounding ontological themes" (141). It is this very kind of exploration that Auster is undertaking here and so allegory is indeed an apt tool. To question what it means to be a writer at this juncture in human history, to try to represent the world of the writer who is solitary and yet who contains within him all the fathers whose voices he hears — is a challenge not easily met. And yet *Ghosts* succeeds in bringing us into the universe of Blue's crowded studio and reading with him in the hope that we too may understand, if not solve, the case.

Bruno Bettleheim's argument in *The Uses of Enchantment* has resonance for us too in our exploration of Auster's work, which is too often charged with the crimes of despair or nihilism:

> Pychoanalysis was created to enable man to accept the problematic nature of life without being defeated by it, or giving in to escapism. Freud's prescription is that only by struggling courageously against what seem like overwhelming odds can man succeed in wringing meaning out of his existence. This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across. (7-8)

Like Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass*, Blue engages in a brave struggle to fathom one

father figure in particular. *Ghosts* immerses us in a relationship between figures who are in one sense a father and son — and in another sense aspects of one man. Our insight into this relationship, and the characters' understanding of themselves and each other, requires travel into a kind of dream world where the unconscious reigns. What does it mean, we are led to ask, if Blue does not fathom Black? What happens if he refuses to plumb the depths of the past (the way Thoreau plumbed the depth of Walden Pond) — or if he is simply not paying attention?

After setting up in his Orange Street studio, Blue looks across at his quarry and guesses that he and Black are around the same age, "late twenties or early thirties" (165-166). What seems at this point in the novel to be an unimportant piece of information we see later as evidence of the fact that we are looking at a case of doubles. Bruno Bettleheim talks about fairy tales that involve two brothers: "Two protagonists — usually brothers — stand for seemingly incompatible aspects of the human personality….The stories stress that both desires reside in each of us, and that we cannot survive deprived of either" (90-91). There is always, in these tales, a brother who goes out to seek adventure and one who stays at home. The brother who stays at home finds himself having to rescue the brother who has put himself in danger (90-91).

For our purposes it may be useful to think of Black as the adventurous one and Blue as the stay-at-home, though as Bettleheim makes clear, "the stories stress that both desires reside in each of us, and that we cannot survive deprived of either. The story most often teaches that entirely cutting oneself off from one's past leads to disaster, but that to exist only beholden to the past is stunting; while it is safe, it provides no life of one's own" (91). Thinking of this novel as a kind of fairy tale, then, may be useful as we engage with Blue in

a kind of spying that requires more insight into the object of our surveillance than is typically required in detective work.

Stanley Cavell, in *The Senses of Walden,* makes the following observation: "*Walden*'s phenomenological description of finding the self, or the faith of it, is one of trailing and recovery; elsewhere it is voyaging and discovery" (52). In the following passage from *Ghosts*, we get the idea that we are about to embark, with Blue, on a journey of self-discovery:

> It is February 3, 1947. Little does Blue know…that the case will go on for years. But the present is no less dark than the past, and its mystery is equal to anything the future might hold. Such is the way of the world: one step at a time, one world and then the next. There are certain things that Blue cannot possibly know at this point. For knowledge comes slowly, and when it comes, it is often at great personal expense. (163)

The knowledge referred to in the above passage is clearly self-knowledge. The "great personal expense" the narrator alludes to is the journey into the past Blue must take, a journey where he faces several father figures and must finally face the part of himself he would rather experience as "other." Stephen Fredman argues that Auster's novels "are allegories about the impossibly difficult task of writing, in which he investigates the similarly impossible task of achieving identity" (6). Though there is no question about the first part of Fredman's assertion, he goes too far in insisting that identity is not achieved. Once again we must remember that the narrator of *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* is the narrator of the *Trilogy*, and more importantly, that the protagonists of these novels are alter-egos of the writer. We must, therefore, give laurels where they are due, even as we grant the

diffusion, the dispersal of identity. We must, that is, not minimize the accomplishment of these characters who struggle so bravely to achieve a selfhood that allows for the radical indeterminacy of postmodern life yet refuses to surrender to the forces of nihilism and despair.

Thoreau's reflection on his own sense of having a double reminds us of how appropriate it is that Thoreau is the central literary father in this novel: "I…am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator" (V, 11).

Like Thoreau, detective Blue has a double. The conceit of Auster's novel is that Black needs someone to watch him write — he needs an audience — and so he disguises himself as White and hires Blue for this purpose. Although Blue appears to be the very opposite of the intellectual Black (Blue reads *True Detective Magazine* and cannot understand *Walden*), it becomes clear early in the text that Blue, a reader of true crime and stranger-than-truth stories, and a writer of creative surveillance reports, is Black's alter-ego. The two must meet and finally merge in order for Blue to see that the manuscript Black has been working on is his own. The two aspects of this complicated man must come to an understanding or one of them must be annihilated. In an interview, Auster talks about Lacan's mirror stage: "We can only see ourselves because someone else has seen us first. In other words, we learn our solitude from others….You don't begin to understand your connection to others until you are alone. And the more deeply you plunge into a state of solitude, the more deeply you feel that connection" (*AH* 315).

When Blue becomes tired of the "new idleness" the case requires (Black does nothing

but read and write and so does not require much in the way of surveillance), he begins to reflect on his relationship to this figure he has been hired to watch: "In spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself" (172). In another interview, Auster goes even further, claiming that "in the process of writing or thinking about yourself, you actually become someone else" (*AH* 277). To stand apart, then, and see oneself as "other" is not a sign of psychosis, but an unavoidable experience for a writer. To split oneself (or to be aware that one is split) into reader and writer is no cause for despair: it is rather the condition of the self-aware postmodern writer.

Cavell makes the following point about the relationship between reader and writer: "As the writer must establish or create his mode of presence to the word, he must admit or create the reader's mode of presence to it. It is the ground upon which they will meet" (61). We are Auster's readers and Blue is Black's reader, but at the point in the novel alluded to above, Blue dissolves one of the apparent lines between him and Black and becomes a writer or storyteller himself: "Blue…discovers that making up stories can be a pleasure in itself….[He] realizes there is no end to the stories he can tell. For Black is no more than a kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things, and one story can fill this hole as well as any other" (172-173). It does not appear that Black is *always* this kind of "blankness" for Blue, but when he is, Blue becomes a storyteller.

One of the questions raised by the text is whether a hole is the same as a wall. Before I explain what I mean by this, allow me to quote from Auster again. He is speaking here of his flesh-and-blood-father who was so self-contained that he seemed to need no one: "If there was not such a man, that meant there was another man, a man hidden inside the man

who was not there, and the trick of it, then, is to find him. On the condition that he is there to be found" (*IS* 20).

The point here is that if Black were merely a "hole," a "blankness," there would be no problem. The trouble emerges when the blankness is a kind of wall or mask that the other (Auster's father, Blue's alter-ego, Black) erects or wears to hide from one seeking connection with him.[55]

In his essay "Paul Auster's Specters," Paul Jahshan sees *Ghosts* as "a full-fledged allegory of how postmodern writing and reading can successfully negotiate the new challenges presented by the dawning virtual age, focusing on the twin concepts of the mirror and the double and the resulting spectral image(s) produced" (389). I am with Jahshan up to this point, but then he claims that "one of the key points of postmodernity and post-structurality was the realization, probably for the first time in the history of literature, that the signifier only and ultimately points to itself" (392).

My response to this oft-made argument is to paraphrase Mark Twain and say that the reports of the death of physical reality are greatly exaggerated. Bruce Bawer comes closer, I believe, to understanding what Auster is doing when he questions the relationship between signifier and signified:

> Auster's preoccupation with words and their relations does not derive from an empty allegiance to the fashionable idea that language is only about itself; rather, his preoccupation manifestly flows from a keen interest in the nature of physical reality, and an equally intense compulsion to define, as precisely as possible, the nature of the subtle and intricate nexus between the outer world of observable

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[55] White and Black and Blue all wear masks at various times in the novel.

> phenomena and the inner world of the endlessly observing, generalizing, and denominating human mind. (185)

To continue with Bawer's language, I would say that Detective Blue's "denominating mind" moves from innocence to experience as he develops a post-structuralist view of language. He moves, in fact, from a simplistic understanding of words as "great windows that stand between him and the world" to the view that "words do not necessarily work…[and that] it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (175-176). In an interesting parallel, Auster says this about the experience of writing about his father:

> Never before have I been so aware of the rift between thinking and writing….I have begun to feel that the story I am trying to tell is somehow incompatible with language, that the degree to which it resists language is that when the moment arrives for me to say the one truly important thing (assuming it exists), I will not be able to say it. (*IS* 32)

Thus, although Auster and his characters despair at times that words will never do what they are asking of them, that is not to say that words do not refer to a world outside of (though mediated by) language. But let us return to Blue and his particular dilemma.

In an example of a violation of the law of the excluded middle (or of a certain kind of psychological realism), Black is Blue's alter-ego *and* his super-ego. That is, although Black is the same age as Blue, he plays the role of Blue's smarter, more experienced (and literate) elder, making this a peculiar sort of father/son pair. In fact, much of *Ghosts* is taken up with father/son stories that serve as embedded texts that direct our focus repeatedly to the central and fraught relationship between men and their male offspring. When we

understand what Auster is asking of us as readers, every ghostly father we encounter should call up the ghost of Auster's biological father along with the spirits of the writer's literary fathers. Harold Bloom quotes Malraux: "Every young man's heart is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few mighty, often antagonistic ghosts" (*Anxiety of Influence* 26). But the relationship between Blue and Black is more complicated even than this. Echoing a fiction he had yet to write[56], Auster reflects on his work as a translator:

> Every book is an image of solitude….A man sits alone in a room and writes….A. sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is as though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own…. A. imagines himself as a kind of ghost of that other man, who is both there and not there, and whose book is both the same and not the same as the one he is translating. (*IS* 136)

That Black and Blue are aspects of the same person is indisputable by this point in the novel. When Blue becomes bored watching Black read (*Walden*) and write, the narrator tells us that "the only way for Blue to have a sense of what is happening is to be inside Black's mind…and that of course is impossible" (166). If we do not already suspect that getting inside Black's mind is not only possible for Blue, but necessary for his psychic survival, we will look back later on this passage and note the foreshadowing, for it becomes clear that our detective must penetrate his alter-ego in order to endure. And so at this point Blue finds himself (like all good searchers after the truth) reflecting on his past.

Auster considers the workings of memory in the following in an interview with Mark

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[56]*Ghosts* was published in 1986, though the play *Blackouts*, on which *Ghosts* was based, was written in 1976.

Irwin published in *The Art of Hunger*:

> Suddenly a crisis occurs when everything about ourselves is called into question, when the ground drops out from under us. I think it's at those moments when memory becomes a powerful force in our lives. You begin to explore the past, and invariably you come up with a new reading of the past, a new understanding, and because of that you're able to encounter the present in a new way. (329)

When Blue contemplates his past, the first stories that come to him are cases he worked on, and successfully solved, with father-figure Brown, the man who trained him. The Redman Affair involved embezzlement (*G* 166), but the Gray Case (*G* 190) was far more interesting because the eponymous figure developed amnesia, changed his name to Green, and re-married his accommodating wife, thus reminding us of "Wakefield" and literary father Hawthorne.

Next we come to the father-son stories. The first one Blue reads about in *True Detective* magazine. It is a chilling tale of an unsolved murder and the detective (Gold) who refuses to abandon the case. Blue concludes that one of the boy's parents must have murdered him and the fact that the boy would have been about Blue's age today leads our detective to the realization that "it could have been me….I could have been that little boy" (170). Here the possibility of a homicidal father emerges to remind us of *City of Glass* and the connections between novels and characters in the *Trilogy*.

When Black takes a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge and Blue follows him, it is an occasion for Blue to recall the story of the Roeblings — the father-son pair who together built the Brooklyn Bridge. Blue's reverie begins with a vision of walking with his father over the bridge (177-178). There are three things that are significant in Blue's reflection.

One is the fact that Blue's father was a police officer (and later a detective) who was killed in the line of duty when Blue was still a boy (177-179). Blue, we note, has followed his father into detective work; that is, he has taken over for the deceased father just as Auster has taken over for Thoreau and Poe and his other predecessors. The second important piece of information is that the elder Blue was a fine storyteller who regaled his young son with the details of the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge as the two walked its length. And so the flesh-and-blood father is in some sense also a literary father.

Significantly, Blue the father tells his young son the story of John and Washington Roebling, and how the son took over the construction of the bridge when his father died soon after the plans for the structure were complete (178-179). And so we have (so far) two sons rising to the occasion and following (so to speak) in the footsteps of their fathers (as Auster follows in the footsteps of father Thoreau).

In a third example of a son following in the father's path, Blue recalls a story he read in *Stranger than Fiction* about a skier who comes across the frozen body of another skier who had been killed years earlier in an avalanche.[57] The dead man turns out to be the younger man's father, who was killed when the younger skier was just a boy: "He had the distinct and terrifying impression that he was looking at himself….The dead man was still young, even younger than his son was now" (180). Blue's reaction to the memory is powerful: "There was something so odd and terrible about being older than your own father that he actually had to fight back tears as he read the article" (180).

At first Blue's reaction seems surprisingly intense. Then we remember that Blue may be older now than his father was when he died. We know that Blue was a boy when his

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[57] Auster has his alter-ego, Paul Benjamin (Auster's first and middle names) tell this story in the movie *Smoke.*

father was killed in the line of duty twenty years before (179). We also know that Blue, like Black, is in his "late twenties or early thirties" (166). Therefore it may be that Blue is in some sense older than his father. At any rate, we surely hear echoes of Auster's sadness of having lost *his* father. In Samuel Auster's case, too, it could be said that the man he may have become died years earlier from a bullet — the one that his mother fired to kill his father. We also cannot help but hear echoes of the writer/son's loss (the literary father is not here to guide him), and guilt (not only is he alive where the literary father is long dead, but he must, in a sense, replace the father).

Alison Russell argues that "Blue's memories of lost fathers result in the loss of his own identity" (77), but I am proposing something to the contrary. It is Blue's willingness to remember — to focus on fathers past — that gives our detective the courage he needs to usurp Black's place and become his own father. First, though, let us consider biological paternity: John Thoreau and Sam Auster.

I will not make too much of the biological fathers here, but it is an interesting fact that both writers had fathers who were successful businessmen whom neither son wanted to emulate. To follow in the father's footsteps and pursue a life in business held no appeal for Thoreau or Auster. No doubt this rejection of the fathers' livelihoods was a source of disappointment for the fathers and guilt for the sons. Though Thoreau worked in his father's pencil factory and even improved the product in a way that altered the business for the better, he made it clear that this was not where his interests lay. Thoreau's description of his father is somewhat condescending, to say the least: "[He was] a small, quiet, plodding, unobtrusive man, thoroughly genuine and reliable, occupying himself for the most part in his own business, though he could be friendly and sociable when occasion

invited" (qtd. in Cain 11). One cannot imagine the father appreciating such a characterization, which seems to aim at distancing the son from the father as much as possible. It is unsurprising then that Thoreau resisted "the day-to-day work routine he beheld in his father's life" (Cain 14). Thus to the extent that *Walden* is, in addition to being a quest for self-discovery, a manifesto against a life of routine, it may be said to be Thoreau's rejection of his biological father.

If time and space permitted, we would talk in depth about Emerson as father to Thoreau and about Thoreau's struggle with this and other literary fathers. It will have to suffice here to sketch the relationship between the author of *Nature*, *Self-Reliance* and other seminal texts — and the writer most famous for his life at Walden Pond.

In rejecting the invitation to follow his father into business, Thoreau sought out an embodiment of his burgeoning philosophy to whom he could apprentice himself. Emerson, with his focus on a life of the mind, was the perfect master for a young man who would renounce much in the way of physical comfort in order to travel a journey more spiritual. Richard Lebeaux writes of how Emerson becomes a father figure to the younger writer/philosopher:

> Keeping in mind Thoreau's sense that his own father and the town authorities could not provide him with models for living, it is all the more plausible to say that Emerson, fourteen years his elder, became a 'father substitute'…[and that this] had crucial psychic consequences for Thoreau. Their relationship…would take on the dense and dark undertones and tensions of a father-son bond….Thoreau was [also] confronted with many of the same problems he had with his own father. (82)

Lebeaux goes on to describe the ways in which Emerson disappointed his "son"

Thoreau and suggests that "not only did the relationship with Emerson provoke conscious animosity (on both men's parts)," but it forced to the surface Thoreau's early childhood desires and trepidations, which were then reinforced by father Emerson's behavior — i.e., his traveling and his preoccupation with his own affairs (82).[58]

Emerson, then, becomes the father whom Thoreau needs to integrate and then transcend, for the younger writer moves beyond the father of Transcendentalism and creates on the banks of Walden Pond a life of self-reliance beyond even the imagination of Emerson.[59]

Auster writes in *The Invention of Solitude* of the difference in the way he and his father looked at the worlds of work and money:

> I realize now that I must have been a bad son. Or if not precisely bad, then at least a disappointment, a source of confusion and sadness. It made no sense to him that he had produced a poet for a son. Nor could he understand why a young man with two degrees from Columbia University should take a job after graduation as an ordinary seaman on an oil tanker in the Gulf of Mexico, and then, without rhyme of reason, take off for Paris and spend four years there leading a hand to mouth existence….His most common description of me was that I had "my head in the clouds," or else that I "did not have my feet on the ground." Either way, I must not have seemed very substantial to him, as if I were somehow a vapor or a person not wholly of this world. In his eyes, you became part of the world by working. By definition,

[58] Lebeaux goes into some detail about Emerson's need of Thoreau at the time in light of the elder's many losses: his first wife Ellen and three of his brothers had died by this time. (82)

[59] Lebeaux quotes James Russell Lowell: "I met Thoreau last night, and it is exquisitely amusing to see how he imitates Emerson's tone and manner. With my eyes shut, I shouldn't know them apart" (82).

> work was something that brought in money. If it did not bring in money, it was not work. Writing, therefore, was not work, especially the writing of poetry. At best it was a hobby, a pleasant way to pass the time in between things that really mattered. My father thought I was squandering my gifts, refusing to grow up. (*IS* 60-61)

In one of the rare passages in *The Invention of Solitude* when Auster speaks admiringly of his father, it is to report that the elder Auster was a diligent worker, a conscientious businessman. At the time, the Auster brothers owned many buildings in the Newark, New Jersey area**:**

> The job was a permanent juggling act….Everything was always happening at once, a perpetual assault from a dozen directions at the same time, and only a man who took things in his stride could have handled it. On any given day it was impossible to do everything that had to be done. You did not go home because you were finished, but simply because it was late and you had run out of time….In fifteen years he took only two vacations. (*IS* 56-57)

More than his father's dedication to his work, though, Auster seems to revel in his father's kindness:

> He was soft-hearted with the tenants — granting them delays in paying their rent, giving clothes to their children, helping them to find work — and they trusted him. Old men, afraid of being robbed, would give him their most valuable possessions to store in his office safe. Of all the brothers, he was the one people went to with their troubles. No one called him Mr. Auster. He was always Mr. Sam. (*IS* 57)

As with many of the similarities in the lives of Auster and his Spanish forefather, the

similarities in the lives of Auster and Thoreau are striking. Like Cervantes and his literary descendent Auster, Thoreau was not a young man — he was thirty-seven — when he published the work for which he became famous.

In addition, Thoreau and Auster were both poets, essayists, and translators before they wrote their major works of prose: "[HDT] wrote poetry and prose in the 1830s, but his real start came in the early 1840s, when he produced essays, poems, and translations for the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*" (Cain 4).

Not surprisingly, given his reputation for solitude and civil disobedience, it is said that Thoreau "disliked groups, organizations, and institutions" (Cain 5). Auster confesses that he was only marginally involved in the protests of the sixties for the same reason: "I found myself temperamentally unfit for group activities. My loner instincts were far too ingrained" (*HTM* 35). The state of the world at present, however, has led Auster more recently to take political stands against Bush administration policies, though in terms of group membership, PEN, a most appropriate organization for a writer of his stature, is the one with which he is most closely associated.

William Cain tells us that Thoreau held in high esteem such writers as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Thomas Browne (Cain 19). Raleigh is also a hero of Auster's, appearing as he does in nearly all of Auster's novels. Thoreau was also deeply interested in Native American culture and read much travel literature (Cain 19). Native Americans play major roles in two Auster novels: *Moon Palace* and *Mr. Vertigo*, and in *Moon Palace* we are treated to a list of travel books that Julian Barber (aka Thomas Effing) has the narrator read aloud to him as he prepares for his final journey.

However interesting the parallels between Thoreau and Auster may be, it is literary

paternity, finally, that is the most intriguing. It is surely no accident that Auster found in Henry David Thoreau a kindred spirit and literary father. "The idyllic life represented by *Walden*," Bruce King writes, "is not a matter of environment, or of retreat from urban life; it is rather a moral question involving the way man chooses to live" (qtd. in Ruland). It is this same question, I am arguing, that is at the heart of all of Auster's work. It is a question he asks not in the abstract, but in embodied characters and in plots and narrative strategies that highlight this most fundamental of questions: How should we live?

We must grant, however, that this second novel in the *Trilogy* (about which far less has been written than the two novels it is sandwiched between) is more of a puzzle than the other two. It is the kind of enigma, though, that brings richness to the reader who is willing to live with the ambiguity of the text. Auster talks about paradox in an interview with Mark Irwin: "[It]…gets very much to the heart of what novel writing is for me. It's a way for me to express my own contradictions" (qtd. in Barone 15). About Thoreau's seminal work, Joseph J. Moldenhauer says this: "The dominant stylistic feature of *Walden* is paradox — paradox in such quantity and of such significance that we are reminded of the works of Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, and other English metaphysical writers" (qtd. in Ruland 74).

Certainly paradox is also a central feature of *Ghosts*. When the time comes for Blue to confront one of his literary fathers, he tries to do as Black has been doing and read *Walden*:

> But the book is not a simple business….[Blue] feels as though he is entering an alien world…a prisoner on a forced march….He is bored by Thoreau's words and finds it difficult to concentrate….Blue thought that he was going to get a story, or at least something like a story, but this is no more

> than blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all. (193-194)

And so our detective is not up to the task, having "never read much of anything except newspapers and magazines, and an occasional adventure novel when he was a boy" (194). The need to understand Black who (presumably) understands Thoreau, however, is the impetus for a second reading, which goes a little better as Blue "comes across a sentence that finally says something to him — Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written — and suddenly he understands that the trick is to go slowly, more slowly than he has ever gone with words before" (194). These are, of course, Auster's instructions to the readers of *Ghosts*, which cannot be rushed through in the way a traditional detective story might be.[60] Our hope for Blue (and for ourselves) is soon dashed, however, for Blue "begins to resent Black for putting him through this torture…[and] throw[s] the book aside in disgust" (194). The question then becomes, what does it mean that Blue cannot (or will not) read his (and Black's) literary father? The narrator tells us that the consequences of Blue's inability or refusal are significant:

> What he does not know is that were he to find the patience to read the book in the spirit in which it asks to be read, his entire life would begin to change, and little by little he would come to a full understanding of his situation — that is to say, of Black, of White, of the case, of everything that concerns him. (194)

An active and sympathetic reading of Thoreau, then, who claimed not to have learned anything from his elders but who filled *Walden* with the wisdom of classical and ancient

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[60] In *Smoke*, Paul Benjamin must slow down to see the value in cigar store owner Auggie's photographs. Flipping through the albums, the writer is unimpressed by the shots of the same street corner in Brooklyn over a period of years. When he becomes more deliberate in his viewing, however, Benjamin notices how the light changes with the seasons. He is also stunned when he comes across a photo of his now deceased wife crossing the street.

texts, should help Blue to understand his relationship to alter- ego Black and their literary fathers.

For this kind of reading, however, Blue is unprepared. Cavell describes his own task in reading and writing about *Walden*:

> My subject is nothing apart from sensing the specific weight of these words as they sink; and that means knowing the specific identities of the writer through his metamorphoses, and defining the audiences in me which those identities address, and so create; and hence understanding who I am that I should be called upon in these ways, and who this writer is that he takes his presumption of intimacy and station upon himself. (11-12)

This is the reader as active participant — the reader as writer of the text he reads. And if we substitute the word "builder" for the word "writer," we come closer to the parallel Richard Poirier points out in *A World Elsewhere*: "Thoreau's *Walden* is perhaps more explicit than any other American book," he writes, "about the connections between a defiant hero literally building a world of his own…and the writer who looks upon writing as analogous to building….Thoreau *is* his style" (20). In a later Auster novel, *The Music of Chance*, some literal building occurs when characters Jim Nashe and Jack Pozzi build a stone wall by hand. In *Ghosts,* however, the building all occurs on the page (and in the mind) — sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph — until a manuscript (perhaps the very manuscript we are reading) is complete. But the building requires that the architect (the writer) be a reader first, and at this point in the novel, our detective is clearly not up to the task. We cannot help but wonder as we read, are we? Cavell says of *Walden* what I would say of *Ghosts*:

> To discover how to earn and spend our most wakeful hours — whatever we are doing — is the task of *Walden* as a whole; it follows that its task, for us who are reading, is epitomized in discovering what reading in a high sense is and, in particular…what reading *Walden* is. For the writer of *Walden*, its task is epitomized in discovering what writing is and, in particular, what writing *Walden* is. (5)

After Blue gives up on Thoreau (and after a confrontation with the future Mrs. Blue sends our detective's hopes for his marital future crashing to the ground), he decides (and I want to emphasize the fact that he *decides*) that he needs to find a way to get close to Black — to understand that part of himself that understands *Walden*. After suggesting in his last report that Black is ill and "might be dying" (197), Blue waits at the Brooklyn post office hoping to catch a glimpse of White (the man who hired him), but the masked man Blue assumes is White runs away before Blue can confront him (198-199). At this point, realizing that White is Black and therefore ahead of Blue in our detective work, we are forced to recognize that, in this deconstructive anti-detective story, we are not in the presence of Poe's Dupin. Blue, at this juncture, is still limited in his perception. To put it in Poe's terms, the mathematician and the poet must merge in order for our detective to attain a more expansive vision.

It occurs to Blue that it is possible that "he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black" (200). This makes him think of another passage from *Walden*, which he finds and reads: "We are not where we are, he finds, but in a false position. Through an infirmity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out"

(200). In this passage in Thoreau's text, the philosopher is criticizing those who would live inauthentically. Right before the quoted (and somewhat cryptic) passage, Thoreau says, "No face we can give to a matter will stead us so well at last as the truth. This alone wears well" (217). In Auster's text the apparent reference is to the two cases at hand: Blue spying on Black and Black spying on Blue — two aspects of the same man at times in harmony with the other, at times estranged from him.

Still, we wonder what it is that Blue is coming to understand about Thoreau and if he is close to some revelation about his situation — about who he is in relation to Black and White. His frustrated musings give us more than an inkling that this may be the case: "They have trapped Blue into doing nothing…. He feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of this life. This is strange enough — to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others" (201). In these complaints we hear the life of a writer, living through words and the plots and characters he has created. We also hear that the literary fathers have him paralyzed. But Blue gets more specific in his critique: "If the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action — nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book" (202).

This overdetermined passage may be one (or all) of four things: a critique of Blue as participant in this detective story, a critique of Black's life as a writer, a critique of literary father Thoreau's seminal text, and/or a critique of *Ghosts* itself. Though the lines are blurred, Blue settles on Black as the object of his frustration:

> As for Black, the so-called writer of this book, Blue can no longer trust what he sees. Is it possible that there really is such a man — who does nothing, who merely sits in his room and writes?….He has learned a thousand facts, but the only thing they have taught him is that he knows nothing. For the fact remains that none of this is possible. It is not possible for such a man as Black to exist. (202-203)

Not ready to put the pieces of the puzzle together and recognize Black as an aspect of himself (or as a father-figure), Blue begins to wonder about Black's motives:

> [Perhaps he is] another one of White's hirelings, paid by the week to sit in that room and do nothing. Perhaps all that writing is merely a sham…a list of every name in the phone book…or a handwritten copy of *Walden*. Or perhaps they are not even words, but senseless scribbles…a growing heap of nonsense and confusion. (203)

In suggesting that the book being written (copied) in Black's studio may be *Walden*, Blue may be (unconsciously) suggesting that Black is a mere imitator — a literary son who cannot misread [61] well enough to come into his own as an original talent. Following his own (skewed?) logic, Blue concludes that White must be "the real writer then — and Black no more than his stand-in, a fake, an actor with no substance of his own" (203). The idea of a "stand-in" brings us back to the first novel in the *Trilogy* where Quinn is a "stand-in" for detective Auster. It may also bring to mind again literary father Borges who, in "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," celebrates just such a "fake." Borges' narrator tells us that Menard "did not want to compose another Quixote…but the Quixote itself…he did not

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[61] I refer here to Harold Bloom's use of the term in *The Anxiety of Influence.*

propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide — word for word and line for line — with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (*Labyrinths* 39). The great conceit of this story is that the texts are identical, yet "Menard's is almost infinitely richer" (*Labyrinths* 42).

That Borges brings William James into the story, as a contemporary of Menard's, is no surprise. James' argument in *The Principles of Psychology* is right in line with Menard's: "For an identical sensation to recur it would have to occur the second time in an unmodified brain. But as this…is a physiological impossibility, so is an unmodified feeling an impossibility" (232-3). And so, we might add, is an unmodified text. To paraphrase Heraclites, we cannot step twice into the same text. The desire to have written the father's text, however, is another matter.

As father Borges reminds us in an essay on Kafka, writers have the ability to alter the past with their writing: "His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (*Labyrinths* 201). This is a much more positive view of literary parenthood than Bloom's anxiety of influence, though it may be that Borges' desire to rid the word precursor "of all connotation of polemics or rivalry" stemmed from a denial of his own oedipal rivalry, a subject for another book. But in any case, Borges' more optimistic perspective on literary influence adds another dimension to our analysis. If *Ghosts* enriches our reading of *Walden*, what better compliment can a son pay to a father?

In any case, Auster's text, if we allow it to, modifies (to use Borges' word) our conception of who we are as readers in the present. As Blue and Black mirror each other, this text, more than others, can be said to be a mirror for the reader. Wolfgang Iser, speaking more generally, argues the following:

> The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be different from his own…[and] the impact this reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text" (281-2).

The fact that we see all the action through Blue's eyes makes it clear that we are expected to identify with Blue — to feel bewildered when Blue is bewildered and galvanized when Blue takes some action that may lead him to unveil the mystery**.** Perhaps we need to be reminded, however, that the relationship between Blue and Black is meant to keep us unsettled. As Alison Russell says, "Auster subverts this binary opposition characteristic of Romance by insisting upon a 'both/and' oscillating movement: he denies romantic hierarchization by refusing to privilege permanently one term of an opposition over another. Blue is Black, for example, and also not Black" (83).

To understand how fully Blue conforms to his role as hard-boiled detective, we need to look closely at his relationship with the future Mrs. Blue. Our detective chooses solitude over connection when he forgoes attachment in order to pursue his quest.

Leslie Fiedler wrote in 1960 in *Love and Death in the American Novel* that "Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the center of a novel" (24). Three pages into *Ghosts,* we learn that there is a woman in our detective's life: "Blue picks up the phone and calls the future Mrs. Blue. I'm going under cover, he tells his sweetheart. Don't worry if I'm out of touch for a little while. I'll be thinking of you the whole time"(163). That afternoon he thinks of "the future Mrs.Blue" and how

much he misses her, but true to the role of solitary detective, Blue does not make the call: "He thinks about calling her up on the phone for a chat, hesitates, and then decides against it. He doesn't want to seem weak. If she knew how much he needed her, he would begin to lose his advantage, and…the man must always be the stronger one" (165). Still, Auster wants to let us know that this decision is not easy for Blue:

> Unfortunately, thoughts of the future Mrs. Blue occasionally disturb his growing peace of mind. Blue misses her more than ever, but he also senses somehow that things will never be the same again….Whenever the future Mrs. Blue enters his consciousness, he is seized by a kind of panic. All of a sudden, his calm turns to anguish, and he feels as though he is falling into some dark, cave-like place, with no hope of finding a way out. Nearly every day he has been tempted to pick up the phone and call her…but the days pass, and still he doesn't call….If he is able to invent a multitude of stories to fit the facts concerning Black, with the future Mrs. Blue all is silence, confusion, and emptiness. (173)

Fiedler argues that "the typical male protagonist in our fiction has been a man on the run…anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26). Blue, like Quinn, seems to want connection and yet clings to seclusion, enjoying the detachment and the idea of being "under cover."

Blue's shock at the future Mrs. Blue's reaction to seeing him months later on the street is evidence not only of our detective's connection to other solitary American males in our literature, but proof also that he is as far out of touch with the world of human relations as

Quinn was: “For several moments Blue is so at a loss that he doesn’t know whether to bend his head farther down and hide his face or stand up and greet the woman whom he now understands — with a knowledge as sudden and irrevocable as the slamming of a door — will never be his wife” (195).

The fact that Blue lives at the end, and that he escapes from Black’s studio, leaves us with the feeling that he has succeeded in dismissing his ghosts and transcending the father. At the very end of the novel the narrator (who you may remember is also the narrator of *City* and *The Locked Room*) intrudes in the first person to let us know his hopes for Blue: “I myself prefer to think that he went far away, boarding a train that morning and going out West to start a new life. It is even possible that America was not the end of it. In my secret dreams, I like to think of Blue booking a passage on some ship and sailing to China. Let it be China, then, and we’ll leave it at that” (232).

Although Harold Bloom reminds us that “Nietzsche insisted that nothing was more pernicious than the sense of being a latecomer” (*A Map of Misreading* 29), and postmodern writers are by definition latecomers, we may conclude that in this novel, the American literary fathers have been integrated and that Blue’s story (like Auster’s) is an American original. As Emerson said long ago in his essay “Nature”: “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers….The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face, we through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (3).

Strikingly, Auster seems to want to turn this idea of Emerson’s on its head — or at least to redefine what it means to have an “original relation.” As we noted in the beginning of this chapter, we encounter the worlds of Walt Whitman, Henry Ward Beecher, Bronson

Alcott, and Herman Melville in Ghosts. We encountered Melville in *City of Glass* and will again in *The Locked Room* (and nearly every other Auster novel), but the others are specific to this text. The worlds these men inhabited overlapped in fascinating ways. William Cain tells of the time in 1856 when Thoreau met Alcott and Whitman, "who gave Thoreau an inscribed copy of the second edition, 1856, of *Leaves of Grass*, a book that Thoreau termed 'a great primitive poem, — an alarum or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp'" (50). Whitman was the American original Emerson had believed would arise in the nation. Whitman was not like the poets of whom Emerson was dismissive, the ones "contented with a civil and conformed manner of living [who wrote] poems from the fancy, at a safe distance from their own experience" ("The Poet" 320).

Abolitionists Bronson Alcott and Henry Ward Beecher moved in the same circles as Emerson, Thoreau, and other Transcendentalists. Thoreau said that Bronson Alcott was "the sanest man and has the fewest crotchets of any I chance to know" (Thoreau, XIV, 21). It is surely not arbitrary (though the narrator claims that the setting is unimportant) that Auster sets the second novel in the *Trilogy* in Brooklyn Heights, on Orange Street, where the ghosts of these literary and spiritual fathers live.

Perhaps a distinction should be made, however, between Whitman, Beecher, Alcott, and Thoreau, as inheritors of Emersonian optimism and self-reliance, and Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, the darker fathers for whom this inheritance is ambiguous and contradictory as it clearly is for Blue and Black and their creator Auster, who himself lived for a time in Brooklyn Heights. If we are aware of this biographical fact, as Auster's ideal reader would be, we can accept this as a clue that the author is claiming his inheritance, his legacy from the fathers who passed through this historic section of Brooklyn and who presumably still

wave their ghostly mantles on Orange Street.

Because the inheritance is so complicated, Blue's case is not easily solved. In fact, we are told, "the case will go on for years" (162). At a certain point in Blue's reflections, he concludes that Black "is not one man but several" (203). As close as Blue appears to be at this moment to an epiphany, his psychic quest, his struggle with the anxiety of influence continues as he is not ready to acknowledge himself as a writer doing battle with his literary fathers. Needing to get closer to his nemesis, Blue "reaches into his bag of disguises and casts about for a new identity," deciding on "an old man who used to beg on the corners of his neighborhood when he was a boy — a local character by the name of Jimmy Rose" (203). And so literary father Melville, via his story "Jimmy Rose," is again brought into the swirl of identities. The fact that Black tells Blue (disguised as "Jimmy Rose") that he looks like Walt Whitman adds yet another layer to the palimpsest (205). And Blue's response is particularly telling: "Well, you know what they say….Every man has his double somewhere. I don't see why mine can't be a dead man" (205). Black goes on to tell stories about Orange Street and its illustrious visitors (or "ghosts," as Blue calls them) Whitman, Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church and the fact that "many great men" including Abraham Lincoln, and Charles Dickens have set foot inside this Brooklyn house of worship (205-207). [62]

Thus it is Black who knows the details Blue must learn about the lives of American writers and the men who fought against slavery. When Black tells Blue a story about Whitman's brain being saved for posterity (and study) only to be dropped on the floor, "swept up and thrown out with the garbage," we realize that Auster is asking us to reflect

[62] In addition to the ghosts of American writers, Auster is apparently also haunted by the history of American slavery and racism. In addition to the references to Lincoln, et. al. here, the Ku Klux Klan plays a significant (and needless to say disturbing) role in *Mr. Vertigo*.

on what it means if a literary son has no access to the mind (brain?) of the literary father. And in the case of our detective/writer Blue, we wonder what it means that he cannot read (or that he misreads) both his nemesis Black and their literary father Thoreau.

Another of Black's anecdotes involves Thoreau and Bronson Alcott conversing with the esteemed Whitman across a full chamber pot. The "bucket of excrement" reminds Black of Whitman's brain falling to the floor: "Brains and guts," he says, "the insides of a man. We always talk about trying to get inside a writer to understand his work better. But when you get right down to it, there's not much to find in there — at least not much that's different from what you'd find in anyone else" (208). Black's assertion, however, is belied by his hobby, the nature of which he has already confessed to Black: learning about the lives of American writers (208).

A story about literary father Hawthorne, "a good friend of Thoreau's and probably the first real writer America ever had," follows the one about Whitman (209). Before summarizing Hawthorne's "Wakefield," Black tells Blue about Hawthorne's seclusion and, in response to Blue's befuddlement, tells this Whitman look-a-like that "writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there" (209). And though we may be tempted to shout, "Will the real writer please stand up?" we are left wondering just how far along Blue is on his psychological journey when his response to this latest philosophical musing by Black is to say of the writer that he is but "another ghost" (209).

Blue has an important insight, though: "Even though the talk had nothing to do with the case, Blue cannot help feeling that Black was actually referring to it all along – talking in riddles….Blue cannot get rid of the thought that the man was on to him from the start"

(211). In his next report to White, Blue doesn't mention his contact with Black. The note he receives in response, "Why do you lie?" confirms for Blue that White and Black are co-conspirators and "from that moment on, Blue lives with the knowledge that he is drowning" (212).

As we have learned to expect from this overdetermined allegory, we are in the dark again (and drowning along with Blue). Perhaps we are to think that Blue is drowning because Black and White (his literary fathers) have him under surveillance when he thought it was the other way around. Blue must be wondering (with the reader) what it means to be the one the ghosts are haunting. That is, if Blue's job as detective, like Dupin's in Poe's "The Purloined Letter," is to identify with his opponent (understand his literary father), then what happens if he fails? In Poe's story, the criminal will go unpunished. In *Ghosts*, where there is no criminal, the danger seems to be that Blue, the living detective/writer, will allow himself to be so overshadowed by Black that he will not survive.

Additional blurring of the boundaries between father and son occurs when Blue follows Black back across the Brooklyn Bridge into Manhattan and "confesses to himself for the first time that he is developing a certain fondness for Black" (181). Finally close to Black in a bookstore, he gets "the feeling that he has seen Black before, but he can't remember where. There's something about his eyes" (181). Picking up a copy of *Walden*, Blue notices that the publisher of this edition is Walter J. Black, Inc. and, though he does not seem to take it very seriously, the thought crosses his mind that this man could be Black's father (181). The father as publisher: an interesting idea. If the father is the announcer, issuer, of the work of the son, he is also the enabler, urging the son on to his success. Is

this mere wishful thinking on the part of the writer — or is it the fulfillment of a promise by all literary fathers that their legacy, the gift they leave behind, is the work that the sons and daughters will claim as their own? [63] Auster's agenda, no doubt, is to lead the reader to these (and other related) reflections.

In another instance where the lines between Black and Blue seem to dissolve, we are told that "there are moments when [Blue] feels so completely in harmony with Black…that to anticipate what Black is going to do…he need merely look into himself. Whole days go by when he doesn't even bother to look through the window or follow Black onto the street" (186). At these times we may imagine that Blue is successfully integrating his alter-ego or is at peace with the internalized father.

These times of harmony are, however, contrasted with times when Blue "feels totally removed from Black, cut off from him in a way that is so stark and absolute that he begins to lose the sense of who he is" (186). This passage calls to mind Poe's William Wilson and Borges' parable "Borges and I": "Years ago I tried to free myself from him…my life is a flight and I lose everything…I do not know which of us has written this page" (*Labyrinths* 246-7). The uncanny that is central to the work of Auster's fathers Poe and Borges confirms our sense that Blue's wrestling with his double is a psychic battle. Roberta Rubenstein argues, rightly I think, that Auster's *Trilogy* "pivots on psychodynamic processes and images central to Freud's construction of the psyche and, in particular, of the uncanny, repetition, and doubling" (246).

Splitting off this part of himself (the writer/father), Blue is lost and incomplete. Although the idea of literary influence I am employing here is quite different from

[63] We may be reminded here of Auden's gloss on the legacy of Yeats's poetry: "The words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living."

Bloom's, I think the following passage of his is apt for our purposes: "The anxiety of influence is so terrible because it is both a kind of separation anxiety and the beginning of a compulsion neurosis, or fear of a death that is a personified superego" (*Anxiety* 58). It is during one of these latter phases, when Blue feels "a terror worse than anything he has ever known," that he writes a letter to father-figure Brown,[64] outlining his dilemma and "pinning all his hopes on what Brown will say to him" (187). When Brown's letter arrives, Blue is crushed, for "Brown does not even address himself to what Blue wrote…[and] Blue feels betrayed by the man who was once like a father to him" (186-187). Misunderstood and rejected by the father, Blue, after "several hours of despondency and self-pity…works his way out of the gloom" (187). The conclusion he comes to is one that all strong writers must come to in order to integrate and/or transcend the father:

> It might be a good thing…he says to himself. It might be better to stand alone than to depend on anyone else. Blue thinks about this for a while and decides there is something to be said for it. He is no longer an apprentice. There is no master above him anymore. I'm my own man, he says to himself. I'm my own man, accountable to no one but myself. (187-188)

Blue is talking about himself as detective, but the move he makes toward independence is the move that he as writer must make to get out from under the shadow of father Black. He must be lost, in fact, in order to recognize who he may become. "[It is] not till we are lost," says Thoreau, "not till we have lost the world…do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (qtd in Cavell 49).

And after Blue is able to free himself from one father-figure (at least temporarily, or to a

[64] The name Brown may refer to several men of that name: Charles Brockden Brown, father of the American romance; Sir Thomas Browne; Chesterton's Father Brown, a favorite of father Borges' and writer of the story "The Pursuit of Mr. Blue."

certain extent), he finds himself more attuned to another:

> Blue falls into step with Black, perhaps even more harmoniously than before. In doing so, he discovers the inherent paradox of his situation. For the closer he feels to Black, the less he finds it necessary to think about him…the more deeply entangled he becomes, the freer he is. What bogs him down is not involvement but separation….At those moments when he feels closest to Black…he can even begin to lead the semblance of an independent life…secure in the fact that everything will be exactly the same when he returns. (188-189)

With this new freedom, which seems to come from integrating his alter-ego, Blue goes for walks, to ball games, to the bar, and to the movies (189-193). The films he sees — more embedded texts (or discourse worlds) that take us away from the primary narrative while reinforcing its main theme — are (not surprisingly) about the impossibility of escaping one's past. Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past* plays a character named Markham[65] who tries to escape his criminal life and make an honest living as Jeff Bailey. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, James Stewart (as George Bailey) does all he can to keep from living his father's life, only to discover that in his case repeating the past is not such a bad thing (191-193). Blue's musings on these films leads him to the conclusion that once one "has been marked by the past…it can…never be otherwise. Blue begins to be haunted by this thought, for he sees it as a kind of warning, a message delivered up from within himself, and try as he does to push it away, the darkness of the thought does not leave him" (193).

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[65] Helen Markham is the name of David Zimmer's deceased wife in *BI.*

Haunted by the loss (ghost) of his detective father (and later by the loss of Brown), Blue is "marked" as an abandoned son. The importance of Blue's insight here cannot be overstated. It is one of several places in the text where it becomes clear that this is not a story *only* about language. Language may be our way of accessing the past, but it is not synonymous with it. Another important point I want to make here is that Blue decides to act. At first the action involves reflection — that is, it remains in the realm of the mind — but it is no less a result of volition than the action Blue later takes when he breaks into Black's studio.

Roberta Rubenstein argues that "like the protagonists of all uncanny double stories, he [Blue] is so obsessively drawn to the case that represents his split-off inner life that he remains incapable of leaving it" (253). Rubenstein is right to emphasize the obsession, but I would give Blue more credit. He *can* leave the case, but he does not, even when he feels most defeated.

In a restaurant in the Algonquin Hotel (an appropriate setting for a meeting between two writers), Blue "looks Black in the eyes," but sees only "utter blankness, dead eyes that seem to say there is nothing behind them and that no matter how hard Blue looks, he will never find a thing" (213). If Blue could somehow swallow Black at this point, integrate this shadow-figure into his consciousness, then the story could end here. But Blue's search for knowledge of the other (which is a search for self-knowledge, though he still does not understand this) is not over. And so our detective, without a disguise, introduces himself to Black as a life insurance salesman named Snow from Kenosha, Wisconsin (where Sam Auster and his family lived before and just after the murder of Harry Auster), while Black turns the tables on Blue and claims to be a private detective hired to watch a guy who "just

sits in his room all day and writes" and who "needs me…needs my eyes looking at him…to prove he's alive" (214-216).

The writer, it seems, needs the reader. And in agreeing to read, we allow the writer to exist. "In *Walden*," Cavell suggests, "reading is not merely the other side of writing, its eventual fate; it is another metaphor of writing itself" (27).

Thus it seems that while Blue has been hired to watch Black write, Black has indeed been hired to watch Blue for the same reason, or so he claims. As Black says in the restaurant scene, Blue must know he is being watched: "That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know, or else nothing makes sense" (215-216). But if there is no Mr. White ("There never was such a man as White," Blue concludes after the restaurant scene), then who hired whom? Little by little Blue gets closer to the truth of his situation, but he must take several more steps — steps that require great courage — before his psychological journey is over and he has a story to tell that is a mirror of *Walden*.

When Blue, disguised as the Fuller brush man, approaches Black's studio, he thinks, "The door will open, after that Black will be inside of him forever" (218). But the integration of the alter-ego will not be easy. The embedded texts we have already been made aware of appear here again in Black's studio: Thoreau's *Walden*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (which would have included "Wakefield"). But beyond these, "on the table, neatly stacked around the edges, piles of paper: some blank, some written on, some typed, some in longhand. Hundreds of pages, perhaps thousands. But you can't call this a life, thinks Blue. You can't really call it anything. It's a no man's land, the place you come to at the end of the world" (220). And so we have Blue's commentary on the life of a writer — Black's life and his own.

Yet the fact of this novel flies in the face of Blue's assertion. Reflecting once again on *Walden*, Cavell sees the writing life in a more positive light:

> Building a house and hoeing and writing and reading…are allegories and measures of one another….If your action, in its field, cannot stand such measurement, it is a sign that the field is not yours. This is the writer's assurance that his writing is not a substitute for his life, but his way of prosecuting it. He writes because he is a writer. This is why we can have the sense, at once, that he is attaching absolute value to his words, and that they do not matter. What matters is that he show in the way he writes his faithfulness to the specific conditions and acts of writing as such. (60-61)

Unable to claim at this point his authority as a writer, Blue still sees himself as a detective and echoing again Poe's Dupin, he says that "deep down [he] wants Black to know that he's just as smart as he is, that he can match wits with him every step of the way" (221). But when he feels that Black is "practically begging him to make his move…he sinks into a fresh torment of self-doubt" (222). It is here that Blue has his Thoreauvian fantasy: "He imagines himself…far away from here, walking through the woods and swinging an axe over his shoulder. Alone and free, his own man at last" (222). Blue's fantasy is marred, however, by the presence of Black, "hiding behind some tree, stalking invisibly through some thicket, waiting for Blue to lie down and close his eyes before sneaking up on him and slitting his throat" (222). This is when Blue decides that "if he doesn't take care of Black now, there will never be any end to it. This is what the ancients called fate, and every hero must submit to it" (222).

Steven E. Alford finds in the above passage "one of the principal thematic claims of *The New York Trilogy*, that we can have no knowledge of ourselves without the participation of

an Other….In Blue's case, he interprets this condition as a type of psychic tyranny over his dream of freedom. He calls that tyranny 'fate'" (71).

This is certainly the case, although the "Other" for Black is the double he must destroy/integrate in order to be free. Detective Blue must be a hero and his heroism involves transgressing a boundary — he breaks into Black's studio while he is away. What happens next is more confirmation that we are in a psychological drama: [66]

> The moment he sets foot in Black's room he feels everything go dark inside him….He takes one more step into the room and then blacks out, collapsing to the floor like a dead man. His watch stops with the fall, and when he comes to he doesn't know how long he's been out. Dimly at first, he regains consciousness with a sense of having been here before, perhaps long ago, and as he sees the curtains fluttering by the open window and the shadows moving strangely on the ceiling, he thinks that he is lying in bed at home, back when he was a little boy. (223)

So if Black's studio brings Blue back to his own childhood, the two clearly occupy the same psychic space.

We must remember that Blue has taken his father's place as a detective. Before Blue, in a frantic state, leaves the studio, he grabs Black's papers only to discover once he gets home that they are his own reports. This is confirmation either that Black did indeed hire Blue (and so would naturally be the recipient of Blue's reports) or that Black is a split-off part of Blue and not really a separate being at all. Whatever finding the reports means to Blue, it sends him into a terrible state where he refuses to write another report:

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[66] Compare this to Quinn's experience as he crosses the threshold of the Stillman apartment (*CG* 16).

> For several days, Blue does not bother to look out the window. He has enclosed himself so thoroughly in his own thoughts that Black no longer seems to be there. The drama is Blue's alone, and if Black is in some sense the cause of it, it's as though he has already played his part, spoken his lines, and made his exit from the stage. For Blue at this point can no long accept Black's existence, and therefore denies it. Having penetrated Black's room and stood there alone, having been, so to speak, in the sanctum of Black's solitude, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it. (225-226)

Blue does not yet understand his situation. He goes from wanting to kill Black to wanting to help him, for he is moved by Black's sadness: "He's the saddest creature in the world. And then, the moment he says these words, he understands that he's also talking about himself" (227). Deciding to "offer his hand in friendship," he knocks on Black's door only to be confronted by Black in a mask, pointing a gun at Blue: "I don't need you anymore," Black tells his alter-ego.

If we need to be reminded that we are in the realm of romance here, perhaps Northrop Frye can shed some light: "[A]t the lower levels the…twin image darkens into a sinister doppelganger figure, the hero's shadow and portent of his own death or isolation" (qtd. in Russell 83).

Even though we have been rooting for Blue, the fact that it is our detective who beats

Black unconscious — Blue who is the stronger one — comes as a surprise and a relief. It seems to the reader from what we know of Black that he should be the victor, the one who we are told has written the story that Blue brings back to his own studio to read (230-232). It is with Blue, however, that we have been identifying; it is Blue who is the detective on a case, the hero on a quest; and it is Blue who finds, when he reads Black's manuscript, that he knows it all "by heart" (232). In the end, then, Blue *has* understood Black and so is free to leave. The narrator wishes our enigmatic detective well:

> Where he goes…is not important….I myself prefer to think that he went far away, boarding a train that morning and going out West to start a new life. It is even possible that America was not the end of it. In my secret dreams, I like to think of Blue booking a passage on some ship and sailing to China. Let it be China, then, and we'll leave it at that. For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing. (232)

Harold Bloom has written that a poem is written to escape dying (*Anxiety* 19). "For every poet begins (however "unconsciously") by rebelling more strongly against the consciousness of death's necessity than all other men and women do" (*Anxiety* 10). Peter Brooks reminds us that Sartre and Benjamin both argued that "narrative must tend toward its end, seek illumination in its own death" (103). In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale talks about death in the novels he analyzes:

> Postmodernist fiction is *about* death in a way that other writing, of other periods, is not….In a sense, every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a

> displaced way….Postmodernist writing models or simulates death; it produces simulacra of death through confrontations between worlds, through transgressions of ontological levels or boundaries, or through vacillation between different kinds and degrees of 'reality.' Thus postmodernist writing may be one of our last resources for preparing ourselves, in imagination, for the single act which we must assuredly all perform unaided, with no hope of doing it over if we get it wrong the first time. (231-232)

And finally, John Gardner, who railed against much postmodern fiction, said (rightly, I think) that "art is essentially serious and beneficial, a game played against chaos and death, against entropy" (6). My argument here and in the other chapters is that Auster's "game" is indeed serious — it is a game played against death. It is, in order that we may read it, an aesthetic game, but it is also a psychological and an ethical game.

At the end of *Ghosts*, Black says, "You were the whole world to me, Blue, and I turned you into my death" (230). The writer, writing to escape dying, needs an audience (father/alter-ego) who functions (as he watches the writer at work and anticipates his publications) as inspiration and motivation. The problem is that the audience is also judge and sometimes executioner and so the writer must be ready to confront the audience (the father) and destroy him if necessary.

Another way to look at this, however, is to see how as readers we identify with Blue as an audience for Black. First our detective simply takes the job: he is willing (as are we) to "read." Then he experiences frustration alternating with pleasure as the lines between reader and writer are blurred (mirroring the reading process). When the writer (Black, Auster) is finished with us (Blue, the reader), he wants us out of the way. But we will not

go passively (or in Blue's case, he will not allow himself to be annihilated) because we have been composing the text as we read and so have become writers ourselves.

Regarding the French "new novel" of the 1950s (almost certainly an influence on Auster), Peter Brooks says about Robbe-Grillet what can easily be said about the author of *Ghosts*:

> [He] uses elements of the detective story to create readerly expectations which the text will disappoint, since there is no certain crime to be detected, yet which lead the reader to the central gap or split…of the text: the time and place that the protagonist, and the text, never can account for, a black hole that is also animating of plotting and meaning since it provokes the reader's search….The reader is invited to play with and against traditional novelistic devices, constructing a model that denies narrative's privilege while it confirms narrative's necessity. (315)

The "black hole" that Brooks speaks of is the indeterminacy of the text, which is also the site of its potential for us as readers/writers. At the end of *Ghosts,* Blue returns to his studio with Black's manuscript and finds that he "knew it all by heart," just as Black has predicted (232). But the story, the narrator tells us, does not end there. It ends only when Blue leaves the Brooklyn studio. "Where he goes," the narrator says, "is not important. For we must remember that all this took place more than thirty years ago, back in the days of our earliest childhood" (232). If we take the narrator at his word — that is, if it all goes back to *our earliest childhoods* — then it is indeed our story as much as it is Blue's, which, I submit, is what gives the text its power.

Chapter Three: The Secret Letter and Forking Paths: Fathers Poe and Hawthorne in *The Locked Room*

To follow with Bruno's notion that the structure of human thought corresponds to the structure of nature. And therefore to conclude that everything, in some sense, is connected to everything else.
Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

The third part of *The New York Trilogy* has, not surprisingly, much in common with the first two novels. The unnamed narrator receives a call, in this case from the wife of a childhood friend, and embarks on a quest to bring his missing friend Fanshawe's work to the public. There are, as in the first two novels, several cases of blurred identity. The narrator, Fanshawe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Paul Auster (author of the *Trilogy*) function as alter-egos or doubles of one another.[67] As in *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, there are many embedded texts: Fanshawe's work (poems, plays, and novels); the narrator's work before the call (magazine pieces, mostly); the narrator's (unwritten) biography of Fanshawe; and the secret letter[68] the absent Fanshawe sends to the narrator. In addition to these nested narratives, Poe's detective stories and Hawthorne's novel *Fanshawe* play key roles in this novel that claims Hawthorne and Poe for its main literary fathers. In addition to these key fathers, Defoe, Thoreau, Stevenson, Cervantes, Melville, Raleigh, Marco Polo, Spinoza and

[67] In an example of parallel universes, we may say that Fanshawe and the narrator are living the same life — in two different spheres (like the brothers in the fairy tale, the one runs off, the other stays home). According to Max Tegmark in "Parallel Universes": "The many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics [is] the idea that random quantum processes cause the universe to branch into multiple copies, one for each possible outcome" (46).

[68] The phrase "the secret letter" brings to mind Hawthorne's most famous novel – and though Fanshawe's letter remains hidden, unlike Hester's "A," it is, as the scarlet letter was intended by Puritan society to be, a source of shame and, like the embroidered "A," Fanshawe's letter changes lives. With Poe on our minds throughout the *Trilogy*, an additional allusion may be to "The Purloined Letter," though in the Dupin tale the letter is missing, then found. In what John Irwin may call an antithetical doubling by Auster of the Poe story, it is Fanshawe, the sender of the letter, who is missing, then found.

others make appearances, as do Bakhtin and several lesser known figures, who turn up in a dozen stories the narrator calls parables. Via these discourse worlds, we are led (as we were in the first two novels in the *Trilogy*) away from the primary narrative (the narrator/Fanshawe/Sophie triangle) so that we find ourselves moving back and forth between epistemology (what do I know so far and what will happen next?) to ontology (what world is this and what kind of reader should I be to read this text?). Auster's narrative strategies (the blurred identities, the embedded texts, and the aborted quest) highlight once again the life of a writer in a struggle with literary fathers.

This third novel in the *Trilogy*, however, in spite of the violations of ontological boundaries that foreground the fiction-maker behind the fiction (and keep us from falling completely into reverie), can be read — more than the others — as a realistic narrative. In fact, one might characterize the novel as a domestic drama with a love-triangle theme (that is, after it ceases to be a lost-person mystery). In this case, of course, we would not be the active readers or co-creators of the text that Sartre and Barthes and others (including Auster) seem to want us to be. The arrows are pointing (autobiography and fiction are crossing lines here!), the neon lights are flashing (it is the struggle of the writer with his predecessors that is being evoked here!), and we come once again to the question of Auster's ethical and aesthetic agenda. But first let us look at how Auster uses point of view.

In our analysis of *City of Glass* the point was made that we are immersed in Daniel Quinn's consciousness and so are mostly unaware of the narrator's presence until near the end of the novel when we learn that he was a friend of Character Auster (from whom he is now estranged). In *Ghosts*, we again have a third-person-limited point of view and once

more hear from the narrator only at the end of the tale when he shares with us his wishes for Blue. In *The Locked Room*, coming third in the *Trilogy*, the narrator does not wait until the novel is ending to make an appearance. He speaks to us from the very beginning in the first person.

In *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, Richard Chase suggests that "in a romance too much depends on mystery and bewilderment to risk a generally receptive intelligence in the midst of things…the effect of [which] is to produce a sense of verisimilitude and dramatic coherence" (23-4). The first two novels in the *Trilogy* fall more clearly into the realm of romance, so that the worlds we see through the eyes of Quinn and Blue are worlds we only sometimes recognize as "real." In this third novel, in contrast, the "generally receptive intelligence" we meet on the first page brings us at once into a world we can recognize as realistic — one in which we are not as tempted to distrust what we are seeing or hearing. We do need to be aware, however, that the narrator of all three novels is the same man: "These three stories are finally the same story," we are told near the end of *The Locked Room*, "but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about" (346). If we see all three novels as allegories of the life of a writer on a quest to reconcile himself with his literary fathers, perhaps we can argue that the narrator has, in this third novel, acquired the courage necessary to admit his struggle with his doppelganger, a struggle he must win in order not only to write, but to become fully human. From this perspective, the point of view in *The Locked Room* is a sign of psychic individuation on the part of the narrator.[69]

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[69] From Emerson's "Self-Reliance": "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that…the power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried."

In order to place this novel (and the *Trilogy* more generally) into the context of the detective story, we must enter the discourse worlds of fathers Poe and Borges and the "analytic anti-detective story." John Irwin defines "analytic detective fiction" as "the genre invented by Poe in the Dupin tales of the 1840s." Other detective tales he says have main characters (detectives) "whose main concern is not analysis but adventure" (1).

William Spanos describes the connection between the traditional detective story and western epistemology:

> For just as the form of the detective story has its source in the comforting certainty that an acute "eye," private or otherwise, can solve the crime with resounding finality by inferring causal relationships between clues which point to it…so the "form" of the well-made positivistic universe is grounded in the equally comforting certainty that the scientist and/or psychoanalyst can solve the immediate problem by the inductive method, a process involving the inference of relationships between discontinuous "facts" that point to or lead straight to an explanation of the "mystery," the "crime" of contingent existence. (150)

Auster's detective tales, as we have seen, fall into a different category, the deconstructive anti-detective story, for though there is a missing person (Fanshawe), there is no real crime, hence no investigation beyond the hiring of private detective Quinn (from *City of Glass*) before the action of the novel begins and the search the narrator undertakes in Chapter seven (more than halfway through the novel) for his friend/alter-ego/nemesis. Both pieces of detective work, not surprisingly, end in failure. Thus it seems that we have another writer who must come to terms with his double in order to survive. As we are

called into the worlds of Poe and Borges, especially the worlds as John Irwin sees them, we find ourselves in a sphere of infinite complexity and are reminded once again of Borges' claim about the writer creating his own precursors. Hence we are prodded to take another look at the father of the detective story.

Auster makes sure that we are aware of his intention to rewrite his literary predecessor Poe by alluding to him in several places in the novel. First we are told that when Fanshawe started writing in grammar school, Poe and Stevenson[70] were his "models" (252). Other references to Poe come later when Fanshawe lowers himself into an open grave (259), when we are given the title of Fanshawe's "big" novel *Neverland* (270), and when "The Pit and the Pendulum" is said to be less "compelling" than Peter Freuchen's story about breathing himself "into a coffin of ice" (300). In this last example, Poe's fictional tale of horror is said to suffer from the comparison with a "real-life" account of being buried alive.[71]

John Irwin argues that Borges' three detective stories: "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in his Labyrinth," "The Garden of Forking Paths," and "Death and the Compass," are what he calls antithetical doubles of Poe's original three: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter."

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[70] Needless to say, Auster was also influenced by Poe and Stevenson and so in this way connects himself to the character Fanshawe. In addition to these postmodern detective tales (with their images of being buried alive or trapped in small dark spaces), there is the detective novel *Squeeze Play* that Auster wrote in 1978 (see *HTM* pp. 123-129 and Appendix 3) and the detective story he wrote as a boy (see *IS* 168). And of course doubles, twins, or alter-egos are central to all three novels in the *Trilogy.* As author of the most famous of alter-egos, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson is a guiding spirit — or ghost — in all three of these tales. It is also interesting to note, as John Irwin informs us, that Stevenson shares in *Memories and Portraits* "how he taught himself to write by imitating various authors, especially [Sir Thomas] Browne" (Irwin 131).

[71] Though, as it turns out, Peter Freuchen survives to tell his tale.

I want to suggest that a case may be made for Auster's being third in line, producing the three detective tales in the *Trilogy*, which point to Poe as predecessor. Poe's ideal reader, arguably, is able to match wits with the author (the master analyst himself), and, with the reasoning ability of the poet who is also a mathematician, solve the mystery:

> [The] aesthetic task…was to find mysteries that would serve as dramatic correlatives for the central mystery of the human condition, and the fact that the mysteries he created were ones associated with the commission of crimes simply evokes the ancient sense that the structure of self-consciousness, as something constituted by an original and essential oddness, is basically transgressive. (Irwin 416)

My argument is that Auster's "aesthetic task" is somewhat analogous. Certainly his concern is with the human condition, but as I suggested earlier, the self that the postmodern writer is occupied with is a fragmented one (to paraphrase Humpty Dumpty, using Poe — not even the mathematician and the poet can put him back together again), hence finding a "dramatic correlative" for such a figure is difficult.

Thus the mystery the reader is trying to solve in *The Locked Room* is complicated. Surely first it involves the disappearance of Fanshawe. Then, when we know about his secret letter to the narrator, the mystery appears to be the impact of the letter — i.e. if and when the narrator will reveal the secret to Fanshawe's wife Sophie — and what effect the secret, or the revelation of the secret, will have on their relationship. According to Irwin, "the battle in an analytic detective story is typically a contest to see if the reader can solve the mystery before the detective does. Obviously, the contest depends upon the writer's playing fair by giving the reader access to the same clues the detective has, so as to make it

a contest of attention and reasoning" (191). But there is a question about what kind of reasoning are we being asked to do here. "There is a sense in which every analytic detective story," Irwin claims, "as a contest between writer and reader for priority of solution, is a hidden-object problem – the object in question being the mystery's solution" (191).

The Locked Room, like "The Purloined Letter," is about keeping secrets. In Poe's story, Monsieur G___, the Prefect of the Parisian police, informs Dupin that, given the compromising contents of the letter in question and the circumstances under which it was stolen, they must both treat this as an "affair demanding the greatest secrecy" (126). The letter itself is a secret (or was supposed to be) and the lady in question must keep it a secret from her husband. And finally, Minister D___ (the thief) is keeping secret the whereabouts of the letter he purloined.

In Auster's novel, the hidden-object, as we have indicated, is the letter from Fanshawe[72] (for most of the novel it is this one letter, though late in the narrative there is a second note from the still-missing doppelganger that becomes a second hidden-object). In the case of *The Locked Room*, the actual object (the letter) and the narrator's object (his need to keep the letter a secret) are both concealed from Sophie Fanshawe. In Poe's tale, the narrator reasons (in the dark, as Dupin insists that they will reflect better without lighting a lamp) that it is the "possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power" (Poe 127). In *The Locked Room*, the letter has the power to destroy the sanity of its recipient — and the power to destroy the loving relationship the narrator forms with his double's wife: "Fanshawe was alive — and if I let Sophie know it, what would this

[72] Though we may also claim that Fanshawe himself is the hidden-object — hidden, it turns out, in a locked room.

knowledge do to us? The thought that Sophie might want him back was too much for me, and I did not have the courage to risk finding out" (283). Irwin relates Lacan's take on "The Purloined Letter": "A character's place within the triangular structure of glances is shifted from a position of insight to blindness as soon as he takes possession of the letter" (421). Certainly this is the case with the narrator in *The Locked Room*.

The point is made in "The Purloined Letter" that the Prefect will receive a "prodigious" reward if he succeeds in obtaining the stolen letter (129). If we identify with Dupin (as surely we are meant to do) we experience the satisfaction that comes from solving the mystery. What, we may ask, is our reward as readers of Auster's tale? If the mystery is a psychological one, we may, in identifying with the narrator, come to understand this man and his relation to Fanshawe.[73] An accurate description of what Dupin is looking for is essential to his resolution of the case. Do we have the information — the clues — we need to solve the mystery? Perhaps to fathom the enigma in this postmodern novel we must reevaluate first principles — the very thing the Prefect is incapable of according to Dupin (131).

The principle in the case of *The Locked Room* may be to identify with the author of the novel. Of the schoolboy who always won at marbles, Dupin says that his "principle of guessing…lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents" (132). For the narrator of *The Locked Room*, that opponent is Fanshawe — whether this boyhood friend is alter-ego, super-ego (representing literary forefathers Hawthorne and Poe in particular), and/or his own inner darkness. For the reader of this novel, the opponent is Auster. If what the secret letter reveals about the relationship between the narrator and

[73] And to Quinn and Stillman and Blue and Black.

Fanshawe is the crux of the mystery, then we must formulate hypotheses about this odd relation. Having become acclimated, however, via the first two novels in the *Trilogy*, to the intricate web of relationships (among the dead and the living) that Auster weaves, we may insist that all conclusions based on these hypotheses remain provisional and that this novel may well be, like Ts'ui Pen's labyrinth in "The Garden of Forking Paths," "virtually impossible-to-disentangle" (125). It may be a work where "all the outcomes in fact occur" (125). The possibility exists that Fanshawe and the narrator are living at the same time in parallel universes, or it may be that Fanshawe is a projection — the man the narrator would have become had he been more self-assured, more single-minded about his writing, and more solitary.[74] In fact, he must be willing to virtually relinquish human connections.[75]

"The larger mystery evoked by the purloined letter," Irwin affirms, "concerns the way the metaphysicality of meaning is contained or concealed on the physical surface of writing" (192). Without claiming for Auster's novel a transcendent truth, we may insist that in this case matching wits with the author may mean refusing to engage in that "irritable reaching after fact and reason" Keats warned us about. We surely cannot say of Auster's detective stories what Irwin says of Poe's (and Borges' reflection of them), that their theme is "the quest for an absolute knowledge of the mind" (94).

The connections between Poe's story and Auster's are far from the kind of mirroring for which Irwin is arguing. It is difficult to resist, however, seeing the parallels (the most obvious and previously discussed coming first in the list): Both texts involve letters, love triangles, revenge, the luring of one character by another into a trap, self-deception on the

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[74] In Auster's *Oracle Night* it seems that the elder John Trause (Trause is an anagram of Auster) and the younger Sidney Orr are alter-egos of Auster at different times in his life.

[75] Remember that Auster says that Quinn is the man he may have become had he not met his second wife (*AH* 313).

part of the one who has the letter, and the color red (the color of the original seal on the stolen letter; the red notebook). The parallels between the Borges story ("Death and the Compass") and *The Locked Room* are also intriguing: Both texts involve letters, revenge, the luring of one character by another into a trap, self-deception on the part of the one who has the letter, allusions to Spinoza, and again the color red (red ink on a map and red names in Borges; the red notebook in the Auster).[76]

"Everything, in some sense, can be read as a gloss on everything else," Auster writes in *The Invention of Solitude* (83). Auster is a gloss on Borges and Borges is gloss on Poe. Auster is a gloss on Thoreau, who is a gloss on Emerson. "While at the Manse, " James McIntosh reports, "Hawthorne met and grew to like Henry David Thoreau…still an aspiring young man of Concord and not yet a well-known writer" (Norton: *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales* 273).

In this novel, though, Thoreau comes into the picture via a back door when we meet character Dennis Walden, a childhood friend of Fanshawe and the narrator's (249). We are told that Fanshawe displays a particular kind of generosity, or selflessness, when the three boys are invited to a birthday party and Fanshawe gives the gift *he* was supposed to give to the birthday boy to the empty-handed (and apparently embarrassed) Walden. The narrator, remembering this years later, says that "Fanshawe's gesture had opened up a whole new world for me: the way someone could enter the feelings of another and take them on so completely that his own were no longer important. It was the first truly moral act I had witnessed" (250).

The fact that the narrator is so impressed by his young friend's behavior indicates to the

[76] Perhaps it follows naturally that Auster and Borges would also share an interest in literary fathers Cervantes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Pascal, Bruno, Sir Thomas Browne, and Lewis Carroll.

reader that Fanshawe's ethics are a model for the narrator — and in his quest to plumb the depths of his alter-ego's psyche, the narrator must struggle to hold onto, and emulate, that image of the selfless Fanshawe. In a text with two characters named for books — in this case the same book that had Blue nonplussed in *Ghosts* — we are clearly being asked to use our imaginations. Perhaps it is useful to think of *Walden* the way that Stephen Albert in "The Garden of Forking Paths" describes the embedded novel of the same name: "I imagined…a Platonic, hereditary work, transmitted from father to son, in which each new individual adds a chapter or corrects with pious care the pages of his elders" (125). It is one of the claims of this chapter that *The Locked Room* is this kind of "hereditary work, transmitted from father to son." In other words, the last novel in the *Trilogy,* like the two that precede it, claims an inheritance even as it passes one on.

Here Hawthorne (in the body of Auster's Fanshawe) gives Thoreau (in the body of Dennis Walden) a gift[77] — the gift of a literary forefather — to be passed on to yet a third party (perhaps another literary son). The fact that the famous solitudes of Hawthorne and Thoreau have their echoes in Borges' character Ts'ui Pen — "He renounced the pleasures of both tyranny and justice…in order to sequester himself for thirteen years in the Pavillion of Limpid Solitude" (124) — is an additional thread in our web of associations.

"What people saw when he appeared before them," Auster writes of his father, "was not really him, but a person he had invented, an artificial creature he could manipulate in order to manipulate others. He himself remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain" (*IS* 16).

The passage above makes clear how enigmatic Auster's father was. In other passages

[77] For another perspective on the gift see Alex Segal.

Auster reveals that his father had no faith in — or respect for — his son's chosen profession. In Irwin's analysis of Borges' gloss on Poe he spends a great deal of time on the father/son theme, especially on the Oedipus and Theseus myths as they relate to Borges' own life. In reflecting on Poe and Hawthorne it may be useful for our present purposes to note that both writers lost their fathers early in life. Borges had (according to Irwin) a positive yet competitive relationship with his father that the elder encouraged via chess and literature. Irwin points out the importance of knowing (and being known by) one's father:

> The son's self-knowledge (his knowing who he is) is a function of knowing who his father is (i.e., a function of the father's recognition and acknowledgment of the son and thus a form of the son's dependence on the father's will), the son's mastery, his creation of a stable, independent personality, is in some sense a function of his freeing himself from his father's will. (210-211)

If one does not know the father (and in turn is not known by him) it stands to reason that the task of freeing oneself from the father's will is necessarily fraught with confusion and pain. Let us keep in mind, then, as we look closely at the "twins" Fanshawe and the narrator, that who the fathers are (and where they are lurking) is a central question in this narrative.

The blurring of identities — the theme of the double — is clear from the first two lines of the novel: "It seems to me now," the narrator tells us, "that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am" (235). This is an early clue that the quest to "read" Fanshawe (to fathom the work

and the man) is a quest for self-discovery on the part of the narrator, for to know the other (in this case, Fanshawe) is to know oneself.[78] Alter-ego Fanshawe was a childhood friend and next-door neighbor with whom the narrator had long ago lost touch: "He belonged to the past for me now, not to the present. He was a ghost I carried around inside me, a prehistoric figment, a thing that was no longer real" (236). Like the ghosts of literary fathers past (such as Hawthorne), it will become evident that Fanshawe is both an alter-ego and a kind of father-figure to the narrator who admired, but was also intimidated by, his friend:[79]

> I see now that I also held back from Fanshawe, that a part of me always resisted him. Especially as we grew older, I do not think I was ever entirely comfortable in his presence. If envy is too strong a word for what I am trying to say, then I would call it a suspicion, a secret feeling that Fanshawe was somehow better than I was…that there was more innate goodness in him than in others, that some unquenchable fire was keeping him alive, that he was more truly himself than I could ever hope to be. (247)

Although the narrator resisted this intense and solitary double, he was also inspired to imitate his friend:

> Early on, his influence was quite pronounced. This extended even to very small things. If Fanshawe wore his belt buckle on the side of his pants, then I would move my belt into the same position. If Fanshawe came to the playground wearing black sneakers, then I would ask for black sneakers the

[78] If the narrator learns something about himself from Daniel Quinn's red notebook, and something more from Blue's wrestling with Black, perhaps in this third novel he takes a further step toward self-awareness.

[79] Compare this to Black and Blue in *Ghosts.*

> next time my mother took me to the shoe store. If Fanshawe brought a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* with him to school, then I would begin reading *Robinson Crusoe*[80] that same evening at home. (247)

Echoing the narrator's imitation of Fanshawe, Auster imitates literary father Hawthorne when he names his character Fanshawe. And like his namesake (in Hawthorne's novel), and Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Fanshawe is a solitary being:

> There was something so attractive about him that you always wanted him beside you, as if you could live within his sphere and be touched by what he was. He was there for you, and yet at the same time he was inaccessible. You felt there was a secret core in him that could never be penetrated, a mysterious center of hiddenness. To imitate him was somehow to participate in that mystery, but it was also to understand that you could never really know him. (248)

We are reminded more than once of how close Fanshawe and the narrator were, but in spite of their being the same chronological age (remember Blue and Black?), it appears that Fanshawe is the elder — the smarter, the more adventurous and, as we see in the following passage, the one more eager for what passes for adult experience. Describing a weekend that Fanshawe and the narrator (at Fanshawe's urging) spent "roaming the streets" of Manhattan, "talking to bums…getting drunk" and visiting a prostitute, the narrator calls himself "an adolescent Sancho astride my donkey, watching my friend do battle with himself" (254). After taking turns with the prostitute, the narrator is dispirited while Fanshawe appears quite satisfied. Taking back his earlier assertion that he had "too many desires" (251) to live like Fanshawe, the narrator says that "I realized then that Fanshawe

[80] Though literary father Defoe is merely alluded to here (as he is in several Auster novels), he is an important model for the evocation of solitude — a condition that Auster dwells on as he focuses on the lives of writers and other isolated figures.

was much hungrier than I could ever be" (255). That the narrator ends up second in line for Fanshawe's wife Sophie is, needless to say, an echo of this earlier loveless encounter.[81]

In addition to shifting our attention away from the primary narrative and bringing us back to *City of Glass* and the idea of the quest with the Cervantes allusion (Daniel Quinn= Don Quixote = Fanshawe), the Don Quixote and Sancho reference reinforces the idea of Fanshawe as the superior of the two alter-egos, or as I have been hinting — the surrogate father-figure.

Fanshawe's less laudable attributes and his thoughtless or callous behavior, however, are noted along with his admirable qualities and his "good deeds": "He was the best baseball player, the best student, the best looking of all the boys….He was…more in harmony with himself, more ideally a normal child than any of the rest of us" (31). But the narrator also says the following:

> There were times when he shocked me by his willingness to jump into dangerous situations. Behind all the surface composure, there seemed to be a great darkness: an urge to test himself, to take risks, to haunt the edges of things….Fanshawe would talk to me about the importance of "tasting life." Making things hard for yourself, he said, searching out the unknown — this was what he wanted. (253-254).

This is a description of a knight, a hero. Sometimes, however, Fanshawe's actions indicate neither a positive nor a negative characteristic. "In retrospect," the narrator says, "I find it natural that Fanshawe should have become a writer. The severity of his inwardness almost seemed to demand it" (252). Here we have the image of the writer as

[81] Irwin quotes from Monegal's biography of Borges in which the writer tells the story of visiting a prostitute with his father and imagining that the elder Borges may have preceded him in the woman's bed. The experience for Borges, as for the narrator, is disappointing (Irwin 291).

anti-social figure, an image that Fanshawe, in contrast to the more world-connected narrator, embodies. Auster's words about his father could be said of Fanshawe:

> The rampant, totally mystifying force of contradiction. I understand now that each fact is nullified by the next fact, that each thought engenders an equal and opposite thought. Impossible to say anything without reservation: he was good, or he was bad; he was this, or he was that. All of them are true. At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all the others. (*IS* 61)

Evocative also is the narrator telling us of an early work by his alter-ego that has echoes of the text we are reading: "In the sixth grade…Fanshawe wrote a short detective novel of about fifty pages….The story escapes me now, but I recall that it was infinitely complex, with the outcome hinging on something like the confused identities of two sets of twins" (253). Tuned in by Auster to such possibilities the reader cannot help but wonder if Fanshawe's sixth-grade novel is a mise-en-abyme, and if so, if the two sets of twins are Fanshawe and narrator — and Fanshawe and Fanshawe.

Continuing the portrait of his callous double, the narrator in this last novel in the *Trilogy* tells us that "by the time he was thirteen or fourteen, Fanshawe became a kind of internal exile, going through the motions of dutiful behavior, but cut off from his surroundings, contemptuous of the life he was forced to live" (255). The alienated, detached teenager will grow to write about the world from which he will be, but for a short respite with the woman he marries, increasingly estranged.

But before we judge Fanshawe as without human feeling or connection, we learn that when Fanshawe's father is diagnosed with cancer, his mother falls apart and he is left with

the responsibility for his twelve-year-old emotionally unstable sister Ellen [82] (257-258).

In this text about identification with and imitation of various kinds of fathers, there is a story the narrator tells that shows not only an early propensity on the part of Fanshawe to court death, but hints that the desire to become the father may *require* a willingness to transgress that ultimate boundary. The two teenagers visit a graveyard and Fanshawe takes advantage of the opportunity to lower himself into an open grave. When they get home they find out that Fanshawe's father has died (259-261). Perhaps we are to understand that Fanshawe was so identified with his father (who had been dying of cancer for some time) that he needed to feel (or imagine himself feeling) what it was like to be dead. As we suggested earlier, the grave scene is certainly an allusion to father Poe and his "Premature Burial."[83] It is, however, much more than this as we may readily imagine in a novel about many kinds of fathers. Identification with the father can be suffocating — or freeing. About Kafka and Beckett, Auster has written: "They both had a tremendous hold over me" (*AH* 275).

When the narrator gets the call from Sophie Fanshawe, he has not heard from his friend in years. The narrator is surprised, not only by the call and the fact that his childhood friend has disappeared, but by how much, at least according to Sophie, he meant to his friend in spite of the years of silence:

> Each time my name had been mentioned I was described as his best friend in the world — the one true friend he had ever had. He had also managed to keep up with my work, always buying the magazines in which my articles appeared,

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[82] Ellen is the name of Fanshawe's love interest in the Hawthorne novel and Auster's schizophrenic sister. And in another of the kind of meaningless coincidence that Auster loves, the young woman with whom Thoreau and his brother John both fell in love was named Ellen.

[83] Peter Brooks reminds us, however, that "burial alive" has a rich literary career, beginning at least with M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (221).

> and sometimes even reading the pieces aloud to her. He admired what I did, Sophie said; he was proud of me, and he felt that I had it in me to do something great. (244)

The narrator is not as impressed with his own accomplishments as is his friend. He is the one, though, more connected to the world; his name is out there in print. Still, Fanshawe's compliments, paradoxically, plunge the narrator into a dark reflection:

> I admit that I was flattered….I was having a hard time of it just then, and the fact was that I did not share this high opinion of myself….I had begun with great hopes, thinking that I would become a novelist, thinking that I would eventually be able to write something that would touch people….But time went on, and little by little I realized that this was not going to happen. (244-245)

As the narrator learns, while he was writing articles and reviews, his alter-ego was working in solitude on fiction and poetry — that is, doing the kind of work the narrator had hoped to do. Though his critical essays have been praised, this does not satisfy the narrator:

> I was not quite thirty and already I had something of a reputation. I had begun with reviews of poetry and novels, and now I could write about nearly anything and do a creditable job. Movies, plays, art shows, concerts, books, even baseball games….The world saw me as a bright young fellow, a new critic on the rise, but inside myself I felt old, already used up. (245)

We can smile at the narrator's harsh judgment of himself, but we must take seriously the disparity between his goals as a writer (to write novels, to touch people's lives) and his accomplishments:

> Fanshawe's praise, therefore, left me with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I knew that he was wrong. On the other hand (and this is where it gets murky), I wanted to believe that he was right. I thought: is it possible that I've been too hard on myself? And once I began to think that, I was lost. But who wouldn't jump at the chance to redeem himself — what man is strong enough to reject the possibility of hope? The thought flickered through me that I could one day be resurrected in my eyes, and I felt a sudden burst of friendship for Fanshawe across the years, across all the silence of the years that had kept us apart. (245)

The oedipal triangle would not be complete, of course, without the mother, and so Fanshawe's seductive and vindictive mother, feeling rejected by her son, seduces the narrator. The two therefore commit a kind of incest (the narrator is Fanshawe's double, remember) that is also an attempt to destroy the missing son: "I'm not saying that he was bad," Jane Fanshawe complains to the sympathetic narrator," he was a separate being without parents. Nothing I said ever had an effect on him. The same with his father. He refused to learn anything from us" (309). [84]

To reinforce our sense of Fanshawe as a figure for whom solitude was a life-long obsession, the narrator shares an anecdote about a large cardboard box that his childhood friend retreated into as a boy: "If another person ever entered his box," the narrator tells us, "then its magic would be lost for good" (260). Like the story of the open grave, this seems to be yet another parable about solitude — about the need of the writer to enter a world to

[84]Continuing in a somewhat contemptuous tone, Jane Fanshawe blames her emotionally disturbed daughter for her effect on Fanshawe: "Ellen's the reason why he never published any of his work, you know. She's why he quit Harvard after his second year" (310). Though Auster recounts the story of quitting Columbia after his second year because he could not do what he wanted to do in Paris in the Junior Year Abroad Program (*HTM* 31-32), the reader cannot help but wonder if there is some autobiographical reference here to Auster's schizophrenic sister Ellen.

which no one else has access, at least while he is composing. Put another way, the writer needs space (literally and metaphorically) for his imagination. That this is difficult for those excluded from the space (literally and metaphorically) is self-evident. The narrator, seeking connection, makes his discomfort at being left out clear (to the reader, if not to his friend).

When the narrator gathers Fanshawe's papers together into two pieces of luggage, he tells us that he carried "the two suitcases slowly down the stairs and onto the street. Together, they were as heavy as a man" (246). The equating of a man with his work here is particularly telling. The narrator and Fanshawe both seem to have trouble separating their feelings about their work from their feelings about themselves. When the narrator worries that Fanshawe's work may not be up to snuff, this idea is reinforced: "There was no difference in my mind between giving the order to destroy Fanshawe's work and killing him with my own hands" (262). Issue a negative judgment on the work (and therefore, according to Fanshawe's instructions, destroy it) and you murder the man.

Directly after the narrator expresses his fear of destroying Fanshawe by judging his work unfit for publication, the competition between the two comes to the forefront again and another fear is voiced, the fear of being swallowed (annihilated) by the alter-ego:

> If I did not want Fanshawe's work to be bad…I also did not want it to be good…. Old rivalries no doubt had something to do with it, a desire not to be humbled by Fanshawe's brilliance — but there was also a feeling of being trapped….Once I opened the suitcases, I would become Fanshawe's spokesman — and I would go on speaking for him, whether I liked it or not. (262)

This, of course, is the writer's fear — that once he starts speaking for (or imitating) the

father (in this case Fanshawe) he runs the risk of losing his own voice. This is why he must confront his double to survive.

Fanshawe's gross insensitivity appears inexcusable to his friend and to the reader. In his letter to the narrator, though, the disappeared writer claims that his abandonment of his wife and unborn son is a mark of his kindness: "I want you to understand that I haven't lost my mind. I made certain decisions that were necessary, and though people have suffered, leaving was the best and kindest thing I have ever done" (281). At the same time, Fanshawe insists on his solitude to the point of threatening his friend's life: "I beg you not to look for me….It seems to me that I have the right to live the rest of my life as I see fit. Threats are repugnant to me — but I have no choice but to give you this warning: if by some miracle you mange to track me down, I will kill you" (281). [85]

Fanshawe's letter catches us off guard when the missing man reveals that his need for solitude is no longer tied to a need to write: "Writing was an illness that plagued me for a long time, but now I have recovered from it….You are my friend, and my one hope is that you will always be who you are. With me it's another story" (281). What are we to think of a character who needs to be alone even though he has given up writing? This can only make sense if Fanshawe is not a separate being at all, but merely a double of the narrator who, having gone too far into his solitude, must self-destruct. The fact that Fanshawe writes the narrator early on, knowing that the narrator will try to find him, and that he writes again insisting on a meeting, leads us to the conclusion that Fanshawe does not want to be left alone. And then there is the fact that the second meeting is on April Fool's Day.

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[85]Frederick Crews, in *The Sins of the Fathers* discusses Hawthorne's story "Alice Doane's Appeal." He says that the brothers in the story are "like joint posessors of an individual nature, which could not become wholly the property of one, unless by the extinction of the other" (51).

Who is the fool here? The reader who believes that Fanshawe exists?

The narrator's quest to write the biography of his alter-ego involves researching Fanshawe's life in the south of France and what the narrator learns there only increases his admiration for his friend: "I hesitate to talk about a religious or mystical experience…but from all the evidence it seems that Fanshawe was alone for the whole time, barely seeing anyone, barely even opening his mouth. The stringency of this life disciplined him. Solitude became a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery" (327).

That there was some transformation from this self-discovering writer who married and fathered a child to the alienated ex-writer (and madman?) is painfully clear to the narrator: "The Fanshawe I had known was not the same Fanshawe I was looking for. There had been a break somewhere, a sudden, incomprehensible break – and the things I was told by the various people I questioned did not account for it" (332-333).

Much later (during the final confrontation at Columbus Square) Fanshawe gives his own somewhat cryptic explanation: "I wasn't meant to live like other people….It's all in the notebook. Whatever I managed to say now would only distort the truth" (368). Here, as in many passages, the narrator notes how different from himself is his alter-ego. Though also a writer, the narrator believes that he does not have what it takes to write the kind of serious literature that Fanshawe has written. The narrator needs connection where Fanshawe needs solitude. Even as boys, the difference between them was clear:

> No matter how remarkable his behavior was, you always felt that he was detached from it. More than anything else, it was this quality that sometimes scared me away from him. I would get close to Fanshawe, would admire him so intensely, would want so desperately to measure up to him — and then,

> suddenly, a moment would come when I realized that he was alien to me, that the way he lived inside himself could never correspond to the way I needed to live. (251)

Elaborating on the differences between his alter-ego and himself, the narrator says, "I wanted too much of things, I had too many desires, I lived too fully in the grip of the immediate ever to attain such indifference. It mattered to me that I do well….Fanshawe remained aloof from all that, quietly standing in his corner, paying no attention" (251).

And lest we begin to think of them as two truly separate beings, the narrator reminds us of their symbiosis:

> If Fanshawe and I eventually had our differences, what I remember most about our childhood is the passion of our friendship. We lived next door to each other, and our fenceless backyards merged into an unbroken stretch of lawn, gravel, and dirt, as though we belonged to the same household…neither one of us had a brother: ideal conditions therefore, with nothing to stand between us. We were born less than a week apart and spent our babyhoods in the backyard together…standing up and taking our first steps on the same day. (251-252)

As he embarks on his quest to bring Fanshawe's work into the public sphere, the narrator sounds much like Blue in *Ghosts*, who comes to understand himself through merging with his alter-ego. "It was probably necessary," the narrator says, "for me to equate Fanshawe's success with my own. I had stumbled onto a cause, a thing that justified me and made me feel important, and the more fully I disappeared into my ambitions for Fanshawe, the more sharply I came into focus for myself" (273). Hence the quest to publish his double's work is tied up with the quest for self-discovery and writerly

independence on the part of the narrator. But the difficulty of writing another's life is a recurring theme in Auster. In writing about his own father in *The Invention of Solitude*, he says that "while that piece is filled with specific details, it still seems to me not so much an attempt at biography but an exploration of how one might begin to speak about another person, and whether or not it is even possible" (*AH* 276).

One important difference between *The Locked Room* and *Ghosts* is that instead of giving up love (Blue gives up his fiance in order to follow Black), the narrator finds it with his alter-ego's wife: "It was strange how Fanshawe had brought us together. If not for his disappearance, none of this would have happened" (277). And so it is Fanshawe's abandonment of Sophie that leaves her available to his "twin." Or in other words, the solitary writer has to disappear in order for the connected writer to find love and happiness. And so though Leslie Fiedler would find his "man on the run" in Fanshawe, he would have to acknowledge that our narrator does not "avoid…sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26).

The love and happiness that the narrator finds with Sophie is, however, nearly destroyed by the narrator's obsession with Fanshawe. Writing this book (*The Locked Room*) years later, the narrator tells us that this is what he needed to do (it is the final trial in the quest) in order to finally escape from the darkness of the father, from Fanshawe (alter-ego, super-ego). For it is "only darkness," the narrator says, that "has the power to make a man open his heart to the world, and darkness is what surrounds me whenever I think of what happened. If courage is needed to write about it, I also know that writing is the one chance I have to escape" (278). But this is much later. First the narrator endures many trials as he immerses himself in the work of his alter-ego:

> People were beginning to say that…I had invented…[Fanshawe] to

> perpetrate a hoax and had actually written the books myself….I realized that…it would be…possible for me to write another book or two under his name….I was not planning to do this, of course, but the mere thought of it opened up certain bizarre and intriguing notions to me: what it means when a writer puts his name on a book, why some writers choose to hide behind a pseudonym, whether or not a writer has a real life anyway. It struck me that writing under another name might be something I would enjoy — to invent a secret identity for myself — and I wondered why found this idea so attractive. (279)

Though Fanshawe writes in English and the narrator is not changing his friend's words into another language, he is, in bringing Fanshawe's work to an audience, in effect translating the father from the private to the public sphere. The theme of translating the other and/or speaking for the other — underlies much of Auster's work. In the second part of *The Invention of Solitude,* titled "The Book of Memory," Auster talks about his experiences translating works from French to English. Auster refers to himself in this part of the memoir as "A.":

> He sits at his desk reading the book in French and then picks up his pen and writes the same book, and the strangeness of this activity has never failed to impress him….Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two.... Therefore, he tells himself, it is possible to be alone and not alone at the same moment. (*IS* 136)

Taking over for the "father" creates obstacles for the "son." Once the narrator succeeds in publishing his alter-ego's work, the money gives him the freedom to write,[86] but he

[86] Here we have the theme of the windfall ubiquitous in Auster.

cannot produce under these conditions: "For several days I even toyed with the idea of writing a detective novel, but then I got stuck with the plot and couldn't fit all the pieces together" (288).

The freedom to write, the money, comes from father-figure Fanshawe, the man whose place the narrator has usurped. Auster did not suffer from this same conflict when his father died. The writer received a modest inheritance that allowed him to cut back on the translating he was doing to survive and instead focus on his own writing. And so along with the grief and confusion Auster shares with the reader in *The Invention of Solitude*, he also notes the irony that his father, who gave him nothing in terms of love or emotional support, bequeathed to him a timely gift for which Auster was duly grateful. In contrast to the narrator of *The Locked Room*, that is, Auster was able to take advantage of the windfall and compose the memoir that became the seminal prose text in his body of work.

In *The Locked Room* the father-figure's success should, it seems, ensure the son's success too, but guilt over having taken Fanshawe's place, and the looming anxiety of influence paralyzes the narrator. The father-figure's work is good, so good that the "some of [the reviews] were extraordinary….This was the fairy tale that every writer dreams about" (277).

When the narrator is considering what writing a biography of Fanshawe might be like and Sophie encourages him with the thought that it could be "the story of your friendship," we feel the narrator's anxiety and ambivalence. "It could be as much about you as about him," Sophie argues (290). Again we have Auster's wink to the reader, not only because Sophie does not know that Fanshawe is still alive, but because we are aware by now that in writing about Fanshawe, his alter-ego, the narrator will indeed be writing about himself.

This is another case where the reader knows the narrator better than he knows himself, and so instead of self-awareness, the research into Fanshawe's life that must precede the writing of the biography fills the narrator with guilt: "I plunged into it with deceit in my heart. The book was a work of fiction….I signed the contract, and afterwards I felt like a man who had signed away his soul" (291). In spite of the lie of the quest, however, and in spite of the narrator's insistence that "every life is inexplicable," it seems as though immersing himself in the life of his alter-ego should be a journey of self-discovery for the narrator similar to Blue's attempt to understand Black — or Quinn's attempt to understand Peter Stillman. Setting us straight on this matter, though, the narrator insists that the attempt to penetrate the mind of another is doomed to failure because we cannot even understand ourselves: "No one can cross the boundary into another — for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself" (291-292).

Just as Blue's reflections on the father/son pairs in *Ghosts* lead him to greater self-awareness, the narrator spends several pages reflecting on his experience as a census taker in Harlem in 1970 and on the strange lives of several people which lead him to conclude that "lives make no sense" (295) and that we are all too often the agents of our own demise. He considers the fact that the lines between fact and fiction are thin, if not invisible at times, for as his boss at the census bureau says, "Just because a door doesn't open when you knock on it doesn't mean that nobody's there. You've got to use your imagination, my friend" (293).

This summer job also leads the narrator to conclude that sometimes it is better to tell a lie: "I even went so far as to defend my preference for large families on political grounds: the greater the poor population, the more obligated the government would feel to spend

money on it" (294-295). And finally, the experience of creating families on paper where none existed in reality (at least not fitting those descriptions on those streets of Harlem in 1970), allows the narrator to feel the power of a writer who makes a real difference in the world: "As opposed to the story writer, I was offering my creations directly to the real world, and therefore it seemed possible to me that they could affect this real world in a real way…[and] no writer could ask for more than that" (295).

At the end of these ruminations, however, the narrator comes to a bitter conclusion: "Once I had given birth to a thousand imaginary souls. Now, eight years later, I was going to take a living man and put him in his grave….I was digging a grave…and there were times when I began to wonder if I was not digging my own" (295). And so in contrast to Blue, who did not destroy his double until the end when he (presumably) had earned some understanding of the other, the narrator recognizes his murderous impulse early on, when the writing project itself is conceived (by him) as a weapon of death.

As he attempts to come to grips with his second quest, that of writing Fanshawe's biography, the narrator finds himself meditating on what he comes to call parables: "They mean what they mean only because they are true" (299). There is the story of La Chere, a French soldier who survives many horrors (one of which is to be left alone on an island to starve — another story of extreme solitude) only to become, on a ship back to France with his rescuers, the victim of their "inevitable descent into cannibalism" (295-296). The narrator's conclusion is that "lives make no sense" (295) and "nothing is ever known" (297).

There is the story of Lorenzo Da Ponte, a man who lived several lives, the first as Emmanuele Conegliano, "the son of a Jewish leather merchant" (297); the second as a

Catholic priest and seminary teacher (297); the third as Mozart's librettist (298); the fourth as the husband of an English woman (first in Trieste, then in Paris, and London) and a librettist for "undistinguished composers" (298); the fifth as a shopkeeper in New Jersey and Pennsylvania; and the sixth as a professor at Columbia (298). Again the narrator's conclusion is that "lives make no sense" (298). In another nonsensical transformation (another violation of the law of the excluded middle), the narrator, taking over Fanshawe's work and wife and raising his son as his own has, in a sense, become his double.

Another parable is about a "promising young novelist" who goes mad and hands out his inheritance on street corners in New York City (more on this later). In addition to the obvious connection to Fanshawe throwing his future as a novelist away, there is the connection to the narrator, who may be giving his writing life away by living his alter-ego's life instead of his own.

Four more parables follow. These stories, in addition to their irony or tragic turn of events, have in common the idea that people choose (or are forced to choose) their doom — and their doom involves a closed-in space — an enforced (or self-enforced) solitude. Goffe and Whalley, after sending Charles I to his death, "spent the rest of their lives in a cave" in Connecticut (299). The muderous impulse comes back to haunt the murderer. These two kill the king (the ultimate father figure), but then can only survive by self-punishment, by hiding away from the world. Kill the father and you pay with your life.

Mrs. Winchester, living in fear that the victims of her husband's rifles will come back to haunt her, nearly dies of starvation in one of the many rooms she has built to hide from the ghosts (299). The echoes here are of rooms as vehicles for solitude and escape (for the writer and/or the madman) but also of the fear of ghosts and being haunted by those we

have hurt.

Another parable the narrator recalls is about Bakhtin who, during the German invasion of Russia in 1937, smokes what one would assume was a most prized possession: a manuscript he had spent years writing (299). He clearly feels trapped — doomed — and therefore he destroys his work which, we have already noted is, for a writer, like destroying himself.

Arctic explorer Peter Freuchen nearly freezes to death in an igloo whose walls thickened with each of his breaths. What makes the story most compelling for the narrator is that it is "the man himself who is the agent of his own destruction, and further, the instrument of that destruction is the very thing he needs to keep himself alive" (300). And is this not the exact position the narrator finds himself in? By lying to Sophie, by keeping Fanshawe's secret, he becomes the agent of his own destruction. The narrator tells us that "Fanshawe shows a particular fondness for stories of this kind" (300).[87]

At Fanshawe's childhood home (for research into Fanshawe's life for the biography), the narrator says that "I had stepped into the museum of my own past, and what I found there nearly crushed me" (303). Of course we have already been led to understand that Fanshawe's past is the narrator's past, but here we are reminded of Blue crossing the threshold of Black's studio and entering his childhood. The importance of childhood memories cannot be overstated here. In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster quotes Freud: "You will not forget that the stress laid on the writer's memories of his childhood, which perhaps seem so strange, is ultimately derived from the hypothesis that imaginative creation, like day dreaming, is a continuation of and substitute for the play of childhood"

[87] Needless to say, the narrator is showing that same fondness, as is Auster, who tells stories like this in other works.

(164).

It becomes even clearer than before that we have another case of the violation of the law of the excluded middle: the narrator and Fanshawe are — and are not — the same person. On the second visit to Fanshawe's childhood home, when Jane Fanshawe seduces the narrator, she says, "You even look like him, you know…like brothers, almost like twins…[but] he wasn't half the boy you were. He was cold inside. He was all dead in there, and I don't think he ever loved anyone" (101).

So what are we to think of the narrator's allowing himself to be seduced by his alter-ego's mother? By emphasizing Jane Fanshawe's beauty and the narrator's boyhood fantasy, he makes the seduction scene intensely erotic. In the end, though, the sex is violent (as well as perverse) as the narrator and Mrs. Fanshawe both get to express their anger at Fanshawe:

> Perhaps she felt this unspoken bond between us…that could be proved only through some perverse, extravagant act. Fucking me would be like fucking…her own son — and in the darkness of this sin, she would have him again — but only in order to destroy him. A terrible revenge. If this is true, then I do not have the luxury of calling myself her victim. If anything, I was her accomplice. (313-314)

This is true enough. The reader never sees the narrator as a victim. He is a grown man and he does not fight the seduction. "I liked fucking Fanshawe's mother," he says, "but in a way that had nothing to do with pleasure….I was using her to attack Fanshawe himself….I wanted to kill Fanshawe….I was going to track him down and kill him" (314-315). Thus in a variation of the oedipal story, the narrator sleeps with his double's mother and then

heads out to kill her son who is also, as I have suggested, a kind of father-figure.[88]

In another twist to this psychic drama, the narrator says, "The strange thing was not that I might have wanted to kill Fanshawe, but that I sometimes imagined he wanted me to kill him....But that was precisely why I wasn't going to do it. Fanshawe's power had to be broken….The point was to find him alive – and then to walk away from him alive" (317). If we hear echoes of the struggle of Blue and Black in this passage, certainly it is Auster's intention that we should.[89]

Things have changed since *Ghosts*, however; the narrator is more aware. One can kill the father, but how much better to replace the father without killing him. Learn from the father, imitate him, but finally break his power over you by confronting him and then walking away. Show him the same indifference he has shown you.

As the narrator plays at researching his alter-ego's biography, he sees himself playing the role of detective like his counterparts, Quinn (who also, you may remember, appears here) and Blue, in the first two novels of the *Trilogy*. Like his counterparts, the narrator must be alone on his quest. For the detective, the knight, and the writer, solitude is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for success. Even when he is out in the world, he is essentially alone, for he stands apart as observer and/or savior. This is how the narrator describes his task as he hunts down everyone who knew Fanshawe: "I was a detective, after all, and my job was to hunt for clues" (332). The detective is a writer; the writer is a detective. And then we have the detective looking for the detective: "In

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[88] We might also note that if the narrator and Fanshawe are brothers, then the narrator has married his sister. Peter Brooks reminds us that "throughout the Romantic tradition, it is perhaps most notably the image of incest (of the fraternal-sororal variety) that hovers as the sign of a passion inderticted because its fulfillment would be too perfect, a discharge indistinguishable from death, the very cessation of narrative movement (109). Also see Frederick Crews and John Irwin on incest.

[89] See pages 92-93 in *Ghosts.*

February and March," the narrator informs us, "I spent most of my time looking for Quinn, the private detective who had worked for Sophie. Strangely enough, I couldn't find a trace of him" (333). Once again we find ourselves removed from the primary level of narrative and wavering between two (or more) worlds in a state of ontological instability. Quinn, we know, was not really a detective in *City of Glass* and was not, at least in that novel, hired by a Sophie Fanshawe. But Quinn lives on in *The Locked Room* and with his appearance here we question once again the boundaries between characters and novels and wonder who is looking for whom.

The narrator's absorption in the case and the secrets he keeps from Sophie threaten to destroy their marriage. In a desperate moment, Sophie pleads with her new husband: "If the two of us are going to last, he's got to be dead. Don't you understand that? Even if he's alive, he's got to be dead" (336). Thus in order for the narrator to have a successful connection with Sophie, he must kill eliminate the double who seeks only solitude. In a scene reminiscent of *Ghosts*, the narrator, sounding like Blue when he cannot bring himself to contact the future Mrs. Blue, cannot bring himself to call the woman he has left behind: "I wanted to call Sophie. One day, I even went so far as to walk to the post office and wait in line for the foreign operator, but I didn't go through with it. Words were failing me constantly now, and I panicked at the thought of losing my nerve on the phone" (339).

During the narrator's time in Paris, he interviews a girlfriend of Fanshawe's, Anne Michaux, who does a "double take" when she sees the narrator and mistakes him for Fanshawe: "The resemblance had been noticed before, of course, but never so viscerally, with such immediate impact" (341). "I found it disturbing," the narrator says," [and] could not help feeling appalled. Something monstrous was happening, and I had no control over

it anymore" (341). The monstrous thing is the dissolving of the lines between the narrator and Fanshawe in such a way that the narrator can no longer deny that the two men are one. Perhaps the object of the quest, integrating alter-ego Fanshawe, is the very thing the narrator cannot abide.

It is shortly after this meeting with Anne Michaux that the narrator's quest to find Fanshawe begins to abort. An American couple who had befriended Fanshawe is kind to the narrator and offer him their house in the south of France – the house Fanshawe himself had rented.[90]

The narrator's reaction is gratitude mixed with a kind of hopelessness: "This was the end of the line for me, my southward trek to oblivion. Whatever hope I might have had (the faint possibility that Fanshawe had returned to France, the illogical thought that he had found refuge in the same place twice) evaporated by the time I got there" (342). What the narrator relates next reminds us very much of what happened to Blue in his quest to penetrate the mystery of Black:

> The house wouldn't make room for me….Fanshawe was there, and…I couldn't escape….Now that I had stopped looking for him he was more present to me than ever before. The whole process had been reversed….I felt as though I was the one who had been found. Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him. The work I had contrived for myself — the false book, the endless detours — had been no more than an attempt to ward him off….For if I could convince myself that I was looking for him, then it necessarily followed that he was somewhere else….But I had been wrong. Fanshawe was

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[90] Compare this to Auster's stay in the south of France, including his experience with a movie producer that parallels Fanshawe's (*HTM* 76-89).

> exactly where was, and he had been there since the beginning. (344)

Surely this is confirmation that Fanshawe and the narrator are one, but more evidence follows:

> From the moment his letter arrived, I had been struggling to imagine him, to see him as he might have been — but my mind had always conjured a blank.[91] At best, there was one impoverished image: the door of a locked room. That was the extent of it: Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude — living perhaps, breathing perhaps, dreaming God knows what. This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull. (344-345)

It is right after this realization (that the room that Fanshawe is in is inside the narrator's head) that the narrator has a breakdown in Paris and loses a month of his life. It is certainly no coincidence that the narrator faces this existential void in Sartre's Paris:

> If the point was to obliterate Fanshawe, then my binge was a success. He was gone — and I was gone along with him….The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that come before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*….I have been struggling to say goodbye to something for a long time now, and this struggle is all that really matters. The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle. (149)

To what is it (or to whom is it) that the narrator is trying to say good-bye? Evidently it is the ghosts of the father figures that haunt him. But as was the case in *Ghosts*, this severing of ties requires great energy and courage. In the midst of this breakdown, in a bar

[91] Here we have echoes of Blue trying to fathom Black and of Quinn trying to understand Stillman.

in Paris, identities blur further when the narrator insists on calling a stranger Fanshawe: "I exulted in the sheer falsity of my assertion, celebrating the new power I had just bestowed upon myself. I was the sublime alchemist who could change the world at will. This man was Fanshawe because I said he was Fanshawe" (348).

Lest we forget that other literary fathers are haunting this third novel in the *Trilogy,* the narrator, in another willful transformation, presents himself as Herman Melville (349). Again, we are pulled away from the primary narrative and forced to confront another literary predecessor. We may reflect on the fact (as Auster surely has) that Melville was a great admirer of Hawthorne, but that their friendship was cut short when the younger writer found himself rejected by the man he held in such high esteem. Of course Melville was also a reclusive writer who, after gaining fame with his first two novels, became alienated from his public when he published what was later understood to be his masterpiece, *Moby Dick*. In his troubled relationship with his audience and his solitude, Melville reminds us of Hawthorne at times *and* of the two Fanshawes.[92]

The discourse world of *City of Glass* appears again in *The Locked Room* when a stranger in Paris, who appears to be an innocent victim of the narrator's perversity, confounds us further when he says his name is Peter Stillman (349). This is the epistemological void and ontological instability writ large. If we are going to relate the three novels in the *Trilogy* (which we cannot help but do if we have read all three), we are stunned and then amused by the stranger's assertion, for clearly this Stillman (who does not fit the description of either father or son in *City of Glass*) does not exist except in the mind

[92] Auster says of the mentally ill Holderlin that "towards the end, his mind became so muddled that he began to call himself by different names — Scardinelli, Killalusimeno — and once, when a visitor was slow to leave his room, he showed him the door and said, with a finger raised in warning, 'I am the Lord God'" (*IS* 99).

of the narrator: "Stillman was not Fanshawe — I knew that. He was an arbitrary choice, totally innocent and blank.[93] But that was the thing that thrilled me — the randomness of it, the vertigo of pure chance" (351). And yet this Stillman, like Black in *Ghosts*, is a powerful presence and must play his part in the narrator's psychic drama:

> Long before I reached him, long before I even knew I was going to reach him, I felt as though I was no longer inside myself….I couldn't feel myself anymore….This is the moment of my death, I said to myself….A second later, I caught up to Stillman and tackled him from behind….Stillman tore me apart….For the next three days I didn't move from my hotel room. The shock was not so much that I was in pain, but that it would not be strong enough to kill me….Later that same night, I wired Sophie that I was coming home. (351-352)

The narrator confronts a man he names Fanshawe and attacks him knowing that he will be hurt and perhaps killed in the process. If his alter-ego is already killing him, there must be a showdown — an elimination match similar to the one that occurred in *Ghosts*. While this is a logical conclusion, the annihilation (or full integration) of the other proves impossible at this point and therefore the narrator resigns himself to this fact:

> To the degree that Fanshawe became inevitable, that was the degree to which he was no longer there. I learned to accept this. I learned to live with him in the same way I lived with the thought of my own death. Fanshawe himself was not death — but he was like death, and he functioned as a trope for death inside me. (355)

Still, peace must be made with the ghost of the father; the double, the alter-ego who will not let the writer rest must be placated. When several years later the narrator receives the

[93] Black in *Ghosts* is also referred to as a kind of blankness.

second letter from Fanshawe, asking for a meeting on the first of April at 9 Columbus Square, Boston, the narrator does not hesitate. He does not comment on the April Fool's Day date or the Columbus Square address. Even if Auster is warning us again not to believe a word of this — or to play along with his game — having come this far, we continue to play our part as readers. In any case, the question of who is hunting whom arises once again. "Death and the Compass" is the Borges story that Irwin calls a rewriting of "The Purloined Letter." The criminal Scharlach in the tale, Irwin suggests, "has counted on [detective] Lonnrot's perception of himself as the hunter to blind him to his true status and has used the detective's own powers of analysis to lure him into a trap" (421). Hence we may say that at the end of the labyrinth that has been the search for Fanshawe is the locked room at Columbus Square.

When the narrator speaks to his alter-ego through the door, the latter refuses to be called Fanshawe and will not open the door or show his face. He claims to have a gun and shoots it to prove he is not lying. The narrator hears what he thinks are "groans" or "sobs" on the other side of the door. "I don't want you to hate me," Fanshawe says. "Today is my last day" (361). Thus, instead of one alter-ego killing the other (as implied in *Ghosts*), this double is planning to self-destruct.

In another threading together of the texts in the *Trilogy*, Fanshawe says he has been using the name Henry Dark, the pseudonym of Peter Stillman Sr. in *City of Glass*, and faced with Fanshawe holed up at Columbus Square, we are reminded of Daniel Quinn holed up in the darkness and solitude of the Stillman apartment.

This dizzying blurring of identities demands that we attend to the connections between the texts. Fanshawe, in answer to the narrator's question about private detective Quinn

says, "I turned everything around. He thought he was following me, but in fact I was following him" (362). The parallel to Black and Blue in *Ghosts* is evident here and once again Auster insists that we remain aware of the thread that runs through the three novels.

Another interesting parallel is evident in Fanshawe's reaction to the publication of *Neverland*. Angry that the book is published because in his view "the book was garbage" (363), Fanshawe reminds us of Hawthorne and his reaction to his novel *Fanshawe*. [94]

From behind that very same Columbus Square doorway, Fanhsawe reveals to the narrator another disturbing fact. When he was in New York, the disappeared writer watched the narrator with Sophie and the baby. This surveillance differs from the spying in *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* in that the purpose is not (even ostensibly) detective work. Fanshawe even claims to have bumped into the couple on the street, but they did not notice: "It was fantastic the way you didn't see me," he says (365). Again we have a shifting identity.[95] "I think I'm unrecognizable," Fanshawe tells the narrator from behind the closed door of the locked room. "But that was a lucky thing for you. If anything had happened, I probably would have killed you. That whole time in New York, I was filled with murderous thoughts. Bad stuff. I came close to a kind of horror there" (365).

Fanshawe sounds criminal here, but we need to remember that he is the narrator's double. He is the mad, solitary double who cannot bear to publish his own work and is distraught when it is published (even though he has instructed his friend to publish it if he deems it worthy — and even though there have been mostly positive reviews). It is clear that this double must self-destruct if the narrator is to live on to find authentic human

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[94] See section on Hawthorne and Fanshawe for more about Hawthorne's feelings about his novel *Fanshawe.*

[95] In *City of Glass*, Quinn does not recognize himself when he passes a mirror and glances at his reflection. Peter Stillman Sr. does not recognize Quinn even though they have spoken for two days in a row.

intimacy. (And in an interesting and positive twist, it does not appear that the narrator has had to give up his dream of writing fiction that can touch people, for he claims that he is the narrator of *City* and *Ghosts* and so has written two novels before *The Locked Room*.)

But back at 9 Columbus Square the narrator is exhausted from arguing with his alter-ego: "Fanshawe had used me up, and as I heard him breathing on the other side of the door, I felt as if the life were being sucked out of me" (369).[96] This vampiric image of one man draining another of his life force is even more resonant if we imagine that the man behind the door is the Hyde to the narrator's Dr. Jekyll. And there is a red notebook in which Fanshawe claims to have explained himself and which he slips under the door to the narrator. The fact that Fanshawe, like Daniel Quinn and Peter Stillman Sr. in *City of Glass,* writes in a red notebook is evidence of a further blurring of identities across novels.[97]

While the narrator of *City of Glass* (who, again, we learn is also the narrator of *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*) uses Quinn's notebook as the basis for that novel, he makes no such claim for Fanshawe's notebook:

> The words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out….It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation….He…answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained…unfinished, to be started again. (370)

And yet, not only are the details of the red notebook not shared with us, but the narrator's account of his friend's text could be a description of the novel we are reading,

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[96] Compare this to Melville's character Jimmy Rose breathing on the other side of the door.

[97] See Auster's *The Red Notebook,* published in 1993 and later collected in *The Art of Hunger*.

and the *Trilogy* itself. Another indeterminate text that comes to mind is the novel already alluded to, which is embedded in "The Garden of Forking Paths." The work by Yu Tsen's ancestor Ts'ui Pen is said by his grandson to be "a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts" (124).

Reminiscent of the scene in *Ghosts* where, after beating Black unconscious, Blue stays up all night reading Black's manuscript only to find that he "knew it all by heart" (232), this scene at South Station in Boston reinforces the idea that alter-ego Fanshawe has to die in order for the narrator to live. His description of the red notebook continues this way:

> I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail – even to the point of failing himself. I could be wrong, however. I was hardly in a condition to be reading anything at that moment, and my judgment is possibly askew. I was there, I read those words with my own eyes, and yet I find it hard to trust in what I am saying. (370-371)

Again the blurring of boundaries can leave us scratching our heads, throwing up our hands in despair, or having a good laugh with Auster. It appears that we have indeed been treated to three postmodern allegories where a writer must wrestle to the death an alter-ego or father-figure in order to survive and tell the story that is *The New York Trilogy.*

Indeed, if we recognize how murky the lines are between life and art in this novel, our vertigo is intensified, but our appreciation of the complexities of this work is enriched. There are, in fact, multiple instances where autobiographical elements from Auster's life

are embodied in the character Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*. To point these out is to show how the lines are blurred between Auster and his character and to question the agenda of the writer and the role of the reader given such a novel. For instance, is Auster's ideal reader familiar with *The Invention of Solitude* and his 1997 memoir *Hand to Mouth* and so aware of all the correspondences? If not, does it matter? Certainly the reading experience is different if we recognize the equivalencies, the links, for we are then repeatedly lured away (as we are whenever we encounter a blurred identity or an embedded text) from the primary narrative and unable to fully lose ourselves in the fictional world that Auster has (at the same time) taken such pains to create. If we do not know the other texts, our reading experience is not adversely affected. If we are aware of the correspondences, however, we may enjoy traversing narrative levels and appreciate the richness of the layering. Some further examples of this layering follow.

In *The Locked Room* Fanshawe is said to have "dropped out of college after two years… managed to get a deferment from the army, and wound up working on a ship of some sort for a while. An oil tanker…or perhaps a freighter. After that, he had lived in France for several years — first in Paris, then as the caretaker of a farmhouse in the South" (240).

Though some of the circumstances differ, the above is all essentially true of Auster. In *Hand to Mouth* he tells the story of dropping out of Columbia after two years, only to be reinstated shortly thereafter (*HTM* 31-32) and pulling a lucky number in the lottery for the draft (*HTM* 48). It is said of Fanshawe that "a friend of his at Harvard had a father who had some connection with shipping — I think he represented the seaman's union" (311). Auster's stepfather, Norman Schiff[98], was a lawyer for the Esso Seaman's Union and got

[98] Auster was quite fond of his stepfather; he dedicated *Moon Palace* to his memory.

his stepson a job on the S. S. Esso Florence. Auster's experience on the ship takes up fourteen pages of his memoir (*HTM* 50-64). It is not long after Auster returns from his stint on the Esso that he moves to Paris (*HTM* 69-89) and then, with his girlfriend at the time[99] to the south of France, as caretaker of a farmhouse in Provence (*HTM* 89).

The memoir *Hand to Mouth*, though it claims in the subtitle to be *A Chronicle of Early Failure,* is more accurately a chronicle of Auster's early success at keeping his writing at the center of his life. With the exception of the S. S. Esso, which gives him much time to write along with memorable experiences and characters that serve as fodder for his fiction, he does this by working at jobs that do not require long-term commitments. In fact, Auster makes reference in his memoir to most of the jobs Fanshawe is said, in the following passage, to have held:

> Fanshawe had never had any regular work, she said, nothing that could be called a real job. Money didn't mean much to him, and he tried to think about it as little as possible. In the years before he met Sophie, he had done all kinds of things, — the stint in the merchant marine, working in a warehouse, tutoring, ghost writing, waiting on tables, painting apartments, hauling furniture for a moving company — but each job was temporary, and once he had earned enough to keep himself going for a few months, he would quit. (241)

In his memoir Auster tells us how, after his return to New York from France, he looked for work, but found it impossible, in spite of his best intentions, to take on a full-time job:

> I was twenty-seven years old, and with nothing to show for myself but a book of poems and a handful of obscure literary essays….I immediately began

[99] The girlfriend is writer Lydia Davis, who, you may recall became Auster's first wife; they divorced after his father's death in 1979.

> casting about for work….I was trying to act sensibly….I had learned my lesson, I told myself….But…rather than accept the full-time position I had been offered…I opted for a half-time job at half the pay….I still hadn't given up the vain and stupid hope of surviving on my own terms…and when some freelance translation work finally came my way, I quit the job and went off on my own again. (*HTM* 89-90)

Rejecting the values of his biological father, who understood only long regular days in the world of business, Auster evidently internalized the values of his literary fathers, particularly father Thoreau. More examples of parallel lives follow.

We learn, for instance, that Fanshawe "translated a series of art books…worked as an English tutor…worked the graveyard shift one summer at the *New York Times* Paris office as a switchboard operator…worked off and on for a movie producer – revising treatments, translating, preparing script synopses" (121). All of these jobs Auster had himself and shares in *Hand to Mouth* (36, 47, 71, 75, 76-89).

It is said of Fanshawe that "he had never tried to publish" (16). While it is true, as I have noted, that Auster published poetry, reviews, and other pieces for magazines (see connections to narrator), it is also true that he was quite slow to publish his fiction. In an interview, Auster says that "for ten years or so…I filled up dozens and dozens of notebooks. It's just that I wasn't satisfied with it, and I never showed it to anyone" (*AH* 289).

Though the correspondences are not precise, Fanshawe's literary output can be seen as parallel to Auster's. The narrator describes Fanshawe's body of work this way: "There were over a hundred poems, three novels (two short and one long), and five one-act plays –

as well as thirteen notebooks" (263). You may remember that at this point in his career Auster had published five books of poetry, three novels and three plays. One of these plays is entitled *Blackouts*, which is also the title, the narrator tells us, of Fanshawe's second novel: "The final draft of *Blackouts* was completed at some point during his second year in Paris" (325). To add another strand to the web, Auster's play *Blackouts*, as I mentioned in the last chapter, became Auster's novel *Ghosts*.

In addition to the connections one can easily make between events Auster recounts in *Hand to Mouth* and events in the life of Fanshawe, there are multiple echoes in Auster's earlier memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*. The first section of the memoir is entitled "Portrait of An Invisible Man," and many of the things Auster says of his father happen to be also true of Fanshawe. Here Auster expresses his continual surprise at his father's detachment: "One could not believe there was such a man — who lacked feeling, who wanted so little of others. And if there was not such a man, that means there was another man, a man hidden inside the man who was not there, and the trick of it, then, is to find him. On the condition that he is there to be found" (20). Fanshawe, like Auster's father, apparently did not want to be found. Auster's father is also described as a "Crusoe on his Island…[a] solitary consciousness" (79). And the relationship between Auster and his father, perhaps needless to say, mirrors the relationship between the narrator and Fanshawe. The following is Auster speaking of his relationship with his father: "Like everything else in his life, he saw me only through the mists of his solitude, as if at several removes from himself" (24).

And finally, if we recall the scene at 9 Columbus Square, behind the locked door of the locked room, Fanshawe found it difficult to speak after two years of self-imposed silence.

The following line from *The Invention of Solitude*, written about Auster's father, could have been written about Fanshawe: "The way he spoke: as if making a great effort to rise up out of his solitude" (29).

Much of Auster's memoir *Hand to Mouth* is about exactly this. Early in the text he discusses his decision to drop out of graduate school: "It felt wrong to me for a writer to hide out in a university, to surround himself with too many like-minded people, to get too comfortable. The risk was complacency, and once that happens to a writer, he's as good as lost" (*HTM* 5).

The connection to the narrator is also apparent in the above passage, for even though the narrator does not admit to having written any fiction, he tells us that it was his dream to write novels "that would…make a difference in [people's] lives" (244). Around the time the narrator is called to action by Sophie Fanshawe, however, he has come to this conclusion: "I did not have such a book inside me, and at a certain point I told myself to give up my dreams" (244-245).

You may remember that Auster had stopped writing fiction in the mid-Seventies. He was not satisfied with what he was producing in that genre and so made the decision to concentrate solely on his poetry. However, he adds in the same interview, he "failed to break the habit….Between 1974 and 1979, I must have written twenty-five or thirty [magazine] pieces" (*AH* 299).

In 1978, however, the year his first marriage unraveled, Auster singles out as one filled with "emotional and financial hardships" (*AH* 301). "My wife and I were grinding out translations to put food on the table, and the rest of the time I was pursuing my half-baked money schemes. There were moments when I thought I was finished, when I thought I

would never write another word" (*AH* 301-302).

In addition to this writerly link, there are experiences in Auster's life that he shares in *Hand to Mouth* that appear as experiences of the narrator in *The Locked Room*. One example of this kind of correspondence is the census story referred to earlier. As the narrator is about to embark on the biography of Fanshawe, you may remember, he has second thoughts. In a Faustian bargain, the narrator contracts to do the book, but feels "like a man who had signed away his soul" (291). This reminds him of the summer he took a job as a census taker in Harlem and ended up, when he could not gain access to enough apartments, making up families that did not exist. The fact that this very story is told in *Hand to Mouth* (49-50) connects the narrator to Auster in a very concrete way.

There is also the story related in *Hand to Mouth* of H. L. Humes, the novelist who goes mad, but spends a good bit of time in Auster's apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan during his Columbia days. In *The Locked Room*, the man who gives out his father's inheritance on the street corners of New York City is not named, but is said to have "once been considered the most promising young novelist in America" (299). In Auster's memoir the story of the "legendary, forgotten novelist H. L. Humes" and the author's association with him is given eight pages (*HTM* 39-47).[100]

We also hear echoes of the narrator's relationship with Fanshawe in several passages in *The Invention of Solitude* where Auster talks about his relationship with his father: "Impossible, I realize, to enter another's solitude. If it's true that we can ever come to know another human being, even to a small degree, it is only to the extent that he is willing to make himself known" (19-20).

[100]There is a scene in *Moon Palace* where Thomas Effing (aka Julian Barber) gives away money in a similar way. Also see the January 13, 2007 issue of *The New York Times* for an article on a documentary film being made about Humes.

Missing from our analysis so far is a comparison of the two Fanshawes. If, as we have claimed, the other major father-figure in *The Locked Room* is Hawthorne, this comparison is essential to an understanding of Auster's agenda. In Hawthorne's novel *Fanshawe* and Auster's novel *The Locked Room*, there is a struggle between alter-egos, one of whom, the character Fanshawe, is clearly the superior. And in both works, Fanshawe must die, for he forsakes the world.

The Locked Room comes closest to following Harold Bloom's steps of "misreading," "swerving from," and "completing," for the novel's main character is clearly based (at least in part) on the main character in Hawthorne's novel. But how is Auster's struggle with literary forefather Hawthorne revealed here? *Fanshawe*, Hawthorne's least characteristic work and a novel that Hawthorne wanted destroyed, does not warrant the kind of misreading that some of the master's stronger works might. Conventional and melodramatic, *Fanshawe* is a novel that, as I have said, Hawthorne disassociated himself from almost as soon as it was published. But the character of Fanshawe is interesting in the study of Auster, as the postmodern writer creates an heir of a fictional solitary scholar, one whose secluded life of the mind takes precedence over everything, including his love for the beautiful and pure heroine he saves, Ellen Langton.

Here is a description of Hawthorne's Fanshawe from the perspective of Ellen Langton, the woman he loves:

> There was a nobleness on his high forehead…all his features were formed with a strength and boldness, of which the paleness, produced by study and confinement, could not deprive them. The expression of his countenance was not a melancholy one; — on the contrary, it was proud and high — perhaps

> triumphant — like one who was a ruler in a world of his own, and independent of the beings that surrounded him. But a blight, of which his thin, pale cheek and the brightness of his eye were alike proofs, seemed to have come over him here his maturity. (*BR and F* 346)

Hawthorne's Fanshawe is also described as spending his time in "solitary study — in conversation with the dead," and is said to be a "solitary being…confined…to his chamber" (*BR and F* 350, 352). The two writers, we note, focus obsessively on the solitary nature of the writing life.

Both Fanshawes are described as powerful figures, each in his own way. Here is how Ellen Langton is said to react to Fanshawe's effect on the villain in the novel:

> Ellen almost shuddered, as if there were a mysterious and unearthly power in Fanshawe's voice; for she saw that the stranger endeavored in vain, borne down by the influence of a superior mind, to maintain the boldness of look and bearing, that seemed natural to him. He at first made a step forward – then muttered a few half audible words; — but, quailing at length beneath the young man's bright and steady eye, he turned and slowly withdrew. (*BR and F* 363)

Central to Hawthorne's text is the sacrifice that the character Fanshawe makes in giving up Ellen Langton (whom he has saved from the villain) to his rival Edward Walcott. We can compare the twentieth century Fanshawe's "giving" of his wife to the narrator (after he has abandoned her) to the main character's sacrifice in Hawthorne's text. The narrator in the nineteenth century novel tells us that Fanshawe "had read [Ellen Langton's] character with accuracy, and had seen how fit she was to love, and to be loved by a man who could find his happiness in the common occupation of the world; and Fanshawe never deceived

himself so far, as to suppose that his would be the case with him" (*BR and F* 443).

It is a truly noble deed for Hawthorne's Fanshawe to give up his damsel in distress after he has relieved her of her distress, but why, we may ask, is it necessary? Why *can't* he "find his happiness in the common occupation of the world"? The answer, we assume, is that he is a scholar and a writer who must devote himself (in solitude — and solely) to the life of the mind. Let the man (Edward Walcott) who can devote himself to love, we hear Fanshawe (and Hawthorne) saying, have the damsel.

The question of whether this inability to live a life of connection is a weakness or a strength is somewhat ambiguous in this work that Hawthorne so disparaged as cheap melodrama not worthy of his talent. Fanshawe dies very young, still unwavering in his allegiance to his studies: "The influence of none could prevail upon him to lay aside the habits, mental and physical, by which he was bringing himself to the grave. His passage thither was consequently rapid — terminating just as he reached his twentieth year" (*BR and F* 459). And though in this passage Fanshawe seems granted some volition ("he was bringing himself to the grave"), it is clear that the character's only fault is his being out of step with the rest of humanity. "He left a world for which he was unfit" (*BR and F* 460), the narrator informs us. Clearly it is the writer's need for solitude that Hawthorne foregrounds here — a solitude for which the author himself was famous.

Hawthorne's relationship to the narrator of *The Locked Room* also warrants mentioning. In a letter to G. W. Curtis Oct. 28, 1852, Hawthorne writes, "I have wasted far too much of my life, and done myself more than enough of moral and intellectual harm, with scribbling sketches for magazines" (qtd. in *BR and F* 313). This we can compare to the narrator's dissatisfaction with his magazine work: "I had written a great many articles, it was true, but

I did not see that as a cause for celebration, nor was I particularly proud of it. As far as I was concerned, it was just a little short of hack work" (*LR* 19).

Hawthorne and Auster's Fanshawe make another compelling pair. The following excerpts from a letter that Hawthorne wrote to Longfellow in 1837 cannot help but remind us of Fanshawe in his locked room at Columbus Square: "I have secluded myself from society….I have made a captive of myself and put me into a dungeon; and now I cannot find the key to let myself out….Sometimes, through a peephole, I have caught a glimpse of the real world" (qtd. in *BR and F* 296-7).

Though Auster's Fanshawe does not destroy his work, he clearly does not make any attempt to publish it (beyond leaving instructions with Sophie in the event of his disappearance). He says this in his letter to the narrator: "I'm pleased that so much interest has been taken in my writing. I never had the slightest inkling that anything like this could happen. But it all seems so far away from me now. Writing books belongs to another life, and to think about it now leaves me cold" (281). The fact that Hawthorne locks himself away to write while Auster's Fanshawe gives up writing before he holes up in his locked room, is an important difference between the two. Still, we have evidence of Hawthorne's disgust with his own work and his ambivalence about his public persona. As James McIntosh claims, a "failure to gain a hearing reinforced Hawthorne's constitutional or habitual distaste for notoriety…[and] his relation to his audience was always problematic" (x).

Speaking of the destruction of some of his early work in the "Preface to the 1851 Edition of *Twice-told Tales*," Hawthorne reports that *"*The Author burned them without mercy or remorse, and, moreover, without any subsequent regret, and had more than one

occasion to marvel that such very dull stuff, as he knew his condemned manuscripts to be, should yet have possessed inflammability enough to set the chimney on fire!" (Norton *Hawthorne's Tales* 289)

In his introduction to the Centenary Edition of *Fanshawe*, Roy Harvey Pearce quotes H.E. Scudder, who edited the 1900 edition of Hawthorne's *Complete Writings*. Hawthorne, Scudder says, "made an effort to call in all the copies that were within reach and to destroy them. He made his sister and his most intimate friend [Bridge] give up their copies to be burned, and he never referred to the misadventure" (qtd. in *BR* and *F* 308).

Pearce also quotes from a letter from Hawthorne's sister Elizabeth to her nephew Julian Hawthorne:

> There were a few copies sold, and he gave me one; but afterwards he took possession of it, and no doubt burned it. We were enjoined to keep the authorship a profound secret, and of course we did, with one or two exceptions; for we were in those days almost absolutely obedient to him. I do not quite approve of either obedience or concealment. Your father kept his very existence a secret, as far as possible. (*BR and F* 301-2)

The destruction of or abandonment of a writer's work has come up more than once in the *Trilogy*. Daniel Quinn abandons his earlier more literary work after the loss of his wife and son and later abandons the red notebook; Peter Stillman Sr.'s work is destroyed in a fire he may have set himself; Blue appears to leave Black's manuscript (which is also his) behind at the end of *Ghosts*; the narrator of *The Locked Room* abandons his own work to focus on Fanshawe's; Fanshawe abandons his work to the narrator; and the narrator, in the

end, throws Fanshawe's notebook in the trash.[101]

Not surprisingly, Hawthorne and literary son Auster also have much in common. In an 1844 entry from his *American Notebooks* Hawthorne offers this reflection: "To represent the influence which Dead Men have among living affairs…everywhere and in all matters, Dead Men tyrannize inexorably over us" (Norton *Hawthorne's Tales* 320). That Hawthorne and Auster are similarly haunted is amply evident in the works of both writers.

In a seemingly minor detail of some real significance for a literary son, Auster calls his forefather to the reader's attention when he names Fanshawe's wife Sophie, after Hawthorne's wife Sophia. And in one of those after-the-fact autobiographical connections, a year after the publication of *The Locked Room*, Auster named his daughter Sophie.[102]

Like his heirs, Hawthorne "repeatedly and knowingly imagined a personality for himself, to be treated by the discerning reader as partly a fiction" (Norton *Hawthorne's Tales* 267). We have seen how this is true of Auster. In "Preface to *The Snow-Image*" forefather Hawthorne elaborates on the connection between the public persona and the private man:

> A person, who has been burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance, — and who pursues his researches in that dusky region, as he needs must, as well by the tact of sympathy as by the light of observation, — will smile at incurring such an imputation in virtue of a little preliminary talk about his external habits, his abode, his casual associates, and other matters entirely upon the surface. These

[101]In *Moon Palace*, Thomas Effing abandons his cave paintings; In *Leviathan*, Ben Sachs stops writing; Hector Mann hides and then burns his films in *The Book of Illusions*.

[102] In addition, in March of 2004 at New York's 92nd Street Y, Auster took part in a reading in honor of Hawthorne's bicentenary. He read "Wakefield."

> things hide the man, instead of displaying him. You must make quite another kind of inquest, and look through the whole range of his fictitious characters, good and evil, in order to detect any of his essential traits. (Norton *Hawthorne's Tales* 292-293)

Auster echoes his predecessor in the following passage from a 1989 interview: "Each one of these people [characters] thinks differently, writes differently from all the others. But each one is also a part of myself — which probably goes without saying. If all the books were put together in one volume, they would form the book of my life so far, a multi-faceted picture of who I am" (*AH* 296).

It is also interesting to note that literary father Borges thought of Hawthorne as a literary father. This is clear from his essay on his predecessor, first delivered as a lecture in Buenos Aires in 1949. In this text Borges suggests that Hawthorne was by nature a tale-writer intrigued by situations rather than a novelist infatuated with characters (*Other Inquisitions* 47). That the same can be said of Auster and Borges is quite evident. In fact, the two writers have noted this fact themselves. Auster, in a 1992 interview says, "I tend to think of myself more as a storyteller than a novelist" (*AH* 336).

CONCLUSION

If we accept the primary narrative of *The Locked Room*, the narrator's quest must be termed ethical for he seeks — to his detriment — to bring his friend Fanshawe's work to the public. The narrator's more important quest, however (and for this we must leave the primary narrative and accept the confusion of narrative levels and characters' identities), is to understand himself in relation to Fanshawe. Auster's quest, then, can be said to be ethical in that he leads us to question the nature of postmodern identity and ask how art and life — including relationships with literary forefathers — can be reconciled. Does one have to murder or live without love or intimacy in order to write? The narrator's text, *The Locked Room*, seems to suggest that one does not.

Auster asks us to live in his discourse worlds and read them in the way we imagine he writes them so that our identification is not merely with the characters, but with the author who creates these boundary-blurring fictions. The de-centering and de-stabilizing strategies that Auster uses ask the reader to question the nature of identity, reality, and connection — and the meaning of solitude, chance and choice. It is not accident that determines the outcome of the action, but the choices made by the characters. Fanshawe chooses suicide, while the narrator chooses life.

William Spanos argues that "the postmodern imagination…is an existential imagination. Its…refusal to fulfill causally oriented expectations, to create fictions…with beginnings, middles, and ends — has its source, not so much in an aesthetic as in an existential critique of the traditional Western view of man in the world" (148). That Auster is an existential

writer there can be little doubt, but he never ends with despair. Though Spanos' claims that "the postmodern strategy of de-composition exists to generate rather than purge pity and terror; to disintegrate, to atomize rather than to create a community…to generate anxiety or dread," he also allows that "this aesthetic of de-composition is not…a purely negative one…for [it] becomes not just the agency of despair but also and simultaneously of hope, that is, of freedom and infinite possibility" (156). Certainly with Auster, it is the "freedom and infinite possibility" that is foregrounded — along with the positive effects of story-making and story-telling.

In his fiction, Auster calls into question the nature of consciousness and the postmodern person's need to act in the face of uncertainty. "For," as Spanos suggests, "only in the precincts of our last evasions, where [as Heidegger says] 'dread strikes us dumb,' only in this silent realm of dreadful uncertainty, are we likely to discover the ontological and aesthetic possibilities of generosity" (168).

"I tried to use certain genre conventions," Auster says of his intentions in writing the detective novels that make up the *Trilogy*, "to get to another place…altogether…[to] the question of who is who and whether or not we are who we think we are" (*AH* 278). The characters in all three novels, Auster says, undergo a process of "stripping away to some barer condition in which [they] have to face up to who [they] are. Or who [they] aren't. It finally comes to the same thing" (*AH* 278).

These quests for identity and meaning in the *Trilogy*, as we have witnessed, involve men who play the roles of fathers and sons. Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass* fights to save a son, Peter Stillman Jr., in *Ghosts*; Blue fights for his own life against a father figure who threatens to destroy him; and the narrator of *The Locked Room* saves father-figure

Fanshawe from oblivion only to find himself fighting for his own life. Always in the background — and often in the foreground — are the literary fathers Auster has claimed for his own and the biological father who, in a perverse turn of events, may have inspired this complex and fascinating work with his silence.

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