AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

HE, SHE, AND THE WORDS: GENDER AND WRITING IN THE NOVELS OF PAUL AUSTER

By

RANDA AZKOUL

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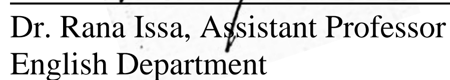
By

RANDA AZKOUL

Approved by:

Dr. David Currell, Assistant Professor — Advisor
English Department



Dr. Rana Issa, Assistant Professor — Member of Committee
English Department

Adam John Waterman

Dr. Adam Waterman, Assistant Professor — Member of Committee
English Department

Date of Defense: May 12, 2020

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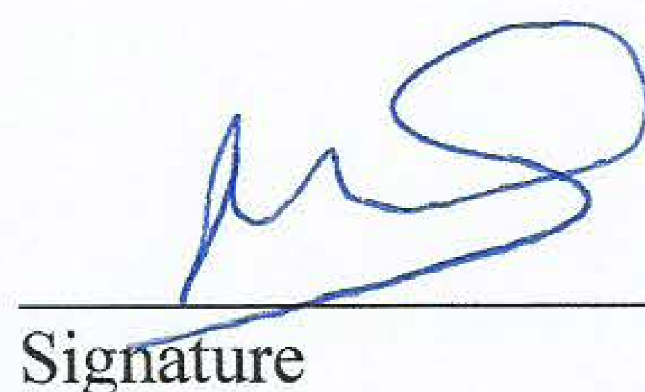

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Paul Auster's novels have received much critical attention and literary acclaim, with most commentary focusing on his postmodern strategies: metafiction, embedded narration, multiple narrative voices, and open-ended interpretations. Auster's works share certain characteristic features and themes: confused and vulnerable male characters, the writing process, guilt and atonement, and dysfunctional relationships.

This thesis argues that the extensive body of literary criticism and book reviews has nevertheless paid too little attention to the crucial role of female characters in his novels and the extent to which Auster's obsession with language intersects with his representation of gender. Using three emblematic works – *The Book of Illusions*, *Invisible*, and *Oracle Night*, I demonstrate how words function as a controlling factor over Auster's vulnerable male narrator-protagonists. The thesis establishes gender as an important topic in the study of Auster's novels and ultimately suggests that Auster's portrayal of his male protagonists may participate in a revised conception of modern American masculinity.

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To the memory of my late father, Dr. Karim Azkoul, who has always been the intellectual beacon of my academic aspirations

CHAPTER 1 AUSTER'S WOMEN

Literary critics agree that the protagonists in Paul Auster's novels are portrayed as confused, vulnerable, weak, and self-deprecating, sometimes even self-destructive, men. In the absence of a gendered reading, however, what has been largely overlooked is the role of his female characters. A closer look at them will reveal that the depth of Paul Auster's fictional world has not been sufficiently plumbed. Auster is the author of fifteen novels, fourteen of which (published between 1987 and 2010) I have examined. Of these, only three do not feature male narrators constructing the fictional world inside the book. *The Music of Chance* (1990) is narrated extradiegetically, *Timbuktu* (1999) is narrated by a talking canine, and Anna Blume is the female protagonist from *In the Country of Last Things* (1987); she is Auster's only female character that has received critical attention.

The remaining twelve novels are narrated by male protagonists, but it is the female characters that exert more control over that constructed world. Their presence defines and ultimately rescues, or in some cases destroys, the men in their lives. This thesis argues that the centrality of the female characters lends them their own strong voice which transcends the labyrinthine worlds of the characters inhabiting the constructed space of the novel. The three novels under scrutiny, *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *Oracle Night* (2003), and *Invisible* (2009), selected from Auster's middle period, present his most comprehensive, emblematic narrative strategies to convey the female icon.

I will also argue that the male characters are overpowered by words. As the male characters under discussion are the narrators, it would seem obvious that they have complex relationships with the power of words, but I refer to their use of words with or about the women in their lives. Words assume an importance that elevates them to the status of a persona, to which the male and female characters respond in different ways. Contrary to cultural stereotypes of women needing verbal reassurances from their male partners, in

Auster's novels, the female characters are the more laconic ones. They are reluctant to vocalize their emotions, often preferring silence; they do not always want or need words to define their reality. On the other hand, Auster, in his interviews, essays, and memoirs, and his male characters, in their internal monologues, assert the importance of words and continually alert the reader to their power. Words can be inadequate or treacherous and can enhance or destroy their worlds. Auster's public claim, in his interviews and essays, that words cannot be trusted to reveal "reality" or "absolute truth" places the onus of discerning fact from fiction on the reader. This claim echoes Roland Barthes' notion of "the death of the author" and parallels Baudrillard's denial of any absolute reality. The words written by the author and narrator are not to be trusted, but the reader intuitively trusts those words. Of course, this ambivalence towards words presents the paradox of language and eludes conclusiveness of answers. Auster uses words to warn against the use and abuse of words. He invites the reader to be wary of words and doubt the veracity of the text being read. He presents his reader with puzzles, but in the absence of solutions or finite answers by the narrators or other characters, the reader who expects closure becomes a detective in the absence of the author as a living, legitimating authority.

The male writers portrayed in the novels are in control of their words and use them confidently and expertly—except in the context of the males' relationship with their female counterparts. The female characters' power stems from their heightened awareness of the possible treacherousness or inadequacy of words, and they may opt to replace them with silence. Silence is a powerful tool because it opens up multiple possibilities, a notion that the male character finds difficult to accept. The struggle is most evident in several instances in which the male character struggles with the female character's silence and attempts to fill that void with words of his choosing, at the cost of inventing a reality merely to satisfy his own need for answers.

For the three novels on which I will focus, *The Book of Illusions, Invisible,* and *Oracle Night,* I rely on close reading, postmodern theories of narration, and gender studies to argue that the female persona presented in the narrator's ongoing internal monologue is portrayed to the reader through her physicality, her actions, her silence, and not only through the male narrator's interpretation of her character and of the articulation of his feelings for her. Key to understanding why the narrators of Auster's novels cannot silence the voice of the female characters is his representation of that female persona. In an additional move, I will also refer to his memoirs, essays, and interviews (in print and online), where his personal life emerges as a source of his inspiration and a potential, although not definitive, guide to the poetics of gender in his novels.

Auster's novels are populated by vulnerable male narrator-protagonists and powerful female characters, both of whom respond differently to the power of words. The conflicts between the invented and lived realities, both constructs of the author, blur the lines between fiction and fact, thereby leaving the reader doubting the narrator's reliability. Metafiction, particularly Auster's reflections on the writing process, dominates all of his prose, be it the novels or his memoirs and essays. The lack of distinction between fiction and fact, his embedded narration, self-referencing, and word games would classify him as a postmodernist. However, as some critics have pointed out, it is only his writing style that is postmodernist; his romanticizing male/female relationships, his narrators' faith that love trumps all and their undercurrent of optimism even in moments of despair would classify him as a modernist—even a romantic. Readers of Auster will recognize the extensive references or allusions to his foundational text, *The Invention of Solitude,* and will also recognize the literary influences and the sources of inspiration taken from his personal life.

Vulnerable Men, Woman Power and Word Power

Auster's narrator-protagonists are vulnerable, and somewhere in their stories, there is

at least one woman who either traumatizes the character or rescues him from his traumas. David Zimmer (*The Book of Illusions*) has lost his family, Adam Walker (*Invisible*) suffers from psychological damage and advanced leukemia, and Sidney Orr has a mysterious illness, writer's block, and a guilty conscience. Striking examples can also be found in his other novels. In *Travels in the Scriptorium,* Mr. Blank cries, his eyes fill up with tears, he chokes through his sobs, he pukes, retches, and weeps, he pukes, howls, and soils his garments, and he covers his eyes and begins to weep. It is only Anna Blume, his caregiver, who is able to alleviate his pain. Nathan Glass from *The Brooklyn Follies* is depressed and terminally ill; the source of his redemption is his young niece, Lucy. Marco Fogg from *Moon Palace* isolates and starves himself, only to be rescued by his Chinese girlfriend, Kitty Woo. Ben Sachs from *Leviathan* is a fugitive, with the artist Maria Turner trying to save him from falling four floors through the air. In these portrayals of vulnerable male characters and their female heroines, Auster is reflecting an atypical interpretation of gender roles; it negates the stereotyped perception of male-female relationships, often reproduced as clichés dominating the literature and other forms of mass culture.

To state that language is the medium in which ideas are expressed, people are described, and actions are drawn, would be banal. For the characters in Auster's novels, words carry an additional level of importance. They believe that one should be wary of words because they are unreliable and therefore cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the storyteller. Furthermore, words are also magical—they can change the past and predict the future. Their supernatural powers will be discussed in *Invisible* and *The Book of Illusions* and will be shown to have particular importance in *Oracle Night.*

Blurred Lines

The impossibility of distinguishing truths from fictions is another common thread in all Auster's novels. The reader receives contradictory versions of the protagonists' narratives

and is hence incapable of determining “what really happens” or “what the characters really do.” This leaves the reader with blurred lines between truth, possible truth, invented stories, and outright negations which produce contradictory versions. In *Here and Now* the published correspondence between him and J. M. Coetzee, Auster remains noncommittal when asked if Adam and his sister really have an incestuous affair. He clearly answers that it is “open to question” (61), therefore up to the reader to decide which version, Adam’s or Gwynn’s, is the “real” one. This vagueness is prevalent in all his novels; the reader cannot rely on the author for answers. This lack of finality reinforces Auster’s proximity to Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, skepticism about the existence of a factual world distinct from an imagined one.

The Writing Process

Auster’s obsession with writing, interweaving with other personal concerns such as the self-doubting male (*Invisible*) and physical or psychological trauma mediated by writing (*Moon Palace, The Music of Chance, The Brooklyn Follies*, and *Man in the Dark*), makes the writing process itself a central trope. Protagonists struggle with creating, eradicating, or recreating their identities as a result of trauma. Within the construct of the fictional world, and perhaps also in the human world, artistic production is often a method of working through a traumatic experience. As in all the other novels, multiple layers of narration produce at least two main characters paralleling each other in their quest to deal with their traumas by connecting with other humans. Auster incorporates this view into the ultimate postmodern fantasy of recreating the self through fiction, mirroring Uncle Victor’s assertion in *Moon Palace*, “Every man is the author of his own life” (7).

Literary Strategies

Modern or Postmodern?

Most critics, notably Brendan Martin in his monograph *Paul Auster’s Postmodernity*, classify Auster as a postmodernist. Auster’s use of fragmented time frames, intertextuality,

embedded narration, nonconclusive resolutions, and multiple narrators would certainly support that claim. He plays language games with the reader, like inserting the number 20 twenty times in the text of *Oracle Night*, and turns almost all of his narrations into a circular motion with the internal monolog of the narrator becoming the text of the novel.

However, critics focusing more on his motifs than his narrative strategies question the label of postmodernity. Even his dystopic novels portray characters who believe that love trumps all, believe in their own quests for meaningful relationships, and are often guided by a sense of responsibility or guilt and the need for atonement. With the exception of *In the Country of Last Things, Timbuktu,* and *Mr. Vertigo,* the settings of his novels and relatable human needs are features of realism, despite the exaggerated role of uncanny coincidences and chance as a prime mover of events. Auster is selective and tactical. He is conscious of postmodern techniques and uses them freely when he deems them useful, but in no sense is he a systematic postmodernist. Auster's career spans over forty years, and he has employed genres ranging across novels, screenplays, memoirs, and poetry that demonstrate both modernist and postmodernist tropes. At this point, the critical argument about whether he should be classified as one or the other is far too limiting and should be abandoned in favor of the study of how his mixture of techniques affects the other dimensions of his work, such as gender. Auster defies categorization.

Word Games

Auster has been disparaged for his excessive use of word games, but I contend that the "gimmicks" are intended to remind the reader of the barrier between the fictional world on/in the page and the physical world we inhabit in our own lives. To illustrate, Auster uses words and names metonymically. In *Moon Palace,* Marco Stanley Fogg, as his Uncle Victor points out, takes his exploratory nature from the name Marco Polo, Stanley from the one who finds his Livingstone, and Fogg from Phineas of *Around the World in Eighty Days.* The grandfather

does not point out that Marco's initials, MS, are an abbreviation for the word *manuscript*, a device Auster uses to remind the reader that Marco is a fictional persona in a written manuscript by the author. Auster uses his characters to indicate that fictionality, as observed in "As they [Auster's protagonists] continue to reinvent themselves, they come to understand the world as a fiction that can be actively rewritten" (Carstensen 423). At the end of the novel, the narrator often claims that the entire story is a text written by a different character. Hidden narrators will be examined in the three focus novels.

Embedded Narration

Almost all the narrators are writers themselves and produce, within the pages of Auster's novel, a text in another constructed world with a different set of characters, creating the *mise en abyme* feature of Auster's writing. In *Travels in the Scriptorium,* the extradiegetic narrator writes that "Mr. Blank is old and enfeebled, but as long as he remains in the room with the shuttered window and the locked door, he can never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words I am writing on this page" (Auster 129-130). If the locked room is a metaphor for the page, then Mr. Blank is a metaphor for the blankness of the page before the words fill it to define him. In *Oracle Night*¸ Sidney Orr writes the story of Nick Bowen, whose inability to leave the underground bunk parallels Sidney's writer's block. August Brill (*Man in the Dark*) writes a narrative with his character Owen Brick devising a plan to kill his author.

Literary Influences on Auster

With the publication of his second novel, *The New York Trilogy* (1987), Paul Auster was given excessive credit for breaking ground in the development of unconventional detective fiction. Authors before him (Borges, among others) broke tradition by omitting features of conventional detective stories: (1) a crime is identified, (2) the motive for the crime is revealed, (3) the detective uses rational deduction to solve the mystery, and (4) the

criminal is caught. The detectives, all of them quirky, be they professionals or amateurs, lend the police a helping hand either upon request or they simple interfere because they are attracted to the challenge, excitement, and a sense of self-importance. Stefania Ciocia labels Auster's work as anti-detective or metaphysical detective fiction because the reader is not always certain which character is the criminal and which one is the victim, with sometimes either or both of them attempting to do the sleuthing. Be that as it may, even his novels that do not fall under the category of crime fiction or detective fiction contain narrators (or characters created by those narrators) who do detective-type work, assume false identities, escape detection, witness mysterious disappearances, or are stuck in locked rooms. When so many of the novels contain elements of uncertainty, the reader can only assume that this uncertainty is Auster's strategy of throwing the burden of proof onto the reader.

In one interview, Auster declares that the biggest influence on his life was reading Dostoevsky; in others he cites Poe and Hawthorne. A distinction should be made between works which he references in his novels and authors whose philosophy on writing was a large influence on his method of fictionalization. Some sources he registers within his stories; others are sources of his literary practice, and these do not always overlap. For example, in *The Invention of Solitude* he refers to and quotes from the tale of Shahrazad, but several scholars have claimed that as a French-to-English translator, the biggest influence on his fictionalization was Maurice Blanchot, whose theories about inspiration, intertextuality, and the necessity of solitude in the writing process can be detected in most of Auster's prose works, evidenced by two monographs written about Maurice Blanchot's influence. In his novels, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, he adopts Roland Barthes' notion of the death of the author, and Baudrillard's hyperreality echoes throughout his fiction. Although Julia Kristeva is credited with having coined the term "intertextuality," she was not a direct influence on Auster, but intertextuality is certainly one of his trademarks, as I have already

begun to indicate. Testament to his wide scope of reading both classics and contemporary authors, Auster makes many intertextual moves among his favorites.

Foundational Text

Pascal Bruckner has been quoted by subsequent critics as having written, "*The Invention of Solitude* (1982) is both the *ars poetica* and the seminal work of Paul Auster. To understand him, we must start here; all his books lead us back to this one" (Barone 27). Auster himself confirms this in several interviews. This memoir is a post-mortem quest for his father, Samuel Auster, from whom he felt alienated. In several interviews, Auster admits that *The Invention of Solitude* was the direct response to the sudden death of his father. The book served a dual purpose. First, he needed to construct the identity of his father, whom he hardly even knew when he was alive; to him, Sam Auster was absent even when he was present. Second, Paul Auster suggests, he wished in his work to examine the role of fatherhood, and in so doing, try to come to terms with himself as a son and as a father. His two subsequent memoirs, *Winter Journal* (2012) and *Report from the Interior* (2013), echo the trope of the dysfunctional relationship between fathers and sons across many of his other works of fiction. The missing father is either literal, as in *The Music of Chance* and *The New York Trilogy,* or metaphorical, as in *Invisible, Timbuktu,* and *The Book of Illusions.* David Zimmer loses his role as a father with the death of his family, and his search for Hector Mann can be considered the search for a father figure. In *Moon Palace,* Marco Fogg inadvertently finds a father and is desperate to become one, as does Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night* and Morris Heller in *Sunset Park.* Nathan Glass in *The Brooklyn Follies* and August Brill in *Man in the Dark* take on roles of surrogate fathers. *The Invention of Solitude* clearly establishes a significant theme for his subsequent writing. Absence, be it physical or metaphorical, is the backdrop of the protagonists' traumas. In the need to transcend or overcome their traumas, they embark on

their various quests to reconstruct the identity of themselves or of "another," where they encounter the powerful women in their lives and are compelled to narrate those experiences.

Why Write?

Paul Auster not only writes; he continually explains why writing is important to him. Artistic production as a tool to combat personal trauma or to shape identity is not limited to the characters in the novels. "Why Write" is the title of Auster's short essay included in *The Red Notebook,* but his most extensive and intensive reflections on the writing process can be found in *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *The Invention of Solitude.*

Auster uses words not only to write his stories but also to provide his protagonists with their own narrative tools. His narrator-protagonists are themselves writers but not all with the same motivation to write. In all cases, recurring threads run through their narrative incentives: to keep a permanent record, to protect themselves from future accusations, or to immortalize an iconic figure in their life. Some of them write to combat trauma, and some to hope for rescue. Daniel Quinn (*The City of Glass*), Fanshaw (*The Locked Room*), and Black (*Ghosts*) write their observations in their notebooks to keep record of their sleuthing; Anna Blume (*In the Country of Last* Things) writes her story in a book-length letter in the hopes of reaching her lost brother; Peter Aaron *(Leviathan*) keeps Ben Sachs alive by writing his story, thereby validating his crimes against the Statue of Liberty and the killing of Dimaggio; David Zimmer and Alma Grund (*The Book of Illusions*) write their tributes to Hector Mann to keep him alive within the pages of the book even after his death. Thomas Effing (*Moon Palace*), in an effort to self-memorialize, dictates his obituary to his assistant, Marco Fogg. August Brill (*Man in the* Dark) writes about Owen Brick in the late hours of the night to combat his insomnia. Sidney Orr (*Oracle Night*) writes the adventures of Nick Bowen to fill the pages of his magical blue notebook and combat his writer's block. Auster's dependence on words is

echoed by his narrators and then manifested again in the characters within the stories that those narrators write.

Because Auster writes authors into his narratives, a double purpose of writing emerges—the author's purpose and the narrator's purpose. The need emerges for the author as well as for his characters. Referring to his obsessions, the things that haunt him, he states, "Writing is no longer an act of free will for me, it's a matter of survival. An image surges up inside me, and after a time, I begin to feel cornered by it, to feel that I have no choice but to embrace it. A book starts to take shape after a series of such encounters" (Hutchisson 18). Essentially, Auster is admitting that he becomes so focused on the ideas that take hold of him and that he cannot rest until he articulates them in writing. This explains his obsessiveness with the quests on which his characters embark. Although he does not claim to write autobiographically, he reveals in that same interview:

> 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. I was looking at myself in the same way a scientist studies a laboratory animal. I was no more than a little gray rat, a guinea pig stuck in the cage of my own consciousness. The book wasn't written as a form of therapy; it was an attempt to turn myself inside out and examine what I was made of." (56)

The past is crucial to his protagonists; several of his novels are narrated in retrospect with a gap of many years, sometimes as few as seven and as many as forty years, but none of them explain the gap between the events and the narration of those events. In his acceptance speech of the Prince of Asturias Award of Letters in 2006, Auster declares he was "struggling to put words on a piece of paper in order to give birth to what does not exist—except in your own head. Why on earth would anyone want to do such a thing? The only answer I have ever been

able to come up with is this: because you have to, because you have no choice." Articulating the memory of past events can only be interpreted as a compulsion to write, even when the stimulus is left to the imagination of the reader.

Sources from Personal Life

His problematic relationship with his father is only one of several sources of writing taken from his personal life. Auster's motif of sudden disappearances is often attributed to his witnessing a camp mate being struck dead by lightning when he was fourteen years old. Evidently, the effect that this incident had on him was the realization that something precious can be lost in the blink of an eye. Hence the novels often featuring sudden disappearances, loss, or random events. The most salient influence on his characterization of the female characters, however, is that of his wife, Siri Hustvedt, whom he describes with much admiration and praise, as noted by Stefania Ciocia when she refers to his "redeeming second marriage with *an amazing woman* [emphasis added]" (643). Auster confirms his veneration of Siri in his letters to J.M. Coetzee when he refers to her as a remarkable woman (*Here and* Now 5). He is not only in awe of her, but he also treads lightly in problematic matters, in his worry that he might upset her in any way. This is best exemplified in the following excerpt. "A prior commitment made many months ago, and when I suggested that we break that date to attend the screening, Siri said she would never talk to me again, perhaps even kill me. I don't doubt that she means it" (85). Hustvedt, a novelist in her own right, is also a writer for psychotherapy journals. In a subsequent letter to Coetzee, he extols her lecture at the Freud Foundation in with phrases like "How not to be proud of her?" and "Then on to Vienna, where she read her much anticipated Sigmund Freud lecture to a full house. A splendid talk, a brilliant talk, the product of two or three months of brain-splitting work, and there I was in the audience with tears welling up in my eyes as the applause rained down on her" (234). Siri, the iconic woman, unmistakably spills into the characterization of the female characters and

becomes the archetype for the women who besot the male protagonists. Ciocia is one of the few literary critics to recognize that his works are populated by "miraculous women" (642). Auster readers will detect the trepidation with which the male protagonists approach their female counterparts, often giving in to their needs, as will be seen in the three novels under discussion.

Hustvedt and Auster read each other's manuscripts and share their feedback. That in itself is not remarkable, but in the interview with McCaffrey and Gregory, when asked whether or not he found it difficult to write in the voice of a woman for *In the Country of Last Things,* he said he did not but that he needed the validation of a woman (his wife). Hustvedt evidently insisted that it sounded authentic and encouraged him to finish it despite his trepidation. She called it "her book" (*Interview with Paul Auster* 60). In several interviews he has acknowledged or claimed that "I can't think of a single instance when I haven't followed her advice" (60). In the only televised joint interview with Hustvedt and Auster, by Tom Skotte, it is Hustvedt who dominates the scene, while Auster remains less vocal. An admiring relationship with his own wife is part of the extra-literary context for Auster's creation of his female characters, and it is tempting to perceive links between the life and the work. Another "borrowing" from his personal life is the names he uses in his novels. The names of his characters are also explicit references to his personal life. Paul Auster's first wife was Lydia; Peter Aaron's first wife is Delia, and Peter's second wife, Iris, is an anagram for Siri, Auster's current wife. (*Leviathan*) Further examples would be the use of his own full name and his son's first name (Daniel) for characters in *The New York Trilogy* and an anagram for his name, Trause, in *Oracle Night;* Sophie (the name of his daughter) for a character in *Travels in the Scriptorium* and *New York Trilogy;* and Sophie's sons Ben and Paul are the names of Paul Auster and his father. It is not surprising that Auster incorporates the names into his word games.

Although this thesis does not emphasize a biographical approach to Auster, his personal writing habits are necessarily at its center. Auster's avid interest in writing implements, notebooks, and the sound of a pen or pencil across a page, most evident in *The New York Trilogy, Oracle Night, Moon Palace, Travels in the Scriptorium,* and *Leviathan*, seems to be a result of his own writing habits of using longhand. In his letter to Coetzee (*Here and Now*), he refers to his typewriter as his writing tool. In his memoir and several interviews, he explains that he does not own a computer. He begins his writing process using quadrille notebooks and pencils and then types up his work on a manual typewriter. Zeroing in on the centrality of his typewriter in his writing process, Auster wrote *The Story of My Typewriter* and Evija Trofimova produced *Paul Auster's Writing Machine: A Thing to Write With* (2014).

Auster uses the blurred lines between imagination and perceived reality, his reflections on writing process with the care given to the space and implements, the circularity of his textual narratives, and concern for the past to highlight the male protagonists' vulnerability. He uses these tools to emphasize the powerful role of the female characters and the objective recognition of vulnerable men in a gendered reading of his novels.

Thesis Structure: Chapter Divisions

Each of the chapters in this thesis will foreground one of the focus novels. *The Book of Illusions* highlights the broken man rescued by his saving angel and the desire to immortalize the mysterious Hector Mann. *Invisible*, with its shifting narrative voices, questions the reliability of the principal narrator when contradictory versions of relationships confirm or deny the veracity of the storytellers. *Oracle Night* is the most emblematic and also the most daring of Auster's narrative style with its total blending of nonfictional writing techniques into a work of pure imagination. In all three novels, the female character is the strongest.

My chapter on *The Book of Illusions*, "Chasing Shadows," centers the role of female characters in male trauma. I will argue that the moments and duration, both spatially and

temporally, of female interventions in the lives of the male characters in *The Book of Illusions* are instrumental to the development and outcome of their traumas. The females manipulate words to wield power that they use either to control the men they encounter or to revive the traumatized men they find. For David Zimmer, the narrator-protagonist, Alma Grund, is his rescuer from grief over personal loss. In the case of Hector Mann, the obscure silent filmmaker, presumed dead and the object of Zimmer's research, his assumed identities are carved out, for better or for worse, by the six female characters he encounters. I will demonstrate how the power of words engulfs Zimmer's consciousness, compels the villainous Frieda, Mann's wife, to destroy any traces of Alma's biography of Mann, and forces Martin Frost, a character from one of Mann's films, to destroy his manuscript to save his lover, Clara.

The trauma experienced by Mann and Zimmer is the need to come to terms with their past. Zimmer, believing that working with words has restorative powers, immerses himself in writing (and drinking) to heal his personal grief. Still, it is only when he encounters and falls in love with Alma Grund that he is "saved." Zimmer narrates his own story through the use of Alma's diaries, which preserve memories verbally. They are further preserved through oral narration to him based on her conversation with Mann, his journals, and Zimmer's own lived experience in his short visit to Mann's house. The female characters who contribute to Mann's traumas instill in him the need to change his identity. The profound impact they have on him emphasizes the women's independence both from his life and from the framework story: when Alma and Frieda die, they exit Zimmer's story. These departures may be interpreted as proof that autonomous female characters are not compelled to remain within the confines of the male narrative.

Chapter 3 focuses on the shifting narrative voices in *Invisible*, emblematic of the unreliable narrator. I will argue that the novel underscores the blurred lines between reality as

perceived by the narrators and the imagination of the reader. The multiplicity of narrators creates various levels of diegesis, and their unsynchronized verbal articulation casts doubt on the text's veracity through the unreliability of words, as do the shifting voices of the protagonist in the continuous change of pronouns in referring himself. All the characters in this novel are entangled in contradictory perspectives with regard to male-female relationships and to the function of words in describing their fictional realities.

Adam Walker, the male protagonist and partial narrator, is vulnerable, susceptible to influence by powerful older men and by female charm. His narrative starts with him as a young, naïve college student. As a fresh graduate, starry-eyed Walker is in awe of Born's status and apparent desire to promote Walker's literary ambitions; he finds Born's glamorous lifestyle, academic clout, enigmatic female companion, and financial encouragement irresistible. Walker is dizzied by Born's promises but equally revolted by his ruthlessness.

Walker is also sexually and psychologically seduced by Margot, Born's "girlfriend." She has the upper hand in that brief affair and, declining to inscribe it in words, uses her body to communicate with him—a rare instance in Auster's novels of *écriture feminine.* She, an exotic French young woman, can determine the course of events in her relationship with Walker, although not with Born. It is not Margot, however, who is the most significant female in his life. In one of the chapters of his memoir, which turns the first narration into a framed tale, Walker describes an incestuous relationship with his sister, Gwynn, for whom he would do anything. His ultimate savior, however, according to him, is Sandra, the woman he marries, the one who reformed him, who "turned me into someone better than I had been" (86).

The female characters are autonomous in relation to Walker's version of events, as the reader learns from Jim's narration, embedded within Walker's writings. Upon receiving the last installment of Walker's book, he "plays detective" by seeking out the female characters,

Gwynn and Ceçile, to verify the contents of Walker's manuscript and edit it accordingly. With the writer of the manuscript having died (becoming *invisible*), Jim must rely on their version of the narrative to determine how much to believe. Gwynn, discovering Walker's version of their relationship only after he dies, denies the incest in Jim's informal interview with her, yet she agrees to let him publish the memoirs. She recognizes that words have power to revive the dead; she and Jim both feel that reading Walker's manuscript after his death somehow reincarnates him—the presence of words has replaced the absence of the man.

In terms of narrative style, Walker uses three different pronouns when referring to himself, *I*, *you*, and *he,* in the sections of the manuscript he entitles Summer, Spring, and Fall, respectively. The central narrator is, in effect, detaching himself from the narrative when using *you* but, at the same time, implicating the reader. The ultimate detachment occurs when the narrator's persona becomes an extradiegetic narrator, distancing him even further from the storyline by referring to himself in the third person. Jim, who narrates Part Four, allows Ceçile to provide closure to the novel with her diary. A further clear indication that the female character overshadows the male narrative is Cecile's literally having the last word.

Chapter 4 features the wide range of postmodern strategies in *Oracle Night*: fusing realism with magical realism and fiction with nonfiction, nonlinearity, embedded narration, and intertextuality. I will argue that such a rich combination of literary forms is used to underscore the vulnerability of the male protagonists, the strong voice of female characters, and the blurring of the real and the imagined. Unlike *Invisible,* with different narrators describing the same set of events, *Oracle Night*'s two narrators tell a different set of stories. Sidney Orr is the autodiegetic narrator, and Orr is the metadiegetic narrator who relates the unfinished novel about Nick Bowen. Both protagonists are mesmerized by the women in their lives, and both suffer from physical trauma.

In this novel, words and the magical blue notebook in which Orr writes develop a life of their own. Sidney Orr describes himself twenty years earlier as vulnerable and unable to resume writing after an unidentified illness has caused him to collapse. His conversational tone in the story he narrates about himself, his wife, Grace, and his best friend, John Trause, gives the reader the impression he can almost hear Sidney's voice describing the people, places, and objects surrounding him. Orr writes two independent stories in his new notebook. With his magnetic attraction to the notebook curing him of his writer's block, he begins a novel about Nick Bowen. Sidney is so engrossed in his writing that he becomes temporarily invisible and unable to hear the phone ring. In other words, the notebook – a repository of the words – removes him from the physical world. Nick, too, is vulnerable and ends up trapped in an underground shelter with no possibility of rescue. Sidney, unable to find a solution for Nick, is trapped in another form of writer's block, one where he has found the inspiration to create a constructed world but cannot find a way to get his protagonist out of the shelter. Similarly, Auster leaves the reader of *Oracle Night* without providing him with closure.

The other "story" Sidney writes in the notebook, exemplifying his need to verbalize his trauma and find explanations for Grace's mysterious behavior, begins with the words "Imagine this." This story leads him to an unbearable conclusion regarding his wife. Thinking that by destroying the blue notebook, he can erase the ugly facts he has imagined, disgruntled with his failure at completing the Nick Bowen novel, and believing that words have a magical power to transform the realities of the physical world, and he rips it to shreds. The entanglement of writing implements and suffering writer's block provides clear evidence that Sidney's consciousness is governed by words. He needs them to create fiction as well as to inscribe his trauma. I will argue that Grace, on the other hand, epitomizes the female character in Auster's oeuvre who does not share that need. When questioned, she chooses silence, and when she declines to provide explanations, he writes down the story that he

imagines can fill the empty spaces. Grace transcends the male narrative because she is not entangled in his verbal explanations. Her characterization through the smitten Sidney Orr empowers her because she has established her "superiority"—her ailing husband needs her, she does not allow herself to be bullied into carrying her pregnancy to term, and she does not allow Sidney to interrogate her. Her power stems from her physicality and her declining to submit to verbal articulation.

Reading Paul Auster's novels must include acknowledgment of the power that the female characters have over their male counterparts and their transcendence of the verbal world constructed by the male writers. Other poststructural critics, namely Maurice Blanchot and Hélène Cixous, have been cited to interpret Auster's fiction or have perhaps developed concepts similar to those I use in this thesis. Cixous's attention to various forms of gendered language in relation to embodied existence parallels my own account of feminine language in the novels. I have, in this studied, deliberately chosen a more empirical analysis, driven by Auster's character development, built on close readings in the belief that an excessive reliance on postmodernist and poststructural literary theory and criticism may perhaps be a reason for the limited critical reception of Auster's novels, one that de-emphasizes his highlighting of female "superiority" as portrayed in contrast to the vulnerable male characters. Most of his novels are worth a fresh look, one that questions the trend to categorize him as anti-feminist, even if a longer or later study may return to feminist critics in the hopes of creating a sophisticated interpretation. Such a reading of his novels may shift the perception of how masculinity is defined in contemporary fiction.

CHAPTER 2 *THE BOOK OF ILLUSIONS*: CHASING SHADOWS

The character of David Zimmer, the narrator-protagonist of *The Book of Illusions*, represents the vulnerable man who is rescued by an enigmatic woman. Typical of an Auster novel, the starting point is the narrator's concern for another character who is either missing, presumed dead, suffering from injury, or whose identity is unknown. This concern results in a quest narrative for the protagonist who needs to locate and reconstruct the identity of that missing person, as evidenced in *Leviathan, The Invention of Solitude, The New York Trilogy,* and *In the Country of Last Things.* With the help of the enigmatic female character, David Zimmer finds answers to most of his questions, but the unanswered question in the mind of the reader of *The Book of Illusions* must be why David Zimmer writes his narrative retrospectively, eleven years after the events take place, articulating his traumatized condition with such lucidity. Within that reflection, he summarizes the life of another character over a period of fifty years. His overall time frame encompasses the present, which he describes, and the future, from which he looks back on the events of the past. His writing account is coherent, even though he is writing about his trauma, his drunken stupors, and moments of distress. What prompts him to represent the disturbed, traumatic period about which he writes? I believe Auster creates this elapsed time frame as one of many reminders of the gap between what we remember and how we articulate those memories. This lapse raises a doubt, which Auster constantly expresses, regarding the reliability of words to give an accurate representation of our lived reality. The narrative, employing several levels of diegesis, intersects two sets of constructed realities experienced by vulnerable, traumatized, male characters: David Zimmer and Hector Mann, his alter ego.

Female Interventions and Identity

The moments and duration, both spatially and temporally, of female interventions in the lives of the male characters are instrumental to the onset, development, and outcome of

their traumas. Both male characters are troubled by their past. David Zimmer, narrator and protagonist, suffers from trauma caused by the death of his wife and two sons in a plane crash and his own survivor's guilt. Having lost his role as husband and father, he is decimated by his loss and is determined to deal with his guilt and sorrow by punishing himself. "I wanted my grief to continue. All I needed was another project to work on, another ocean to drown myself in" (57). By chance, while watching a silent film, he discovers he is capable of laughing again, and it is the consequence of that brief laughter that sets the novel in motion. Believing that working with words can have restorative powers, he immerses himself in writing, but his self-destructiveness results in two failed suicide attempts and excessive drinking. He drinks himself into a stupor in order to obliterate the memory of his pain. Writing, the manipulation of words, turns him into a recluse, and alcohol weakens his judgment, rendering him socially dysfunctional. It is at this point in his life that Alma Grund unexpectedly and very briefly enters his life. Their encounter, starting out confrontationally with Alma pointing a gun at him and ending in a passionate but short-lived love affair, spans a total of eight days covering Vermont, a plane ride, and two days in New Mexico; nonetheless, it leaves a profound and permanent effect on him. After receiving her farewell letter, he reflects, "*I understood* [my emphasis] that Alma had done that for me. In eight short days, she brought me back from the dead" (316). It is through her that he is able to overcome his grief, rediscover his will to survive, and live in the present.

In the case of Hector Mann, the obscure silent actor and filmmaker who has been presumed dead for over fifty years and is the object of Zimmer's research, his identities are carved out, for better or for worse, by the six female characters he encounters: Brigid O'Fallon, Delores St. John, Nora O'Fallon, Silvia Meers, Frieda Spelling, and Alma Grund. The female characters, all but Alma, contribute to Mann's trauma in different stages, often compelling him to assume a new identity. His first change of identity, the only one not

involving a female character, is implied in his silent film, *Mr. Nobody*, where he portrays the title role which serves as foreshadowing of his subsequent disappearance. The character of Mr. Nobody, who becomes invisible upon wearing a particular cloak, is "visible" only to the reader, through the use of Zimmer's narration. The second change results from his becoming a post-crime accessory to the killing of his pregnant ex-lover, Brigid O'Fallon, by his current fiancé, Delores St. John. Consumed by guilt and the fear of detection, he flees. On the run, he forges his third identity upon finding a worker's cap with the name Herman Loesser. Using that name, he travels incognito to find a job at Brigid's family store. In the hopes of losing his foreign accent to blend into American society, he continues with the fourth attempt to deny his previous identity by taking pronunciation lessons with Brigid's sister, Nora. When she falls in love with him, he realizes that he cannot stay with her and must flee again to search for another, fifth, identity. Sylvia Meers comes to the rescue: she offers him partnership in a live sex act to be performed for exclusive, private clientele. He agrees on the condition that he be allowed to perform wearing a mask as he cannot risk being recognized. The faceless sex performer forges his sixth identity. When Sylvia's suspicions (that he has something deeper to hide than just shame of the job) dawn on him, he needs to flee again. Still under the name of Herman Loesser, he unintentionally becomes a hero in the eyes of Frieda Spelling, a complete stranger he accidentally meets when he takes a bullet for her during a bank heist. She nurses him back to life and provides him with his seventh and final identity. They get married, and he acquires the name of Hector Spelling**.** Thus ends the cycle of assumed identities. In most cases, it is a female character who instigates the need for his continued running and developing a new persona.

Unlike the other female characters, Alma, a member of his household, does not compel Mann to change his identity, nor does she create or intentionally distort it. Quite the contrary, her mission is portray him empathetically, with the intentions to immortalize Mann

by writing his biography, based on conversations with him over the years and her access to his private journal, which he willingly shares with her. Verbal articulation, whether oral or written, also becomes instrumental in defining his identity in the eyes of others. It is interesting to note that the only complete version of Mann's life, within the constructed world of the novel, is entrusted to a female character. She is given free rein to write—until her efforts are later thwarted by his wife. When Alma's words are stolen from her, she fights back in a heated discussion resulting in her unintentional but fatal pushing of Frieda. It is Frieda's destruction of her manuscript and computer that lead to the demise of both characters. In this instance, the absence of words, Alma's inability to preserve them, reinforces the necessity for words.

Words Are All

Auster, in his interviews and memoirs, confesses to a compulsive need to write; his personal life spills into his works of fiction when his characters mirror that need. Alma and Zimmer exhibit that need throughout *The Book of Illusions*, which contains a wealth of recorded material: Mann's films, Zimmer's academic books, Alma's biography, Frieda's letters, Zimmer's notebook (an archive of an archive), Mann's diary, newspaper articles collected by Zimmer, and Zimmer's claim of his own posthumously published nonfictional account of the "people" and events surrounding Hector Mann, i.e. Auster's novel. The protagonists rely heavily on using words, as does their creator; in one sense, all books are an archive of words created by their author.

David Huebert defines the archive as "data that can be used in the future to construct a narrative of the past" (248). The compulsive need to keep a permanent record by writing and publishing consumes Alma in her frantic attempt to record Mann's life to keep him alive within the pages of her biography even after he dies, to provide him with literary posterity, a recurring trope in Auster's novels. Zimmer also has what Derrida calls "archive fever"

(Huebert 248). With reference to Derrida's theory, Huebert points out that Alma and Zimmer suffer from the effort "to connect the archival impulse as a response to loss or disappearance as a means of ensuring survival" (Huebert 250). Zimmer reacts to the loss of his family by writing the academic opus, *The Silent Life of Hector Mann*, to chronicle, or archive, Mann's professional life. However, Alma is not responding to loss or disappearance; she is preempting her loss which will result from the Mann's disappearance, that is to say his death.

The effort to immortalize their "hero" stems from different literary desires. Zimmer, as he once claims, embarks on his project, not in an attempt to distract himself from his grief, but to keep him secluded and miserable. The focus of his book is the twelve silent films Mann made before his disappearance, not his personal life. Alma's motivation to write Mann's biography is a deep sense of loyalty, affection, and devotion to the filmmaker. She is compelled to record everything she knows as a tribute to his genius and to provide an explanation for, if not outright exoneration of, his criminal or shady acts and subsequent disappearance. Her resurrecting him from obscurity and possible condemnation in the eyes of the public is paradoxical; as everyone had assumed he was dead, unless his shady actions are revealed in her biography, no one would even know anything about his past, good or bad. Within the fictional world of *The Book of Illusions,* Zimmer's book survives in the format of Auster's novel whereas Alma's manuscript is destroyed. This would seem to suggest that the female voice is silenced, but I argue that it is another female who silences her, and that it is only her voice *about Mann* that is silenced. Furthermore, the information in Alma's biography is relayed to the reader in the mise-en-abyme narrative that Zimmer constructs based on that information, so it, too, survives, albeit in a different dimension.

Zimmer provides the reader with access to two of Mann's silent films, *Mr. Nobody* and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost,* with his detailed notes on the scenarios. This places emphasis on the difference between the viewers of the films in the constructed world within

the novel and the reader of the text called *The Book of Illusions.* The reader is able to visualize the films by "reading" Auster's rendition of Zimmer's words. In *The Inner Life of Martin Frost,* words take on an additional significance because they are important not only for the reader of the novel but also for the protagonist within the film. He is a writer who notices that his muse is becoming frailer with each page of the manuscript he is writing. The film suggests that the writer's love for his muse overpowers his need to preserve his creative output, i.e., his manuscript—as if the words he is writing are draining her. The female character has precedence over the writer and his needs. As in *Oracle Night*, words have a supernatural effect, thereby reminding the reader of Auster's reverence for and mistrust of words. Unlike Poe's "The Oval Portrait," where the artist fails to notice that his wife, his model, is dwindling with each brushstroke and ends up dying, Auster has Martin destroy his creative production to save his loved one. Claire is almost physically destroyed by the supernatural power of words, but Martin's creativity is destroyed when he throws his manuscript, page by page, into the fire. The film frames the struggle between the survival of the female character and that of the words, thus outweighing the verbal creativity of the male protagonist.

Tracing the journey of their short-lived but intense and life-changing love affair, one can conclude that if one removes the writing process from the equation, the protagonists would never have met. It is the publication of his book, *The Silent Life of Hector Mann*, that inadvertently leads him to Alma Grund, who rescues him first in the immediate from being locked out of his house, then from his fear of flying, and eventually from grief over his previous loss. Finding themselves in bed together, she is successful in her mission to persuade him to travel with her to visit the dying Mann, despite his aversion to flying. He loses; she wins. The significance of this flight, a transition from his home in Vermont to Mann's Blue Stone Ranch in New Mexico, is that the plane constitutes the bridge from his

previous ignorance about Mann's disappearance to his current knowledge of his whereabouts with the physical space of the flight filling the gaps in Zimmer's knowledge of Mann's personal life. By the same token, Alma's sharing of this information with him allows him to go not only from one area of the country to another but also from his solitude to companionship.

The reader learns about the principal female character not only through the narrator's feelings about her but also through his description of her actions. He is in control of his male-constructed narrative, but he loses that control when he is no longer able to include her and Frieda in his closure as they both die in New Mexico while he is in Vermont. He becomes an absence. In effect, they have exited the narrative, thereby establishing their independence from both his life and the framework story. These departures may be interpreted as proof that the female characters are not compelled to remain within the confines of the male narrative. Once again, Auster brings to the foreground strong female characters who determine the outcome of the male narrative. They control the words, and the male writer is reduced to inventing possible interpretations for their deaths, especially Alma's suicide. The female characters have taken French leave from their narrator, which further indicates that they are the ones with power over the constructed world.

Writing acquires a power of its own, and the deaths of Alma and Frieda are the outcome of their struggle over the preservation or destruction of the words surviving Mann himself. Alma writes to pay tribute to Mann, whereas Frieda destroys all traces of his work including Alma's manuscript and computer. Although his will stipulates that only the films need to be destroyed, Frieda is establishing her female authority by interpreting his will to include eliminating Alma's biography. Whereas Alma and Zimmer represent the desire to preserve their archives, Mann's purpose is to create an archive of films and then destroy it. Perhaps this is not "the death of the author" but the suicide of the author. He accepts to

resume film making on the insistence of his wife, but stipulates that all the films made on Blue Stone Ranch be destroyed within twenty-four hours of his death.

Mann wishes to eliminate all traces of his legacy, but technology can bypass that elimination. In the coda of Zimmer's narrative, he states his wishful thinking that there may yet be some hope that copies of the manuscript (and even the incinerated film reels) will eventually find their way into the world. Zimmer expresses suspiciousness about words, but paradoxically, some hope for their indestructibility. This hope, though fragile, might be taken implicitly to envelop *The Book of Illusions* itself – as if Auster were sounding a note of textual optimism even as he is exercising postmodernist techniques.

Treacherous and Unreliable Words

Zimmer is both obsessive about and mistrusting of words**.** Frieda Spelling's invitation to visit the dying Hector unsettles him because he is reluctant to believe it is authentic. "When I picked up the letter again, I wasn't sure if the words would still be there. Or, if they were, they would still be the same words" (4). He has previously collected and kept all traces he could find about the lost film director in a box. Referring to them in contradictory terms is a further indication of his view that words are double-edged. "…crammed with all sorts of *precious* material: clippings, photos, microfilmed documents, xeroxed articles, squibs from ancient gossip columns. Most of the information I had collected was *unreliable*: articles from the tabloid press, junk from fan magazines, bits of movie reportage rife with hyperbole, erroneous suppositions, and out-and-out falsehoods" (79; my italics). Apparently, whenever Mann was interviewed, he would give different answers to the same question. Zimmer ignores the contents of his box but does not throw it away. "Still, as long as I remembered not to believe what I read, I didn't see how the exercise could do any harm" (79). When Alma summarizes Mann's life to Zimmer, she tells him, "In his letter, Hector thanked her [Nora] for the many kindnesses she had shown him. He would never forget her, he said. She was a

shining spirit, a woman above all other women, and just knowing her for the short time he had been in Spokane had permanently changed his life" (176). The reader and probably Zimmer realize that Nora is just Mann's steppingstone, indeed not a life-changing experience. Exaggeration or outright lying to spare someone's feelings is yet another indication rendering words unreliable.

Auster is not content merely to acknowledge the power of words; he implies that they have *supernatural powers* over our physical reality. Although *Oracle Night* addresses this issue more elaborately, in addition to the example of *The Inner Life of Martin Frost,* there are at least two examples of it in *The Book of Illusions*. At the very moment that Frieda Spelling is writing the words "Dear Mr. Zimmer," Mann injures himself falling down the stairs. Another aspect of the potential destructiveness of words is the fear of defining emotions. In referring to his first night with Alma, Zimmer writes, "Neither one of us mentioned what happened in my bedroom the night before…to name it would have been to risk destroying it" (117).

Paradoxically, silence, which can be the binary opposite of the presence as well as an absence of words, becomes a presence in Auster's narration and plays a role in shaping identity. Mann has been silent for sixty years; hence, everyone assumes he has died. Mann makes silent films. The hiding of identities, a major component of his adult life, is another form of silence, as is his mask during his performance with Silvia Meers. His stipulation that his films be "silenced" by being incinerated is yet another. Brigid O'Fallon's voice is silenced by her death. Martin Frost's manuscript becomes a silence when it is destroyed. Zimmer's family is silent—they have no voice in the narrative as they die before it even begins. Alma's gun is "silenced" when Zimmer grabs it from her and stores it in his freezer. Auster uses silence to equate its importance with words. However, the most important form of silence is the one that Alma and Claire "impose" on Zimmer and Martin. As in several of

his other novels, the female character declines being questioned by her man. “I put both arms around her [Alma] and held her for a while, not wanting to press her with questions, to force her into talking when she didn’t want to” (288). Martin says, “I made one of the most important decisions of my life. I decided that I wasn’t going to ask any more questions” (262). The liberation of the female characters from being obliged to answer when being questioned appears in several of Auster’s novels, notably again in *Oracle Night.*

Postmodern Literary Strategies

The Book of Illusions is stylistically not as postmodern as the other two novels under consideration, but Auster does draw the reader into the narrative with circular documentation and the shifting authority of the narrator. As a result of engaging and confusing the reader, fiction and nonfiction are fused—a common trope of postmodernism. Circular documentation echoes strategies used in *Leviathan* and *Invisible:* the narrator concludes his narrative by addressing the reader directly and declaring that his manuscript has become Auster’s book, which the reader is holding in his hands. Thus, the reader, a living breathing human being, is implicated in the fictional world of the constructed characters of the novel.

The multiple levels of diegesis problematizes the stance of the narrator, hence his reliability, which leaves the reader questioning his trustworthiness of the narrator— ergo, the veracity of the text. As Auster’s construct, Zimmer’s narrative role is continually changing throughout the novel. In the primary account of his own life, he is autodiegetic (a first person central narrator who is also the protagonist). He becomes heterodiegetic (does not take part in the story he is telling about someone else in his constructed world) at the start of his account of Hector Mann’s past life. Homodiegetic narration (the telling of a story in which the narrator is an observer and not the main character) is used when he informs the reader of the details of his plane ride to New Mexico with Alma and the summary of Mann’s life. When Zimmer recounts, almost transcribes, *Mr. Nobody* and *The Inner Life of Martin Frost,* he

becomes an extradiegetic narrator (totally outside the frame of the story he is narrating). Mann's films are both metadiegetic (within the framework of the story he is telling but on a different level or in a different timeframe) and hypodiegetic accounts—in other words, a product of his imagination. The panoply of narrative levels in this novel leaves the reader questioning how much of Zimmer's story is pure invention. If Mann never existed, then neither did his films.

It is common knowledge that the framed tale has its origins long before the advent of postmodernism. With Bocaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* narrators told or shared their stories for entertainment, not to pay tribute to an icon or keep him/her alive. Auster invokes *The Arabian Nights* in *The Invention of Solitude* when he cites Shahrazad as emblematic of the manipulative narrator. He compares himself as an author to her character; he is a "master narrator" with a specific audience, not a member of a group who share tales for entertainment. Shahrazad spins tales because her life depends on it; Auster spins tales because his psychological life depends on it—he has a compulsion to write. His narrators are not attempting to amuse their audiences; they are struggling with conflicts which they believe can be at least partially healed through verbal sharing. Zimmer narrates Mann's story through the use of Alma's diaries, which preserve memories verbally, and Zimmer's own lived experience in his short visit to Mann's house. They are further preserved through her oral narration to him based on her conversations with Mann and his journals.

Fictionally, Auster imposes on the reader a commonality of traits between Zimmer and Mann to emphasize the paradox of representing a multiplicity of realities through narration: he makes Mann Zimmer's foil. Zimmer and Mann both lose sons. Mann punishes himself by refusing to produce films (and agrees to resume filming only after stipulating that no one will ever view them), and Zimmer punishes himself with isolation. "The only person I knew how to be with was myself—but I wasn't really anyone, and I wasn't really alive. I

was just someone who pretended to be alive, a dead man who spent days translating a dead man's book" (102), referring to his work on Chateaubriand. Part of the fascination the two-thousand-word oeuvre held for him was the title, *Memoires d'autre-tombe,* which he translates as *Memoirs of a Dead Man.* When Zimmer concludes his narrative, the reader cannot miss the parallelism at work again with the similarity between Chateaubriand's posthumous autobiography and Zimmer's.

Auster also uses the fusion of fiction and reality with his personal life spilling into his fictional world. He models some of his characters on people living in the reader's world—not particularly a postmodernist style—to create fiction. The article, "Hector Mann and Henry Roth," illustrates six parallels between Paul Auster's father and an obscure but real person called Henry Roth. They are both children of Jewish immigrants from Europe, both are victims of anti-Semitism, both are hardworking, both carry the guilt of a crime in their past and survive most of their life escaping detection, and both are described as elusive and invisible (Schott-Kristensen 48).

Parallelism serves as the unifying thread in the narrative. Other than silence vs. words, more encompassing binaries are presence vs. absence, the fictional vs. the nonfictional accounts, and private identities vs. the public domain. Presence and absence are conveyed not only in words vs. silence, but also in the entrances and exits of characters, their physical presence and their deaths, and the proclaimed reality and its constructedness. Mann is first described textually by Zimmer, through the study and critique of his films, then physically in his personal contact with him and his entourage in his brief visit to Blue Stone Ranch. Zimmer describes himself as a writer and as a lover. The physical authenticity of lived experiences by the characters is portrayed paradoxically and obscurely in the constructed work of literature. Zimmer's literary book on Mann, which survives, is a foil to Alma's destroyed book on his personal life. Mann's successful presence in Hollywood with the first

twelve films is contrasted with his disappearance and subsequent production of non-viewed films. Textual status and physical status are in opposition throughout the novel.

It seems that Auster does not miss a chance to remind the reader of the blurring of fiction with nonfiction or reality and imagination and that Derrida's notion of hyperreality applies to most of Auster's novels. How can Auster represent the distinction if none exists?

Writing: Destructive or Therapeutic?

Zimmer experiences trauma resulting from loss, rendering him vulnerable. In his pre-Alma phase, he plunges into writing as an escape from the tragedy of losing his family. On the plane ride to Blue Stone Ranch with Alma, he experiences a relapse of nostalgia for his deceased family. "Exactly as I had always imagined I would, I broke down and sobbed. I put my hands over my face, and for the longest time I went on weeping into my stinking, salty palms, unable to lift my head, unable to open my eyes and stop" (125). He overcomes this grief in his new phase of the quest for Mann and in his love for Alma. Once in New Mexico, his writing shifts to a less academic focus to take copious, meticulous notes on the Martin Frost film. Here he is able to detach himself from the object of his writing; effectively, is writing a narrative of a narrative created by Mann. Presumably, he writes at least the notes for the frame narrative, resulting in Auster's manuscript, after his return to his home in Vermont as he awaits Alma's arrival. When Zimmer declares that the events about which he is writing take place eleven years ago, the reader must wonder when he writes that part of his narrative. It cannot be until he realizes he is fatally ill and leaves his memoirs as a legacy. The time gap can only be explained if he needs to come to terms with his impending death by writing what he calls his posthumous memoirs (echoing Chateaubriand). Alma's biography of Mann, a tribute to him and a reshaping of his identity, is not a result of trauma, but her suicide letter to Zimmer definitely is.

As mentioned previously, most of Auster's narrators are protagonists who suffer from loss of identity or of persons, and they turn to writing as a healing process. In reading all his novels published between 1987 and 2010; three memoirs spanning from 1982 to 2013 (*The Invention of Solitude*, *Winter Journal,* and *Report from the Interior*); and a selection of his essays and interviews, I have concluded that Auster himself does not unequivocally share his protagonists' perspective on the healing powers of writing. Firstly, he states numerous times that writing (be it fiction, poetry, or film) for him is not a choice but a daily necessity—that not writing is not an option, so to address the issue of therapeutic value for him as a writer is problematic. In *The Invention of Solitude*, he writes, "Never before have I been so aware of the rift between my thinking and writing" and "There has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open" (32). In attempting to discover his absent father in writing about him, he seems to echo the painful process of verbalizing his trauma. Can one conclude that writing fiction is therapeutic but writing memoirs is not? I will re-examine this in my chapter on *Oracle Night.*

The power of words engulfs Zimmer's consciousness, compels the villainous Frieda to destroy any traces of Alma's biography of Mann, and forces Martin Frost to destroy his manuscript to save his lover, Claire. The paradox of language is that the words written by the author cannot be trusted, but the words read by the reader are valid. This places Auster as a writerly author since the reader must disentangle the levels of narration and contradictory versions of the stories. In that sense, the reader becomes the detective when the author does not provide definitive solutions to the problems or answers to the questions. What the reader cannot do is distinguish between what "really happened" and what the narrator wants him to believe happens because there is no clear distinction between fiction and nonfiction, a notion of which Auster reminds the reader across almost all of his works, even his nonfiction

writings. He is a Baudrillardian par excellence. In the same vein, Auster draws upon "Borges and I" in simultaneously splitting and fusing the private and literary human beings. It would not be farfetched to infer that Auster extends that fusion to the author and the narrator.

Sexism or Feminism?

Mark Brown has claimed that "Gender does not figure significantly in Auster's work as a theme" (*Paul Auster* 159). This is reflected in the chapter titles of Brown's own book, none of which are gender-related. Despite the thrust of feminist critique and critique of feminism, the role of female characters in Auster's fiction has eluded most critics. Even critics who have addressed female characters and have recognized the gap in the literary criticism but offer no explanation for why the gap exists. Exceptions to this generalization are James Peacock, Sofia Ciocia, and Thorstsen Carstensen.

Peacock accuses Zimmer of sexism when he fails to acknowledge Alma. "He [Zimmer] appoints himself as Alma's savior…he fictionalizes her…The fact that Zimmer sees in Alma's birthmark the contours of an 'imaginary country' implies a male desire to colonize the female body (Peacock 57-58). It is true that Zimmer imagines those contours when he first sees the noticeable birthmark on Alma's face, but in no way does he extend the analogy to a desire to dominate, as Peacock suggests. Zimmer himself is fascinated by the image, especially when Alma acknowledges the birthmark as an advantage—it allows her to gauge how superficial strangers are by her interpretation of how they look at her when they see it. Clearly, Peacock takes a gendered reading of Zimmer's comment.

Carstensen also accuses Zimmer of sexism. "Zimmer's tendency to reduce Alma to an aspect of his writerly imagination suggests that fictionalizing the world is perhaps predicated on controlling or even destroying the other" (Carstensen 421). To bolster his argument, he draws parallels between Zimmer's controlling Alma and Marco Fogg's manipulation of Kitty Woo (*Moon Palace*) and *Sunset Park*'s protagonist making decisions on behalf of his

underage immigrant girlfriend. Carstensen provides two examples, valid enough in themselves, but to conclude that the male ego reverberates *throughout* Auster's work is to disregard the counterexamples. The introduction to his thesis includes only the most emblematic examples, one of them by Ciocia herself, of Auster's reverence of the female persona. For *The Book of Illusions,* Carstensen develops his argument by giving the example of the intimate bath scene, which he interprets as Zimmer's desire to dominate Alma and taking pleasure in the "unconditional surrender of the woman to the male caretaker" (Carstensen 421-422). While it is true that the bathtub scene seems chauvinistic, compared with other references to the male being at the mercy of women, as in Mr. Blank's total submission to Anna as she bathes him (*Travels in the Scriptorium*), this interpretation loses potency. Many feminists would likely insist that this scene is an example of objectification of women, rather than an adoration of the female.

Both Peacock and Carstensen read into Zimmer's character what they want to see. That is not the entire picture. I posit that Stefania Ciocia acknowledges some of their views but uses a wider lens than the other critics, particularly Carstensen, to interpret their intentions. Carstensen acknowledges that, "As Stefania Ciocia demonstrates, Auster's novels 'expose men's tendency to project their fantasies and desires onto their female companions.' Indeed, the dangerous implications of the female other in the male protagonist's solipsistic claim for selfhood is an issue reverberating throughout his work" (421). But I contend that Carstensen reads Ciocia only *partially* and that he bases himself on too few examples. It is true that she makes that claim in her essay, "A Doomed Romance? The Donna Angelicata in Paul Auster's Fiction." However, she continues by asserting that "the idealization of female characters is so blatantly a male construction that it cannot be read as anything other than Auster's *exposure* of that tendency [my italics]" (Cioccia 100). If Auster is only exposing

that tendency, it does not give Carstensen ammunition to conclude that Auster subscribes to it. It appears that Carstensen is conflating Auster with his characters.

Recognizing the *donna angelicata*, a concept that she derives from traditions of courtly love literature, as a trope in Austerian novels, she also considers three problematics: Auster may be writing tongue-in-cheek; his portrayal of the ideal woman develops a more contemporary identity in his later novels (which Carstensen does not acknowledge); and limiting criticism to narrow-minded political correctness can be problematic. She even recognizes that Maria Turner, a character from *Leviathan* modeled after Auster's photographer friend, Sophie Calle, breaks the mold of the female character whose role ends after accomplishing her mission to rescue the male character. Ciocia ends her essay with, "*On balance,* as we have seen, Auster is certainly aware of the burden that he places on his women, and of the futility and the narcissism that often accompany the male quests" (119). [my emphasis] This gender dynamics is best summarized by August Brill, "Women are the ones who carry the world. They take care of the real business while their hapless men stumble around making a hash of things" (*Man in the Dark* 21).

No Lines to Draw

The Book of Illusions combines the two aspects of the argument in this thesis: the power of words and the power of women. The multiplicity of written documents and different narrative perspectives are a testament to Baudrillard's notion that one cannot distinguish boundaries between the real world and the constructed world because the real world does not exist apart from the latter. Auster's fictions continually confirms the absence of such a separation, blurring the lines between experience and imagination. The loose ends that leave the reader without closure are a result of Auster's adherence to the Barthian concept of "the death of the author," as he has claimed in many of his memoirs and interviews, notably the one with Joseph Mallia: "The one thing I try to do in all my books is to leave enough room in

the prose for the reader to inhabit it. Because I finally believe it's the reader who writes the book and not the writer" (Hutchisson 10). Unsympathetic critics might see Auster's claim as begging the question of closure, but this is Auster's point: open-endedness conforms to postmodern literary conventions of writerly narration and blurred lines between experience and its articulation. He skillfully achieves his goal having readers invest themselves in his narration.

The fluidity of interpretation embedded in the lack of closure and indistinct line separating "reality" from "fiction" is further underscored by Zimmer's lack of control in his love affair with Alma and Freida's overpowering influence over the outcome of Mann's death. Both Mann and Zimmer are vulnerable male characters subverted by their female counterparts and by the overpowering importance attached to creative production, be it words or images.

CHAPTER 3 *INVISIBLE*: THE DISAPPEARING NARRATOR

Auster employs words to obfuscate the narrator's stance and reliability, to flesh out the healing and masking power of words, to make the authors disappear, and to demonstrate the schism between author and characters, all of which are orchestrated so as to underscore the vulnerability of the male protagonists and the healing power of the women in their lives. The protagonist of *Invisible*, Adam Walker, retrospectively portrays himself as an insecure, naive, and vulnerable young college graduate. Four female characters, Gwynn, Margot, Ceçile, and Sandra, contribute to his healing (to varying degrees and for varying lengths of time). He is not in control of his own narrative; his story slips into the hands of other characters, two of them being other versions of himself. Auster's continued practice of printing dialogue without using quotation marks gives the reader the impression that he is reading an internal monologue rather than a third-person narration, thus breaking down the binary opposition between the author and reader. The reader becomes privy to the meandering thoughts inside the narrator's mind; the effect is magnetic, and the separation between the interior and exterior aspects of the text is blurred.

Who Tells the Story, and Whose Story Is It?

In examining the narrators of *Invisible*, the source and time frame of the information convey not only a perspective on the power of female characters and words, but also on memory and how it is articulated. Unlike many of Auster's other novels, the protagonist is not the principal narrator. The framework narrative is by Adam, who hopes that his retrospective gaze in writing will have a healing effect in attempting to come to terms with the horrors (and pleasures) he experienced forty years after they have occurred. All the characters in this novel are entangled in contradictory perspectives with regard to male-female relationships and to the function of words in describing their fictional realities. The multiplicity of narrators (Jim, Adam, and Ceçile) and the shifting voices of the protagonist

create various levels of diegesis, where their unsynchronized verbal articulation casts doubt on the text's veracity through the unreliability of words. The metaphorical and physical death of the author functions within the constructed world of the narration. Adam, as a writer of his memoirs, distances himself from his narration, so the characters in his world become authors by proxy. Adam relinquishes his authority over the manuscript of his memoir by shifting his narrative voice, each time distancing himself further from the center of his story and finally handing it over to another narrator altogether. The multi-layered narration underpins the fictional constructs of even the most realistic characters and moments.

Adam sends his manuscript to Jim, who relays Adam's story to the reader; Cecile tells Born's story; Gwynn tells her story with Adam. Why does each of them write? Jim, Adam's college acquaintance and a writer, is the primary source for the reader but only a minor character in the overall narrative. He agrees to edit Adam's manuscript, which he receives in fragments, to honor a dying man's wish. Even his editorial decision regarding the possibility of publishing Adam's manuscript is not solely his own but is taken in consultation with Adam's sister. He needs verification of and permission from Gwynn to publish Adam's story, including all the inaccuracies she claims it contains. He accords Ceçile the courtesy of believing her version of events by publishing her diary as a coda to Adam's story about Born. Jim delegates his decision on the outcome of Adam's notes to Gwynn and allows Ceçile to have the last word, thus serving as another clear indication that the female character overshadows the male narrative—even if one were to suppose that the entire manuscript of *Invisible* is Jim's fabrication about a character named Adam Walker.

Adam and Ceçile represent the belief that writing has healing qualities. Adam writes his memoir in an attempt to come to terms with his past guilt and to reach a better understanding of his youthful self. In the final stages of his advanced leukemia, he reflects on his memories of events in his distant past. He is troubled by disturbing memories of past

errors but also liberated by nostalgia for the brighter moments with Gwynn, Margot, and Ceçile. The lucid articulation or memory many years after the facts, a common theme in Auster's novels, raises the question of the reliability of words. The accuracy of the alleged facts might be marred by modified memory, but at the moment in which the narrators are writing, they believe in the power of words to convey their truths. The retrospective gaze, however, may reflect the current perspective of the past rather than the past itself. The passage of time alters the memory itself. I claim that Ceçile writes her diary for the same reason that Adam, or anyone, writes a diary: the verbal articulation of one's traumas with only the self as an initial audience to relieve anxiety.

In the constructed world of the characters involving Adam, Auster is expressing people's belief in the power of words to heal trauma. The writers of the journals believe in their own authenticity; there is no evidence that either Adam or Ceçile are writing histrionically just to impress others. Otherwise, they would glorify themselves rather than present themselves in an unsavory or unfavorable light. Fake diaries exist, but in the context of the novel, this does not seem to be the case. However, Auster constructs his novel in such a way as to raise doubts about the trustworthiness of words, but not because of hypocritical intention of the writers; more because of misremembering. It is the reader who must wonder if their recollections are attempts at self-justification or have been marred by faulty memory, both of which can result in inaccuracies. The manuscript that is finally published, resulting in the novel *Invisible,* compels the reader to question the accuracy of the final version, to the extent to which editorial changes have been made, therefore, the credibility of the stories.

In and Out of the Protagonist's Traumas

The young Adam is riddled with low self-esteem and memories of a dysfunctional relationship with his father, echoing absent or non-existing fathers in *Moon Palace* and *Sunset Park*. He looks up to Born, who enjoys a glamorous lifestyle, academic clout, and an

exotic female companion. Seeing Born as a father figure would explain Adam's desire to become friends with him, his fear of disappointing him, and his fear of Born's violence when he threatens him with a knife. He is dizzied by Born's promises to promote his literary ambitions, intimidated by his domineering personality, but is equally revolted by his ruthlessness. Born, the only other significant male presence in Adam's life, is the unreachable villain whereas the female characters appear to help Adam, each in her own way.

Almost none of Auster's novels include mother-daughter relationships, unlike the focus on the nonexistent or lost father. In the one novel featuring a female protagonist, Anna Blum's family relationship is to her brother, and the reader knows nothing about her mother or her child. *Invisible* features a rare exception, but even Ceçile and her mother Hélène are significant to the novel only in terms of their relationships with Born and with Adam. In Auster's memoirs, he makes no reference to a sister or to his wife's relationship with their daughter Sophie. In *Invisible,* both Adam and Gwynn are brought closer together to the death of their younger brother and a distant relationship with both their parents. An avid reader of Auster's novels must wonder why the female family relationships are never explored. Auster writes about traumas; is it only fathers who have problematic relationship with their sons?

Adam's Deterioration

Adam is in a different stage of his trauma/illness in each of the three manuscript sections he sends or leaves for Jim. In the first two sections, his ideas are eloquently articulated, and he makes intellectual writing choices to reflect his mood and self-image. This is made clear in the shifting voice of his narrative. In "Spring," Adam refers to himself as *I*. In this autodiegetic mode, his ego does not allow him to cry, and he fights back his tears (92, 111). When he addresses himself as *you* in his first voice-shift, he detaches himself enough to admit to crying: "You must help yourself. If something inside you is broken, you must put it back together with your own hands….Tears roll down your cheeks…" (133-4). As Adam's

physical health gradually deteriorates, so does his writing. The final section also reflects an advanced deterioration of his state of mind. Unable to write coherent sentences anymore, he sends Jim *Notes* for Fall and asks him to fix them. Jim describes Adam's fragmented writing as follows: "Telegraphic. No complete sentences. From beginning to end, written like this. Goes to the store. Falls asleep. Lights a cigarette. In the third person this time. Third person, present tense, and therefore I decided to follow his lead and render his account in exactly that way—third person, present tense" (166). Auster concludes Section three with the transcribed "telegraphic" manuscript of "Fall" into a coherent text. On the last two pages, Adam's writing *as conveyed by Jim* looks like this:

> And so ends W's brief sojourn into the land of Gaul—expelled, humiliated, banned for life.
>
> He will never go back there, and he will never see any of them again.
>
> Good-bye, Margot. Good-bye, Ceçile, Goodbye, Hélène.
>
> Forty years later, they are no more substantial than ghosts.
>
> They are all ghosts now and W. will soon be walking among them. (242-243)

Auster portrays all of Adam's relationships with the women in his life as problematic—all except the one with Sandra, the woman he marries. In writing about his return to the USA, Adam expresses, in his final passage, sorrow and isolation (line 1); finality and loss (line 2); nostalgia and regret (line 3); the surreal (line 4); and empathy (line 5). This is Adam writing about himself in the third person, his final detachment from the beginning of his manuscript, where he refers to himself as "I". The overpowering sensation of loss is unmistakable. Born has ensured his expulsion from France, homeland of the three women he meets through him. In effect, this "good-bye note" has a double time reference: his leaving France forty years ago echoes the end of his life; he is joining the ranks of the dead.

Adam's Female Encounters

Auster portrays female characters as powerful and able to be in control not only of the male protagonist but also of the overall narrative or their participation in it. Adam's first female encounter is Margot, Born's girlfriend. He portrays her as his sexual guru as she "teaches him not to be afraid of himself anymore" (52). She is not averse to sex-talk, and declining to inscribe their relationship in words, uses her body to communicate with him—a rare example in Auster's novels of *écriture feminine.* He is intimidated by Margot so is careful not to push her away. He writes he "would never dream of expecting her to play by anyone else's rules but her own" (171) and "It was enough that we were together, and I cringed at the thought of touching something that might cause her pain" (122). Adam describes his seduction by Margot, her sexuality, and shapes as an appreciation of the female body. Despite, or because of, the explicitness of the physical actions, what becomes prominent is beauty, tenderness, and intimacy as compensation for loneliness and separation, but not only for him. She is emotionally abandoned by Born and she, too, takes refuge in a non-committal close physicality with Adam. Their brief times together step outside the routine of the hypocrisy and manipulation of Born's outer world, and together they celebrate that reprieve. Adam's narration of his encounter with her in Paris is in the section where he refers to himself extradiegetically. Margot proves to be very moody, going from silence to giving him graphic details of her sexual history. She has the upper hand in their brief affair and determines the course of events in her relationship with Adam although she is powerless with Born, so vis-à-vis Auster's narrative, she is most powerful only in defining Adam's sexuality. She is part of Adam's story, but she has a minor role in Jim's overarching narrative that is initiated by Adam and completed by Gwynn and Ceçile.

It is Adam's sister, Gwynn, who has the most profound impact on him during the years inscribed in his narrative. He portrays her as his emotional drug. "She is the only

person who makes you feel alive" (112). Growing up, she is his companion and confidante. They live through a dysfunctional relationship with their parents and the death of their younger brother. He prefers her company to anyone else and tells her that she has spoiled him for other women. In his narrative, he describes his physical desire for his sister, which according to him, turns into a passionate and loving incestuous relationship. They are separated by circumstantial distance, and each of them spins off into his/her own direction, but he continues to hold a candle for her until his dying days. Adam, later writing himself into a third-person narrator, reflects, "He wonders if words aren't an essential element of sex, if talking isn't finally a more subtle form of touching, and if the images dancing in our heads aren't just as important as the bodies we hold in our arms" (181). This is a bold statement: he is equating verbal intimacy with bodily intimacy and also equating the importance of imagined intimacy with experienced intimacy. In light of this perspective, whether or not the incestuous relationship he later writes about is a reality or a fantasy is never confirmed, but the confirmation becomes irrelevant.

Gwynn's significance is twofold: she has impact on Adam's emotional life, and she has the power, accorded to her by Jim, to determine whether or not Adam's manuscript is published. Jim seeks her out to share Adam's memoirs with her and attempt to determine how "true" they are. More importantly, however, is his need to acquire her permission to edit and publish Adam's memoirs. Her privilege to determine the outcome of the manuscripts confirms that the female characters have power over the male narrative.

Ceçile, on the other hand, is instrumental in Jim's overall narrative and serves only to clarify Born's relationship with Adam although she is not significant to Adam himself, who does not reciprocate Ceçile's romantic interest in him. Yet, he expresses his admiration for her, using the third person to refer to himself, he writes, "Her mind is a wondrous instrument, and she can think circles around him on any topic imaginable, dazzling him with her

knowledge" (216) These are almost the exact words that Auster uses, in his interviews and memoirs, to describe his wife, Siri Hustvedt. Auster gives Ceçile an equally important role by placing her in the same narrative frame as the primary narrator, Jim. She has the last word. Not only does the portrayal of strong female characters echo his admiration of women in general, and more particularly Hustvedt, but he accords them authorial freedom within the framework narrative.

Adam's ultimate savior, however, according to him, is Sandra, the one who "turned me into someone better than I had been, better than I would have been alone or with anyone else" (86). He is emotionally "rescued" by Sandra, the woman he ends up marrying. The male protagonists in Auster's novels often describe themselves as "damaged goods" (*Leviathan, Oracle Night,* et al.) and helpless without a female to heal them from a trauma or to rescue them from themselves. Peter Aaron and Ben Sachs needed, at various times in their lives: Maria, Delia, Iris, Fanny, and Lilian. Marco Fogg is rescued both physically (from starvation) and emotionally (from loneliness) by Kitty Woo. Time and again, the male protagonist expresses the need for a stronger female presence.

The Healing Power of Words

The vulnerability of the male protagonist revolves around secrets, guilt and atonement. Whether or not writing can heal or contribute to traumas seems to be an unresolved issue for Auster: either he is ambivalent, or he uses double standards. Contrary to his confessions in *The Invention of Solitude* about the damage that words can do in the attempt to deal with trauma, he attributes healing properties to the writing process in the constructed world of his fiction. In *Invisible*, Auster builds a litany of guilt-related incidents in the memoir that Adam writes. Adam admits to his various digressions with mixed feelings as he is rarely able to act according to his own declared principles. He portrays himself as someone who knows the right thing to do but does not always measure up to his own

standards or expectations. Adam claims that he is sorry not to have treated his younger brother better when Andy was still alive, but he only feels guilty about his callousness in retrospect. He compensates for his discomfort over having an illicit affair with Born's girlfriend with his sense of gratification the sexual initiation and liberation she provides him. He describes his alleged incest with his sister Gwynn most eloquently, but his trepidation over sending Jim his manuscript regarding that summer indicates that in retrospect (forty years after the event) he felt ashamed—an excellent example of how memory can modify, by embellishing or distorting, the articulation of a past event. Adam also confesses shame about taking toilet breaks to masturbate on the job. His worst regret, however, remains his weakness vis-à-vis Born's crime.

Fear, combined with guilt, renders him psychologically catatonic, unable to act quickly enough in reporting Born to the authorities when he suspects him of committing murder. Adam reflects on his self-loathing, "Fear reduced me to silence…This failure to act is far and away the most reprehensible thing I have ever done, the low point in my career as a human being" (68). His feeble attempt to expose him backfires, so he is never able to atone for his cowardice. Adam portrays himself as a victim of the older, strong-willed Born, who intimidates, manipulates him, and is responsible for Adam's deportation from France. As I do not believe that Auster makes random authorial choices, I claim that he is underscoring the ability of a person to use words in the way he finds best suited to portray the image of himself he wants to project to the outside world. What the reader knows is what Adam wants the reader to know. Therein lies the other power or words. In that sense, the words can heal one's self-image.

Both in his novels and his memoir, Auster portrays words as having the power to bring back the dead. He wrote *The Invention of* Solitude to find closure with his father after his death, but "Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept the

wound open…Instead of burying my father, for me, these words have kept him alive" (65). It seems that writing nonfiction is not an effective method for Auster to deal with trauma. His novels, however, are populated by characters who adhere to the theory that words (presence) can heal trauma (absence) by immortalizing the dead. "Literary posterity" for their hero was Alma and Zimmer's intention in writing their books on Mann. Aaron writes the life story of Ben Sachs only when he learns of his death. Mr. Effing dictates his obituary to ensure his presence beyond the grave, but Cecile refuses to write Born's.

In *Invisible,* Gwynn and Jim read Adam's manuscript after they learn of his death and reflect that it has brought him closer to them; somehow, Adam's words are a substitute for his physical presence. Jim writes, "Just hours before, Rebecca had jolted me with the news that Adam was dead, and now he was talking to me again, a dead man was talking to me, and I felt that as long as I held the letter in my hand, as long as the words of that letter were still before my eyes, it would be as if he had been resurrected" (165). Gwynn recognizes that words have power to revive the dead. "I was deeply moved by the book. It brought my brother back to me in ways I had not expected…" (157). She and Jim both feel that reading Adam's manuscript after his death somehow reincarnates him—the words have replaced the man.

The Masking Power of Words

Auster permeates his novels with intentional ambiguity and various levels of narration. *Invisible*, the most emblematic example of the multiplicity of narrators and shifting voice of the protagonist-narrator, results in contradictory versions and blurred lines between the reality perceived by the narrators and the imagination of the reader. "He tends to invite his readers to determine the fate of his protagonists and deconstruct the opposition between reader and author" (Momeni and Farahani 89). Providing unsolved puzzles to the reader, he

becomes the invisible author par excellence, thereby exonerating himself of the responsibility to provide well-defined closure to his novel.

Words also have the power to mask “the truth.” The scene involving the death of Cedric William is brief and free from eyewitnesses, yet Adam is certain that Born uses his knife to kill the boy. Born firmly denies this accusation both to Adam and, claiming that the murder is a fabrication of Adam’s twisted mind, later on to Ceçile. Born is never held accountable. According to Jim’s account, Gwynn tells him that she only learned about Adam’s desires when she reads his manuscript, and she subsequently denies it. Auster remains non-committal as to the veracity of Adam’s claim not only within the constructed world but also when a fellow author (Coetzee) asks him to confirm it.

Gwynn denies “the grand experiment”— claiming that the incest is the wishful thinking of a dying man. She agrees to allow Jim to publish the manuscript, provided it is classified as a novel, not a memoir. In the lengthy catalog of negation in her agreement with Jim to publish Adam’s perverse memoir, they decide to change all the names of people and places. Auster makes an authorial decision late in the novel by emphasizing the negation of the real names through Jim’s repetition: “and the reader can, therefore, be assured that Adam Adam is not Adam Adam, Gwyn Adam Tedesco is not Gwynn Adam Tedesco, Margot Jouffroy is not Margot Jouffroy…” (260). Auster repeats the pattern of negations for the place names a few pages later: “Westfield, New Jersey is not Westfield, New Jersey, New York is not New York, Columbia University is not Columbia University” (260-261). Auster’s metafictional insertions are yet another reminder of the unreliability of words as representations of “the truth.” Jim and Gwynn conspiring to transform the memoir into a fictional publication is an acknowledgement of two things. One is that editors, be they covert or explicit, can distort the intentions of the author. The other is that one should not underestimate the persuasiveness of the repeated denials.

In his exchange of letters with Coetzee, referring to Gwynn's denial of any incestuous relationship with her brother, Auster writes, "Where does the act of incest take place, in the bed or in the mind or in the writing?" (*Here and Now* 58). Auster's answer to Coetzee's query, of course, begs the question, because Coetzee wants to know whether or not it took place for the characters in that constructed world of fiction inhabited by Gwynn and Adam, but Auster's noncommittal reply either implies that all the characters are mouthpieces for authors or that his noncommittal answer underscores the indistinguishable line between perceived reality and imagination. In describing Margot, Adam writes, "without Margot's influence, without Margot's body to instruct him in the intricate workings of his own heart, the story with Gwyn never would have been possible. Margot the fearless, Margot the silent, Margot the cipher" (170). Chronologically, the intimacy with Gwynn takes place before he meets Margot, so he can only be referring to *the story* with Gwynn not being possible, and not the relationship itself. Auster is referring to the power of the female character to inspire narration. Whether or not Jim and Gwynn shared an incestuous relationship is not the question at hand. What remains a mystery is this. Does Margot inspire Adam to fabricate the daring relationship with his sister, or to release him from the inhibition of writing about a taboo?

Like Thomas Effing in *Moon Palace,* Born wants to set the record straight according to *his* version of the events in his life. He wants to use someone else's words to exonerate himself from any ill-deeds, but Ceçile declines. She knows he is uncouth, so she denies him the right to use words untruthfully. Here again, Auster is fusing the notion of authorship into the constructed world of the characters. The reader must remember that it is Jim who reports Gwynn's denial of the incest and her claim that her denial does not stem from embarrassment, shame, nor guilt. Jim may think that she has simply repressed that memory. But maybe Gwynn does not "really" deny anything and that even her denial is a fabrication of

Jim's. Maybe Jim is the only "real" character, that it is his solipsistic novel, and that Adam, Born, and everyone else is Jim's pure fabrication. Does the positioning of shifting narrators make any one of them more reliable than the others?

The Invisible Author

Adam plays a double role: he is one of the narrators of *Invisible,* and he is also the author of his memoirs, but he is only partially successful because he lacks the word power to complete his tasks. Adam's sterility is not only biological. He is unable to father children, and he is also incapable of carrying his literary baby to term. Choosing Jim as his literary incubator, he hands over his manuscript and asks him to take care of it until it is ready to be delivered to the world. In effect, Adam disappears from his own narrative. Auster, known for playing games with his readers, is allowing Adam to commit authorial suicide; Auster is also killing off his narrator, but not before finding a surrogate.

Adam's narrative voice shifts when he changes the pronouns he uses in referring to himself. Adam refers to himself as *I*, *you*, and *he,* in the sections of the manuscript he entitles Spring, Summer, and Fall. Adam limps through the writing process: his choice of pronouns is not even his own idea; it is the result of a suggestion by his friend Jim. In Spring, he uses the first-person pronoun to relate situations about people that "happen *to* him": Margot and Born. Adam abandons the autodiegetic stance when he stops using the *I* pronoun. In Summer, Adam detaches himself from his own narrative by implicating an unidentified second person *you*, the singular audience. The distance he creates between himself and his narrative makes it easier to confess his incestuous relationship—it was someone else, the *you*. This strategy, often used to simulate hypothetical scenarios, implicates the reader and lends credence to Gwynn's version that the incest never took place, that it was all a fabrication of Adam's mind. She attributes it a dying man's fantasy, a distortion of his memory of the facts of that summer. When Adam calls Jim to tell him that the next section is ready, he is reluctant to

send it because he is nervous about how Jim will receive it. Although his tone in Summer is warm and loving, in the long-distance telephone conversation with him, he says, “It’s disgusting, Jim. Every time I think about it, it wants to make me puke” (91). Is he referring to what he considers as bad writing or to the events inscribed in it? Auster, master puppeteer, is laying claim to the power that intricate wording has on the understanding of a text. The protagonist-narrator is, in effect, distancing himself from the narrative when using *you*, thereby suggesting that each reader could imagine himself in a similar situation. Further distancing takes place when the pronoun in the narration shifts to *he*. Shifting to the third person *he* pronoun detaches him further from his own narrative. The final detachment occurs when the narrator’s persona becomes an extradiegetic narrator, distancing him even further from the storyline: “It’s almost as if Auster’s texts constitute a literary Bermuda’s triangle” (Duke 1).

The act of storytelling in multiple layers is both a theme and a narrative strategy common to many of Auster’s novels. *Invisible, Leviathan, The Book of Illusions,* and *Travels in the Scriptorium* feature narrators who write books that they claim become the manuscript that the reader is currently reading; the characters have embedded themselves in the authorial process. *Invisible* takes the authorial game to another level. Adam disappears from his own narrative in his role as the narrator (relinquishing that function to Jim, who then relinquishes it to Ceçile). When Adam disappears as a narrator, he becomes the central character of the story “crafted” by Jim, and Gwynn—the subject of their intradiegeticism. Jim, Adam, and Ceçile narrate different, sometimes intertwining, sections of Auster’s novel, but all the sections feature Adam at their center. He is either the narrator or the character discussed by the subsequent narrators.

Auster has both people and things “disappear” or become isolated by using physical space as a mirror for psychological space. A library is already a place where users isolate

themselves from the world outside it. In Walker's job as a librarian, he describes himself moving the wheeled carts of books through the stacks, where only library staff is permitted, so he is again isolated. Walker's labyrinthine movement through the shelves into the deeper, interior spaces of the library stacks isolates him even further from the external world. It is as if he no longer exists in the physical, recognizable world. Kusnir finds this action reminiscent of "the mental movement of ideas coming to both the reader's and writer's mind during the process of reading and writing. Thus not only the librarian, but also a reader and a writer become necessarily disconnected, lonely, and separated from the real world during the process of reading and writing, as this metaphor seems to suggest" (108). Essentially, writing itself is a lonely activity, as is reading. Kusnir's analogy would indicate an assertion of Walker's "disappearance."

The Authors and Their Characters

The female characters are autonomous in relation to Adam's version of events, as the reader learns from Jim's narration, embedded in Adam's writings. Upon receiving the last installment of Adam's book, Jim "plays detective" by seeking out Gwynn and Ceçile to verify the contents of Adam's manuscript and edit it accordingly. With the writer of the manuscript having died (becoming *invisible*), Jim must rely on their version of the narrative to determine the credibility of Adam's memoir.

The author abandoning his characters is akin to a mother giving up her child for adoption—the characters are now isolated from their creator and left in the hands of the reader. This abandonment is worse in Auster's novels because his protagonists are writers but have only partial control over their own writings because *their* creator has abandoned them but still pulls their strings when they or the "manuscripts" they produce are destroyed in his authorial acts. The product of Auster's imagination, August Brill, (*Man in the Dark*) kills

Owen Brick, Alma’s book on Mann is destroyed, and Adam dies before being able to complete his memoir. In other words, the narrators become invisible.

CHAPTER 4 *ORACLE NIGHT*: WORDS COME TO LIFE

Oracle Night, though not Auster's latest novel, is his most daring, both in terms of the scope of his themes and postmodern literary strategies. He remains faithful to the trope of the power of words and women over the vulnerable male protagonists, but words take on a new dimension here—they are elevated to the status of a character by developing their own agency, becoming another persona in the panoply of characters, and interacting within and across various levels of narration. Auster's concerns with chance and traumas as driving forces also assume larger proportions than in previous and subsequent novels, but he continues to highlight ethical issues, memory and its impact on writing, absence, and guilt, in order to stress the vulnerability of the male protagonists, the strong voice of the female characters, and the blurring of fiction and nonfiction. To fuse the real and the imagined, he uses more complex embedded narration, extensive parallelism, metafiction, intertextuality, and intratextuality.

Split Levels

The novel operates on two principal levels: the world of Sidney Orr and the world of Nick Bowen, a character created by Sidney. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Sidney's world as Level 1, where he is the autodiegetic narrator for the most part; Nick's world will be referred to as Level 2, where Sidney becomes an extradiegetic narrator recounting Nick's experiences. Each of these two worlds is populated by a host of other characters, some of them congruous with characters in the other level. The continual shifting of the narrative lens evokes a blurring of what is real and what is imagined, bringing the reader closer to a Baudrillardian understanding of there being no distinction between them: they are one and the same. To reflect that fusion of the "real" and the imagined, Sidney writes in two *spaces* but in only one *place*. The place is the desk in his study at home, made explicit in the second space. The first space is the present. No exception to the autodiegetic narration in *Invisible*

and *The Book of Illusions,* which also feature male narrators relating disturbing events from their past, Sidney in the present time frame writes about the period surrounding his mysterious illness twenty years earlier which caused temporary physical and intellectual damage. The second space constitutes the nine days from the past, when he uses a blue notebook which he perceives as having supernatural powers. The spaces within the blue notebook are his unfinished novel about Nick Bowen, his other fragmented attempts at writing a complete narrative, and his recounting of events within his relationship with his wife Grace. However, he continues writing somewhere even after the destruction of that blue notebook. The time gap between Sidney's current recollections of the past and those nine days to which he is referring raises two questions which are never answered: Is the verbal articulation of his memory adequate? Are those nine days a complete fabrication of his literary imagination? Sidney's thirteen footnotes on a variety of topics, interspersed throughout Level 1 but with reference to both Levels 1 and 2, are yet another attempt to blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction. They also split the writing into text and paratext and convey the narrator's temporal detachment from his story.

Vulnerable, Trapped, or Puzzled Male Protagonists

The reader learns about Sidney Orr through his narration of events that take place over a period of nine days two decades ago. Nine days, I believe, is Auster's symbolic use of the nine months of gestation, but instead of producing a baby, he produces a complex but "miscarried" narrative. The events surrounding those nine days are related to his writing and to his relationship with Grace. He describes mainly his own physical, literary, and emotional traumas, as well as those of his created character, Nick Bowen, as he recollects them in the present. Other male characters in both levels 1 and 2 also suffer from aggression or death, but Sidney, as the writer, is the only one who survives. John and Jacob Trause (Level 1) die; Ed Victory (Level 2) dies, and Nick Bowen (Level 2) is left to die; the others die narratively.

The cause of Sidney’s illness, resulting in collapse, is left unidentified, but the result is clear: he stops being able to write for several months. As a writer, Sidney is aware of his own shortcomings and refers to himself as “damaged goods” (2). This realization projects him into literary incapacitation, but he is fully aware that writing could be his salvation. “Maybe writing was the medicine that would make me well again” (95). His writer’s block is temporarily cured with the blue notebook, but his inability to extricate Nick Bowen from his predicament brings his incipient novel to an abrupt and unresolved ending: the literary baby is aborted. Just as Nick is unable to escape from the four walls of the underground keyless room, Sidney is unable to escape the dead-end of his creative effort, and Sidney abandons his novel without any closure.

Sidney suffers a second physical trauma, a beating he takes from MR Chang, who perceives Sidney as hypocritical and unappreciative because he questions Chang’s moral integrity only moments before slipping into temptation with the African Princess. Sidney is reduced to guilt and low self-esteem when he realizes that Chang’s accusations are true. “…it was as if he felt I deserved to be drawn and quartered for my crimes” (183). The episode with Chang leaves Sidney physically bruised and morally insecure. Sidney’s initial self-righteousness in this incident echoes his conversation with Grace about the Blue Team; both these incidents end with Sidney feeling shame and self-doubt.

Sidney’s vulnerability is evident a third time when Jacob, John Trause’s troubled son, burglarizes their apartment and then returns to attack him and Grace. His emotional vulnerability is with regard to his fear of losing Grace—a fear caused by her inexplicable behavior and subsequent silence. Sidney, like Mr. Blank, David Zimmer, and others, has no reservations about expressing his emotional vulnerability with tears, as he does on more than one occasion.

Absence or Loss

Presence and absence, not limited to the male characters, take a variety of forms. Objects, places, and people that are important to the male protagonist are lost or temporarily disappear, thereby causing him stress, a sense of insecurity, and the need for reassurance. The temporary "disappearance" of The Paper Palace can be compared to HG Wells' "The Magic Shop" or the toy shop in Michael Ende's *The Never Ending Story.* They are both stores that provide a refuge and a source of inspiration for the children in the Wells' and Ende's shops and are invisible to the adults. The Paper Palace is still physically visible but changes location, yet the reason for this sudden change is never explained. In brief, MR Chang loses his original location, which causes Sidney to panic as The Paper Palace is the only place that carries the magical blue notebooks. Other lost objects are the items stolen from his apartment and the manuscript Trause entrusts to him. The greatest loss for Sidney involves Grace, who runs away from home one night, thus temporarily disappearing. She becomes the absence from his life, thereby causing him anxiety over her safety and doubt about her faithfulness.

Sidney creates male characters who suffer from vulnerability or discontent and are victims of coincidence. Nick Bowen, the protagonist he creates in the novel he attempts to write, suffers a different kind of trauma. In a random act of spontaneity, he walks out of his own life without any particular destination. Believing that the chance event of the falling gargoyle is some kind of metaphysical sign, he decides to start an adventure into the unknown, a quest for something new and exciting to lift him out of his contented but boring marriage. Sidney, in an authorial error, paints himself into a corner: Nick inadvertently traps himself in an underground bunker without a key and from which he has no means of escape. The reader discovers that the only person who could possibly rescue Nick, unbeknownst to him, has suffered from a fatal heart attack, and no one else knows where the key is or that

Nick is down there. Sidney creates male characters in his fiction that are doomed to failure or destruction.

Absent from the Blue Team

Auster's protagonist by proxy, Nick Bowen, does not question himself or his values. If he has any remorse over the suffering he may be inflicting on others, his narrator does not express it. Auster's primary protagonist, Sidney, admires ethical behavior and moral perfection, as he explains the Blue Team to Grace in the taxi. She ridicules him for his naiveté, saying, "Good people do bad things" (48). He is slightly hurt but consoles himself with the conviction that although she may not adhere to his college-day idealism, he still considers her to be a "permanent, dyed-in-the-wool member of the Blue team" (96). Then she cries, which confuses and silences him. In physical terms, this conversation takes place as they are crossing the Brooklyn Bridge, a symbolic crossing of a threshold. Up to that point, Sidney does not seem to be aware of any dysfunction in their relationship, but that conversation unsettles him, and nothing is the same after that cab ride. His doubts begin to set in when this strained conversation is followed by other unexplained events, and he wonders if she was referring to herself as the good person who has done something bad.

His self-image as a good person is shattered when he succumbs to sexual temptation in a casual encounter. The shockwaves from Sidney's side note with Maxine, The African Princess, result in moral self-flagellation; this incident has far-reaching consequences on more than one count. Almost instantly, "regret sets in, and within seconds, regret had turned into shame and remorse" (136). Accused of being a moral hypocrite and disloyal friend to Chang ends in a physical confrontation over the blue notebook. Protesting at first, Sidney later reflects he deserves the beating he takes from Chang and confesses that he deserves the aggression, as if he is expelling himself from membership on this team.

The Power of Female Characters

Grace, Auster's principal female character, transcends the male narrative because she is not entangled in his need for verbal explanations. Her characterization through the smitten Sidney Orr empowers her because she establishes her superiority—her ailing husband needs her care, she does not allow herself to be bullied into carrying her pregnancy to term, and she does not allow Sidney to interrogate her. Her power stems from her physicality and her declining to provide answers to his questions. More self-assured and independent than most of his other female characters, she exerts significant power over the constructed world in that she does not play by the rules of Sidney's narrative. Her presence defines him, brings him to a new understanding of himself, and heals him.

Firstly, her presence comforts her husband during his illness and convalescence. Secondly, she asserts her independence in being the one to decide whether to keep or abort the baby. Thirdly, when she needs time alone, she takes the liberty to leave without any warning that she will be gone for the night. She simply does not come home one evening, and when she reappears, she refuses to be interrogated. She, remaining reticent, proclaims she merely wants to be trusted and that she still loves him. Sidney accepts her on her own terms and does not insist that she answer his initial questions. She does not feel the need to ask for his permission for leaving, let alone apologize upon her return. After his initial tirade and suspicion, he retreats when she insists that she has no desire or obligation to explain herself. In his determination not to alienate her and to remain non-judgmental, Sidney muses, "I was her husband, not a lieutenant in the moral police" (70). His acceptance is only temporary, however, and when he begins to reflect on this incident in the blue notebook, doubt sets in. An aura of mystery surrounds her, but she is portrayed as such an ideal in his eyes, like a bubble he is afraid to burst, that he accepts her silence, mainly to avoid any confrontation. Of course, because he is a word addict, he then goes on to fill that silence with his own words. I

argue that Grace, on the other hand, epitomizes the female character in Auster's oeuvre who does not share that need. When questioned, she chooses silence, and when she declines to provide explanations, he writes down the story that he *imagines* could fill the empty spaces. Fourthly, the fact that she is absent during the burglary of their apartment is symbolic of Sidney's vulnerability when he she is not present. In Sidney's recollection of the scene, he describes her as calm when Jacob directs sarcasm at and resentment towards her. Even when Jacob physically aggresses her, thereby causing her to miscarry and be hospitalized, Sidney portrays her as somehow being transcendental. *This is how Sidney sees her, or remembers her.* The reader learns of Grace's glorious attributes only through the words Sidney uses. In this case, words are used to glorify the female character, especially if one is to contrast her equanimity on being abused by Jacob with Sidney's self-loathing and regret after he is physically aggressed by Chang. One possible explanation is that Grace is indeed a strong, stoic woman, and Sidney is grateful for her care and patience during his illness. Another explanation, from a feminist perspective, is that Sidney is so engrossed in a self-centered bubble that he is oblivious to her suffering and pain. Auster very subtly leaves the interpretation to the reader, as he is wont to do.

Like *The Book of Illusions, Invisible,* and several of his other novels, the narrator eliminates the distance between the narrator and the narratee with his informal conversational tone. The reader is under the impression that he is listening to the narrator's internal monolog, which is conducive to trusting his words as truthful. As, however, Auster in his essays and memoirs constantly alerts the reader to the unreliability of words, the reader then must stop to question his own understanding of the characters and their motives. Is Grace as ethical as Sidney's image of her? His total rapture of her casts doubt as to how "true" she is, but he is so desperate to keep her that he is willing to accept her as she is despite her evasiveness, which he acknowledges. Sidney, repeatedly throughout the text, reiterates that

there is nothing else in the world but her (48), thereby embodying the extreme example of romantic love. If someone is in mortal fear of losing the loved one, (116) his judgment is bound to be clouded, and he consequently forgoes any tactic that will push the loved one away. This is evident when he holds back on his questioning of her, waiting for her to be ready to speak. Finally, Auster puts words into Sidney's mouth that reaffirm that finding out the truth does not matter when he writes, "I don't know if it's fact or fiction, but in the end I don't care. As long as Grace wants me, the past is of no importance" (195). He also believes that Grace has the power to "dismantle the architecture of happiness that had been growing up around us for the last several days" (164). In short, Grace is in control of the relationship and is free to use words only when it suits her. It would appear that Auster's portrayal of Grace might classify him as a feminist.

Writing for the Author and the Narrators

Oracle Night is Auster's emblematic metaphor for the writing process, surpassing *The Invention of Solitude, Moon Palace,* and *Travels in the Scriptorium* in its extensive references to the writing process and the precariousness of words. The attention Auster pays to words, notebooks, and other writing implements suggests that words, their meaning and their physicality, govern his world as an author as well as the constructed worlds of his characters. He acknowledges his attachment to the mechanics of the writing process in almost every interview he has ever given. Writing, for Auster, is not merely the verbal articulation of his ideas. It is a physical activity that has its own parameters: his desk, the pen he uses, the time it takes him to write a single page, the color and size of the paper or notebook, the typing on a mechanical typewriter after writing longhand. His narrator-protagonists being writers echo his attention to detail.

The writing process has vital significance for his protagonist as well. Sitting at his desk, buying new writing materials and his joy in putting fresh ink into the pen echo the

importance Auster attaches to the physical aspect of the writing process. In reference to "the day in question," the day his adventures with Blue Notebook begin, Sidney writes, "Whenever I think about that morning now [the present, twenty years later], the sound of that paper is always the first thing that comes back to me…I believe this is where it began. In the space of those few seconds, when the sound of that pencil was the only sound left in the world" (4). This is reminiscent of an earlier novel when Effing says to Marco Fogg, "The only sound I want to hear is your pen moving across the paper" (*Moon Palace* 162). Peter Aaron writes, "Without even knowing it, I enter the lives of strangers, and for as long as they have my book in their hands, my words are the only reality that exists for them" (*Leviathan* 4). Clearly, words function as tools to express thoughts or feelings, but they also imbue characters with a sense of awe. Auster and his narrator share such reverence for writing that it becomes difficult not to conclude that Auster's protagonists are his mouthpiece regarding the writing process.

Writing, in its nonphysical aspect, is a need or illness for writers. Whether they write to work through their traumas or to distract themselves from them, Auster and his characters express the vital urgency they feel to use words, to articulate themselves verbally. Writer's block, a kind of absence in itself, is a condition which is both a result of trauma or can cause it. Words have the power to evoke emotions in the present, preserve the past, and (in *Oracle Night*) predict or change the future. In an interview with Michael Wood, Auster says, "I think of a notebook as a house for words, as a secret place for thought and self-examination" (Wood 132). This is particularly true in his memoir *Winter Journal*, in which he examines each memory he has from the very first recollection when he was three until the recent ones at the age of sixty-four. In the fictional world of Sidney Orr, the story that he imagines about Grace's affair with John Trause is his attempt to deal with his self-doubts. The most appropriate analogy for the author and the writing process is one that the character Quinn

(*The New York Trilogy*) makes in referring to an author in the novel as a ventriloquist—an analogy Auster implies is an accurate metaphor.

The Importance of Words

Both Auster and his fictional characters acknowledge their inspiration from the words of other authors. In Auster's intertextuality, some words spoken, written, or read by the characters in *Oracle Night*, are lifted from events in literary works by other authors, namely, HG Wells, Dashiell Hammett, and the fictional Sylvia Maxwell. Storytelling also dominates much of this novel. Auster tells Sidney's story; Sidney tells Nick's story. In both constructed worlds, there is no shortage of other stories. It is as if to tell his story, Sidney has to tell many stories and stories within stories, hence the mise-en-abyme so characteristic of *Oracle Night.* They all converge into constructing Sidney's identity and the world around him as he characterizes himself with his homodiegetic response to stories about dead babies, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and fictional characters in the story he writes about Nick Bowen. Sidney is sensitive to sad newspaper articles he reads or stories he is told by Chang. He reads a newspaper clipping about a baby who is discarded in the toilet by her mother and keeps it in his wallet for years. A mother who cannot stop nursing her dead baby brings him to tears. Chang stirs Sidney's historical curiosity about the book burning in Maoist China, but Chang also makes the pithy comment about the importance of notebooks, "Everybody makes words. Everybody writes things down" (6). Auster alludes to HG Wells' *The Time Machine* and uses an anecdote from Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* about a falling gargoyle to provide his protagonist with a springboard for Sidney's inspiration using the gargoyle in the incipient novel about Nick Bowen. Nick Bowen, an editor rather than a writer, meets Ed Victory, who in turn tells him stories, one of them about a man called John Trause! In an empathetic effort to honor the dead, Ed Victory keeps the Prague phonebooks in his underground bunker, The Bureau of Historical Preservation, as a record of all the people who

had once lived in that city. Unlike Nick Bowen who turns his back on his life before the falling gargoyle and Sidney who is intent on erasing the past by destroying Blue Notebook, Ed Victory is desperate to keep the memory of the past alive.

Other novels by Auster also use words in unconventional tropes. In *Moon Palace,* words and books constitute the major scope of the novel. Marco Fogg's furniture consists of boxes of books stacked together to form a bed and a table. His dismantling of " furniture," which constitutes the loss of his library, is another symbol of the dependence on words. In short, *Moon Palace*'s protagonist's life falls apart without words in his life. He needs to read them but also to write them. Even during his self-imposed starvation, he writes in his notebook and after recovering, he writes everything that Thomas Effing dictates to him. With the exception of two minor references to the treacherousness of words in *The Book of Illusions,* most of Auster's novels are about the unreliability, not treacherousness, of words to remind the reader of the fictionality of the constructed world.

In *Oracle Night,* however, magic realism lays another dimension to words: their ability to affect the physical world in all three time frames: the present, past, and future. They can erase past wrongs and predict the future. The entanglement of writing implements and suffering from writer's block provides clear evidence that Sidney's consciousness is governed by words. He needs them to create fiction as well as to inscribe his trauma. In the fusion of the various levels of narration within Sidney's writing, he allows the magical power of words in his constructed universe to infiltrate his personal bubble. Words acquire their own agency in the narrative. Sidney perceives the blue notebook as having magical powers and the congruence within and across Levels 1 and 2 reaffirm the blurred lines between physical realities and imagination or fiction. I will use capital letters to turn the blue notebook into a proper noun, as Blue Notebook acquires the traits of an autonomous character with a power to alter physical reality.

Blue Notebook Brings Words to Life

Blue Notebook, a repository of words, is described in minute detail: the size of the page, the quadrille lines, and the spacing. Describing writing implements vividly is common in Auster's novels, particularly because the protagonists are authors themselves. It is also common knowledge that Auster writes longhand and then types up the manuscript on a typewriter. When Sidney first discovers Blue Notebook, he believes it cures him of his writer's block. He is enchanted. When he is writing in it, he becomes so engrossed that Blue Notebook removes him from physical reality, both actively and passively, affecting both his capacity to hear and to be seen by others. In effect, Blue Notebook creates a space within a space, as it were, explaining his absence from the physical space he is in with Grace. On one occasion, he is unable to hear the telephone ringing; he swears that it did not ring. That is not an extraordinary occurrence; intense concentration can make us oblivious to surrounding sounds. The second occasion is more striking: his own "absence" from the room even when he is there. Grace wonders where he is when she does not find him in his study even though he swears that he was there. Auster had alluded to the power of words to magnetize the writer. "By entering the words that had stood before him on the page, he was able to forget his body" (*Moon Palace 238*), but in *Oracle Night,* words carry Sidney into another dimension, which renders him invisible as well as insensitive to factors external to his writing. Auster uses this touch of magic realism to underscore the control that words exert on even our physicality. Blue Notebook both creates and breaks the bond of friendship with Chang, releases Sidney from his writer's block, and imagines disturbing explanations for Grace's mysterious behavior. "Ever since I bought that notebook, everything's gone out of whack. I can't tell if I'm the one using the notebook of if the notebook's been using me" (148). Blue Notebook's uncanny ability to mold the events and thoughts of its narrator can

only be regarded as testament to the tribute Auster pays to writing implements' power to alter experience.

Blue Notebook does more than metaphorically remove Sidney from any contact while he is working. It teaches him to be even more suspicious of his use of words. After his debacle with Chang, he writes, "If I had learned anything from my ferocious encounter with him on Saturday, it was that the notebook was a piece of trouble for me and whatever I tried to write in it would end in failure" (188). Disgruntled with his failure to complete the Nick Bowen novel and believing that words have a magical power to transform the realities in the physical world, Sidney thinks that by destroying the blue notebook, he can obliterate the ugly facts he has imagined about Grace. In the attempt to destroy everything he has written, he rips it all to shreds. The written pages contain the unfinished novel about John and Grace's affair. He also rips out the blank pages, which represent future failures. Auster portrays Sidney as an insecure man who cannot deal with the past and is afraid of the future.

Chang refuses to sell Sidney the last remaining blue notebook in his store. Sidney refuses to buy the red one in its place. Fighting over the color of the notebook is no trivial matter; Blue Notebook, as Sidney, Chang, and Trause believe, has magical powers. Auster is creating a fictional conflict about who has the right to use words, or who "deserves" to use their magic. After Chang's interpretation of Sidney's behavior as hypocritical, he believes Sidney does not deserve the privilege of writing in a blue notebook. Sidney, on the other hand, cannot fathom being deprived of his source of inspiration. He cannot accept the idea that another person is preventing him from writing. After all, it is Blue Notebook who had the power to inspire him again after his months of creative paralysis.

Sidney uses Blue Notebook to write more than one story. The first one is Nick Bowen's story. It is followed by other fragments and ideas for subsequent writing. Then one day as he broods over Grace's unexplained and erratically distant/close relationship with him,

he begins an attempt to understand her behavior. He begins with "Imagine this" (189) to launch a hypothetical explanation for her one-night disappearance and for doubts about keeping the baby: an affair with their best friend and his mentor, John Trause (an anagram for Auster). His theoretical explanation has a significant impact on him. First of all, it satisfies his need for answers. Secondly, it gives him another pretext to exonerate Grace from her hurtful behavior towards him. He is not angry with her or with John; he *understands.* His understanding is the key to his ability to transcend whatever digression she may have committed. If words can alter reality, then it is up to the writer to retaliate. Sidney, in his attempt to control words, kills his friend, Blue Notebook; they cannot co-exist. This is Auster's only novel that places the protagonist in control of the final narrative by destroying it.

Fusion of Experience/Imagination and Time

Auster engages the reader with paratextual similarities to comment on the fluid nature of fiction. Name changes within and across Levels 1 and 2 reassert the fusion between the "real" world of Sidney Orr and the "fictional" world of Nick Bowen. Orr's name is originally Orlowsky, a name that appears in Ed Victory's Warsaw phonebooks, and Chang becomes MR Chang, which Sidney originally mistakes as being an abbreviation of the word mister. Changing of names is an attempt to deny the past by acquiring a new name in order to create a modified identity. Other parallels are the male/female romantic relationships, settings, and chance events. Sidney is mesmerized by Grace, and Nick tells Rosa his brain is in little pieces when she leaves his office. Both male characters place themselves in the hands of their women. Nick's apartment is modeled after John Trause's home—representing the borrowing of geographical inspiration in a writer's work of fiction. A random gargoyle grazes Nick's arm but in *The Maltese Falcon*, it hits Flitcraft in the face. Grace tells Sidney about a dream that mirrors Nick's predicament in being stuck. Nostalgia is presented both as

something to strive for as well as something to overcome. Ed Victory's phonebooks are an attempt to preserver the past, but Richard's 3D viewer is abandoned in order to move beyond the past.

Sometimes, characters cross invisible dimensions when moving physically from one place to another. When Sidney enters The Paper Palace, he develops a Zen type of consciousness. He is no longer the ailing protagonist but an author searching for a sign. Blue Notebook inspires and enchants him; it lures him into overcoming his writer's block, thereby kickstarting the rebirth of his authorial self. Nick avoids the falling gargoyle, thereby whisking him away to leave the old life and start afresh. Previously mentioned is Sidney and Grace's taxi ride across the Brooklyn Bridge, where they leave the familiar comfort zone and step into the uncertainty of their argument and her tears. Sidney's trip to the strip club with Chang represents his migration from the self-righteous, faithful husband to a "fallen" man who has transgressed the values of the Blue Team. Auster manipulates his characters by weaving in and out of physical spaces.

Uncanny coincidences are a motif that constitute much of the intertextuality in the stories at Level 2, including the borrowing of Trause's name for a character in one of Chang's anecdotes regarding World War II. Regine, the temporary maid at John's house reminds Sidney of his guilty episode with Martine, the African Princess. The title of Auster's book is the same as the title of Sylvia Maxwell's *Oracle Night*. In addition to alluding to *The Maltese Falcon*, Auster mentions HG Wells' *The Time Machine,* which inspires Sidney to write a science fiction story about two characters meeting in the present—one of them being a character from the future and the other one from the past. The intertextuality and intratextuality prove that everything is connected in the constructed world of Auster's characters.

Textually, Auster breaks the boundary between fiction and nonfiction in blending time frames and different narrative levels, using unconventional punctuation, and applying an idiosyncratic use of footnotes. He does not enclose dialog in quotation marks, nor does he separate the thoughts and spoken words with any visible marks on the page. The continuous narration with no chapter divisions provides another indication of a fluidity of intertwining events, stories, and characters. In the human world, authors of nonfiction use footnotes to insert side notes or explanations that are subordinate to the narration of the text. The footnotes in *Oracle Night* are not written by the author but by the narrator to deflect the linearity of his story. In Auster's constructed world portraying Sidney's writing in Levels 1 and 2, Sidney uses thirteen footnotes integral to the text. Without it, the narrative would be incomplete. In Level 1, the footnotes are about Grace, his first encounter with the owner of The Paper Palace, his connection with John Trause, his relationship with Grace, Chang's story about book burning in China, the stolen lithograph from his apartment, and his knowledge of John Trause's son. The footnotes in Level 2 contain an explanation of Nick's random choice of Kansas City as his destination, Ed Victory's Polish phonebooks, his adaptation of his previous novel *Tabula Rasa* into a screenplay, and his quandary about how to extricate Nick from his "prison." That the footnotes cut across both levels of narration is not extraordinary, but what is startling is that some of the footnotes run for several paragraphs, sometimes across two or three pages. What remains certain is that Auster is yet again blending fiction with nonfiction, the "real" in Sidney's world with the "unreal" in Nick's world.

Auster casts doubt on the authenticity of the narratives, mainly because of the lapse of twenty years from the time the events take place and the time Sidney decides to write them down. How accurate memory can be over such a long period of time is questionable. The presence of words for the male characters (or the absence of words for Grace) permeates

much of the narration. The lasting impression the reader has, however, is the extraordinary hold that Grace has over Sidney. Considering Auster's memoirs, interviews, and letters, it is not difficult to imagine who serves as his model for the transcendental woman.

CHAPTER 5 READING AUSTER'S GENDERED IDENTITIES

Paul Auster is Jewish by birth and milieu but does not identify himself as a Jewish writer. As he repeats across his interviews and memoirs, his family was not at all religious although he was circumcised and sent to Hebrew school when he was a child. When asked in a television interview to use seven words to describe himself, he omitted "Jewish" in favor of: *American*, *New Yorker*, *wanderer*, *husband*, *father*, *writer*, and *troublemaker*. (*A Conversation with Paul Auster*). He rejected all religious celebrations just as he rejected any label placed on him, ethnic or otherwise. His aversion to the limitation of literary labeling is perfectly understandable considering his writing is so eclectic (see Appendix 1). A few critics have insinuated that *In the Country of Last Things* is about the holocaust, but others agree that his recurring theme of people disappearing or being compelled to hide their identity throughout his novels might be an allusion to the holocaust only in terms of literary motif, not as a specific reference to World War II. He never specifically refers to the persecution of Jews, but he states on several occasions that witnessing his campmate being struck dead by lightning when they were teenagers alerted him to random events and sudden disappearances. But the words he does use in asserting his own identity include "husband" and "father": gendered categories that imply connectedness and dependence on women. As I have argued, this carries over into Auster's fiction, where the stability and instability of his narrator-protagonists' identities often hangs on crucial relationships with female characters.

Many critics posit *The Invention of Solitude,* his first full-length work of nonfiction, as Auster's seminal work, a claim confirmed by the author in interviews and memoirs. Certainly, it establishes the father-son relationship as a continuous theme and conveys many of Auster's reflections on his writing process. However, *Travels in the Scriptorium* is the first novel to use metafiction, intermingling layers of reality, intratextuality, and shifting narrative stances, evident in the three focus novels of this thesis. Auster narrates the story of the

fictional Mr. Blank extradiegetically before turning Blank into a narrator in a sublevel of the mainframe story, thereby rendering him a character in another character's plotline. Blank, in an amnesiac state, needs his memory to reconstruct his identity, something he can only do by writing his story, which is, in fact, the story of his characters. This, too, echoes several theorists' position that reconstructing an identity necessitates a process of storytelling; it is through constructing a story that an identity can be developed. Mr. Blank takes on Auster's role as the author of several novels as the names of characters from previous and subsequent novels emerge throughout this compendium of characters. Blank is haunted by *ghost-like beings* (15), *shadow beings* (34), *phantoms* (35), *damned specters* (73), *my victims* (73), *the monsters* (97), *mob of the damned* (105) *and faceless men* (105). One of those characters in the Blank's sanitorium says, "Without him [Mr. Blank], we are nothing, but the paradox is that we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us. For once we are thrown out into the world we continue to exist, and our stories go on being told, even after we are dead" (129). This testament to the permanence of literature is another echo of statements Auster has made in his memoirs and interviews. Why else would the same names re-emerge in his other works of fiction? David Zimmer and Anna Blume from *The Book of Illusions* and Stillerman from *The New York Trilogy,* are only a few of these examples.

The authors within the constructed world of fiction are sometimes in disharmony with the characters they create. This is evident in *Invisible* but also in *Man in the Dark,* when the character revolts against his author and plans to assassinate him. Sidney Orr's inability to extricate his character, Nick Bowen, from the underground bunker frustrates him to the point of scrapping the entire manuscript when he realizes that his writing attempt results in failure. Auster leaves his protagonist-authors at loose ends, and rather than resolve their dilemmas, he plays a game with the reader by allowing him to pretend to take over the role of author. In

this respect, the reader takes on the role of detective in order to provide answers to the unresolved mysteries.

Literary Space

Literary spaces are replete with the use of missing persons, or disappearance of persons (or places, as in *Oracle Night*). The missing or lost persons set the protagonist on a mission to find them or to reconstruct their identities. In addition to the characters in the focus novels, Auster looks for his father, Anna Blume for her brother, Peter Aaron for Benjamin Sachs, and Mr. Blank for himself. The notion of the quest for identity (one's own or someone else's) permeates Auster's fiction. In most cases, the missing person reappears, but changed somehow, with a reformulated identity. Hector Mann disappears as a silent film maker but reappears only as a recluse making films for private viewing. The *I* in Adam Walker disappears from his own narration and becomes a *you* and a *he*. Grace disappears for one night and returns a calmer, more self-assured person. Chang and his Paper Palace disappear and return antagonistically towards Sidney. Even Sidney makes a literary disappearance as a consequence of his mysterious illness and emerges slowly and tentatively, but only with the help of the "magical" blue notebook. How the missing persons are found, however, is not constant: sometimes they intend to be found and sometimes they are found by coincidence. Auster uses the disappearance as a literary device and the reemergence of the characters to denote a change, even if that change is often random.

His use of the author's disappearance, though, strikes a different chord. It is not uncommon for Auster's novels to contain manuscript pages sent to a friend. It is at this point that the narrators of his novels abandon the characters they create to the second level of Auster's narration. The book that the reader has in his hands is entirely the fabrication of the mind of the primary narrator, rendering Auster's novel a "second-hand" story claimed to be the memoir of an aging person and written many years after the events take place. It is as if

this strategy, along with the metaphysical musings of Auster and his characters, serves as a reminder to the reader of the fictionality of the story he is reading and a profound commentary on the nature of fiction. The narrator addresses the reader directly, exemplified by one of Auster's favorite phrases by Rimbaud, "Je est un autre."

Literary Time

Literary time is warped with the shifting narrative perspectives and multilayered narration. Auster defines memory as "the space in which a thing happens for the second time" (*Solitude* 83). The lucid articulation of memory of events from a sometimes distant past presents the question of accuracy, but as Auster publicly claims, he presents uncertainties without intending to resolve them. Faithful to the notion of the death of the author, he leaves that to the reader. In the constructed world of fiction, Auster's protagonists and their allies view time as important for ensuring that their experiences are remembered in the future and that they or their icons or nemesis are immortalized: Hector Mann, Adam Walker, Born, Benjamin Sachs, Nick Bowen, as cited previously. The protagonist-authors can hold on to the present only by projecting their records into the future. Of Auster's three memoirs, *Winter Journal* is the one closest to a "diary." Apart from the screen by screen narration of the film he narrates, most of this text is devoted to 1) capturing the places he has lived in with the significant events and people in his life at the time 2) sharing the image he has of partly his wife but mostly his mother, along with other family members and in-laws.

Words Are All

Auster's fascination with words translates itself into the power, sometime uncanny, of words in the lives of the characters he creates. August Brill writes, "He sits in a room all day writing it down, and whatever he writes cones true" (*Man in the Dark* 10). Characters in *Oracle Night* are deeply affected by oral and written words used in the various stories Sidney or Nick tell or hear and read. Furthermore, the names of his characters are not haphazard

choices; they bear symbolic signification. Examining Hector's last name is illuminating: Mann, the everyman, the human, the vulnerable, the questor. The heroine, in the eyes of the narrator-protagonist, is Alma Grund. Alma, meaning soul, is the thread that brings Zimmer back to life; she rekindles his soul. Grund, on the other hand, is the German word for ground, and similarly, she grounds Zimmer; she provides him with the concrete possibility of a new life, a new family after the loss of his initial one. For *Invisible,* the symbolism of the protagonist's name is almost trite. Adam, at the start of the novel, is young, inexperienced, naïve, and thirsty for a future. Walker is like the motto for Johnny Walker: "Keep walking," which is what Adam Walker does: he continues, he perseveres, he bumbles through the first part of his life but eventually finds peace because he continues walking. His sister's name, Gwynn, comes from the medieval Welsh tradition meaning 'light' or 'fair.' In Walker's eyes, she is the light of his life. Finally, in *Oracle Night* the name of Sidney Orr's wife represents how he sees her: she is his saving Grace. Auster's care in choosing some names and not others symbolically can be explained by his randomness; he is often, but not always, random in his literary choices.

So Why Should We Care?

There is no doubt that Auster's popularity is at least partially due to the strong entertainment factor: his books are fun to read. The works were also critically appreciated, witnessed by the prizes he has won or awards for which he was nominated in good standing. [see Appendix 2] His works have attracted critical acclaim for his skillful blend of postmodern literary strategies and modern, almost romantic, themes. What remains obscure is the reason for the oversight of a gendered reading of his novels. Auster negotiates the power female characters exert over the male protagonists and their transcendence of the verbal world created by the male writers. He foregrounds the importance of the female storyteller in referring to Shahrazad. "A voice that speaks, a woman's voice that speaks, a voice that

speaks of stories of life and death, has the power to give life" (*The Invention of Solitude* 153). This thesis has argued that the female characters and their dominance over the use of words, a major component of Auster's writing, has not been given its due.

It is true that a handful of critics (including Stefania Ciocia, Jim Peacock, and Thornton Carstensen) have paid some attention to the portrayal of female characters, but Peter Ferry and Angels Carabí have critiqued Auster's novels through a gendered reading using a different lens, that of Masculinity Studies, a field still in development. Rather than using a gendered reading to address female characters in the novels, they examine the role of the male as portrayed in contemporary American fiction. They posit that literature, as a powerful tool in raising awareness and inspiring social change, can deconstruct the traditional, hegemonic image of what it means to be a man in modern society in order to engender a more egalitarian attitude: to be caring, unaggressive in the face of violence, and behave as equal partners without "losing their masculinity."

Peter Ferry argues that literature can challenge mainstream ideology regarding masculinity by presenting alternative versions of manhood and that fictional narratives can propose those alternatives. In "Writing Men: Recognizing the Social Value of Counterhegemonic Masculinities in American Fiction," he suggests that the role of contemporary New York fiction will reshape the image of what it means to be a man. Auster's male protagonists are vulnerable and endearing, so it is easy to see how male readers may even look up to men who are able to expose their vulnerability shamelessly. Ferry's observation that the importance of portrayal of men as counter-mainstream may be sociologically significant in helping to shape an altered perception of masculinity. Angels Carabí argues that it is not enough to dismantle the traditional hegemonic image of masculinity or declare a support for equal rights; even men who reject hegemonic gender identities need models of how that translates into "real life." He believes that Auster and

other contemporary writers can present role models for these men by portraying male protagonists who appreciate the value of tenderness, expressing emotion, yet are not emasculated.

Auster empowers women by stroking the female ego, but he also provides male characters as alternative role models for masculinity. Auster's writing appeals to an audience interested in more nuance than conventional stereotypes or battles of the sexes can offer, one that can cheer along the women yet still appreciate and empathize with the men without considering the men's attempts to solve all the women's problems as a result of dominant masculinity.

Appendix 1—Paul Auster's Published Works (not including his translations)

Novels

The New York Trilogy	1987
In the Country of Last Things	1987
Moon Palace	1989
The Music of Chance	1990
Leviathan	1992
Mr. Vertigo	1994
Timbuktu	1999
The Book of Illusions	2002
Oracle Night	2003
The Brooklyn Follies	2005
Travels in the Scriptorium	2006
Man in the Dark	2008
Invisible	2009
Sunset Park	2010
4321	2017

Poetry

Unearth	1974
Wall Writing	1976
Fragments from the Cold	1977
Facing the Music	1980
Unearth	1980
Disappearances: Selected Poems	1988
Collected Poems	2007

Screenplays

The Music of Chance	1993
Smoke	1995
Blue in the Face	1995
Lulu on the Bridge	1998
The Inner Life of Martin Frost	2007

Nonfiction: Essays, Memoirs, Letters, Autobiographies

White Spaces	1980
The Art of Hunger	1981
The Invention of Solitude	1982
The Red Notebook	1993
Why Write?	1996
Hand to Mouth	1997
The Story of My Typewriter	2002
Winter Journal	2012
Here and Now: Letters 2008-2011 with J.M. Coetzee	2013
Report from the Interior	2013
A Life in Words	2017
Talking to Strangers: Selected Essays, Prefaces, Other Writings, 1967-2017	2019
Groundwork: Selected Autobiographical Writings	2020

Miscellaneous

Auggie Wren’s Christmas Story	1990
Squeeze Play (pseudonymed Paul Benjamin)	1993
Groundwork: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979	1995
The Red Notebook	1995
I Thought My Father Was God (ed.)	2001
True Tales of American Life	2001
The Best Substitute for War	2001
The Story of My Typewriter	2002
The Bartlebooth Follies	2002

Appendix 2—Awards

1989 Prix France Culture de Littérature Étrangère for *The New York Trilogy*

1990 Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters

1993 Prix Médicis Étranger for *Leviathan*

1996 Bodil Awards – Best American Film: *Smoke*

1996 Independent Spirit Award – Best First Screenplay: *Smoke*

1996 John William Corrington Award for Literary Excellence

2003 Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

2006 Prince of Asturias Award for Literature

2006 Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters for Literature

2007 Honorary doctor from the University of Liège

2007 Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres

2009 Premio Leteo (León, Spain).

2010 Médaille Grand Vermeil de la ville de Paris

2012 NYC Literary Honors for fiction

1991 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction finalist for *The Music of Chance*

2001 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Timbuktu*

2004 International Dublin Literary Award shortlist for *The Book of Illusions*

2005 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Oracle Night*

2007 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *The Brooklyn Follies*

2008 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Travels in the Scriptorium*

2010 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Man in the Dark*

2011 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Invisible*

2012 International Dublin Literary Award longlist for *Sunset Park*

2017 Booker Prize Shortlist for *4321*

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