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IDENTITY IN PAUL AUSTER'S NOVELS

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ÖZET

Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı
Paul Auster'ın Romanlarında Kimlik
Işıl ÖZCAN

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimleri Enstitüsü
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı
Amerikan Kültürü Edebiyatı Programı

Paul Auster çağdaş bir yazardır ve postmodern romanları ile ünlenmiştir. Ancak, yazarın diğer edebi kimlikleri unutulmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amaçlarından bir tanesi, yazarın tüm eserlerine bakarak, gösterdiği edebi çeşitliliğe dikkat çekmek ve yazarın romancılık yanı sıra şair, çevirmen, tiyatro yazarı, ve film yönetmeni kimliklerini hatırlatmak, tanıtmaktır. Auster'ın farklı sanatsal girişimlerini hayatının farklı dönemlerinde gerçekleştirdiği göz önüne alınarak, yazarın kariyerinde farklı dönemlere odaklanarak eserleri incelenecektir. Bu sayede, yazarın kimlik konusuna gösterdiği farklı yaklaşımlar da gözlemlenebilecektir.

Auster'ın esinlendiği pek çok düşünce tarzı vardır: varoluşçu felsefe, postmodernizm, Yahudilik, Fransız şiiri vb. Auster, bu esin kaynaklarının özgünlüğünü korur ve eserlerinde kimlik tartışmalarında, esinlediği alanlardan etkiler göze çarpar. Bu tezin amacı, bu esin kaynaklarının, kimlik tartışması üzerinden Auster romanlarındaki izlerinin incelenmesi ve kimliğin iki olgusuna bakmaktır: senkronik ve dialronik.

Anahtar Kelimeler: **1)**Varoluşçuluk, **2)**Postmodernizm, **3)**Otobiyografi, **4)** Baba, **5)** Yahudilik

ABSTRACT

Identity in Paul Auster's Novels

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Paul Auster is a contemporary American writer. He is widely known as a postmodern novelist but his other literary identities are neglected. This study attempts to examine examples from the writer's entire output in order to do justice to the wide range of his work. Paul Auster is also a translator, a poet, a playwright, and a movide director. These different artistic activities of the writer might be observed in different phases in his life. The aim of considering as many phases as possible from Paul Auster's life is to determine how he approaches the theme of identity.

Auster offers a heterogenous blend of all his influences and offers a unique approach to identity. In his novels, identities show postmodern, existential, and European aspects and are marked by fluidity. In fact, the various influences Auster has make his identity as a writer fluid, too in the sense that he uses his varying themes from varying influences simultaneously. Therefore, an analysis of identity in Auster's novels can be analyzed by looking at his early career to understand his own construction of identity. Then, the manifestations of these influences in his works can be analyzed in terms of the fluid identities his novels portray. This thesis concludes that in Auster's novels- as well as in Auster's person- identity appears in two ways: sychronically and diachronically

 Key Words: **1**) Existentialism, **2**)Postmodernism, **3**) Autobiography

               4) The Father,   **5**)Jewishness

IDENTITY IN PAUL AUSTER'S NOVELS

CHAPTER ONE

ON IDENTITY: A SURVEY

CHAPTER TWO

**IDENTITIES IN INTERACTION: "DE-FATHERED" SONS IN
MOON PALACE AND THE INVENTION OF SOLITUDE**

CHAPTER THREE

**THE PARODY OF DETECTION: PERSONA AS IDENTITY
IN THE NEW YORK TRILOGY**

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERTEXTUALITY, SPATIALITY, AND IDENTITY IN <u>TRAVELS IN THE SCRIPTORIUM</u>: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXAMPLE OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

INTRODUCTION

Paul Auster was born in 1947 in Newark, New Jersey to an assimilated middle-class Jewish family. He started his literary pursuits when he was a student at Columbia University in New York. Since then, he has been writing, and now, his creative output presents an exciting variety. Paul Auster is mostly classified as a novelist, or rather, as a postmodernist novelist. Nevertheless, Paul Auster is not merely a novelist, and it would unfair to restrict his work to postmodernist practices. It is important to note that he is also a poet, a playwright, an essay writer, a translator, an editor, a film director and a screenwriter. His works show an influence of the existentialist mode of thinking besides that of postmodernist practices. We see the presence of a remarkable mix of American, European, and Jewish themes that do not so much coalesce into homogeneity as illuminate each other within a framework that keeps these elements heterogeneous.

By dividing Auster's career into two stages, we can hope to do justice to the noteworthy range of his artistic activities. This might also give us the chance to

observe the changes in his literary, artistic identity as well as the changes he went through as a person. Thus, while considering Auster's oeuvre, we can first look at his early works that are composed of poetry, critical essays and translations in the 1970s and consider him as a highbrow European-American intellectual. Secondly, we can look at Auster's literary activities from the 1980s up to the present. He can be considered a successful novelist for his narration, characterization, and style, all three of which reflect not simply postmodern influences but an elaborate combination of postmodernist and existentialist themes and approaches. In this period, his range of artistic activities extends to cinema, middlebrow as well as highbrow literature, and he seems to show a qualitatively different and more intense interest in European Jewish history and themes.

The first assumption that this thesis proposes for a processual analysis of Auster's career is that Auster's early works act can as guides in helping us recognize the influences on Auster's writing and on the formation of his literary identity. His early works are almost entirely neglected; for example, there is yet no work devoted solely to his poetry. In the 1970s, Auster translates French poets and European writers whom he reads extensively and admires to the point of imitation. Thus, his translations are first-hand sources for his literary interests. Auster writes critical essays about most of these poets and writers. These essays reveal what he admires in those works. In his poetry, he embraces the themes he favors in those works. The first stage seems to end in 1979, with Auster deserting poetry and turning to prose. However, the themes of his essays and poetry continue to echo in his novels. Put differently, the voice Auster gains in his early period is heard in his entire oeuvre. Therefore, while analyzing Auster's early period, his translations, his poetry, his critical essays, the thematic parallels among them, and Auster's transition from poetry to prose appear to be inter-related fields that offer paths to follow in examining the change and development in his literary and personal life.

Paul Auster's college years might serve as a useful starting point in analyzing the first stage. Auster graduates with a B.A in English and comparative literature from Columbia University in 1969. He receives an M.A. in Renaissance literature from Columbia in 1970. As an undergraduate, Auster reads modern French poets like

Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine in his French Literature class. Seeing that his French at the time is not advanced enough to read these poems well, he begins translating these poems. He refers to these translations as "real acts of discovery, labors of love" (The Red Notebook 102)[1]. In an interview with Stephen Rodefer, Auster explains,

> The foreignness was daunting to me—as though a work written in a foreign language was somehow not real—and it was only by trying to put them into English that I began to penetrate them. At that point, it was a strictly private activity for me, a method to help me understand what I was reading, and I had no thought about trying to publish them. (101)

In 1971, after he graduates, Auster moves to Paris and lives there for four years with his girlfriend Lydia Davis who is also a writer, translator, and an intellectual like Auster. They get married in 1974, have a son together, and the marriage ends in 1979. In Paris, Auster's passion for reading, translating, and writing poetry intensifies and he has a very productive period.

Auster writes most of his poetry during his four-year stay in Paris. On his return to New York from Paris, he begins to publish them. Between 1970 and 1972, Auster writes twenty-five poems that he publishes in an edition entitled Unearth in 1974. In 1976, Auster publishes Wall Writing, which is a collection of thirty-seven poems he has written between 1971 and 1975. He publishes Fragments from Cold in 1977 which includes twenty-three poems. Disappearances, which is another brief collection of poems that Auster has written in 1975, is published in 1988. All these editions are small ones, and they receive little public attention (Springer 65). However, in interviews and autobiographical writings, Auster does not express any anxiety about being a little-known poet at the time. What he reveals in such accounts is his desire to find the best medium in literature that helps him express himself.

Besides writing poetry extensively during his stay in Paris, Auster continues doing translations of works he likes to read and begins to make money by translating some of these texts as well as other texts. In 1972, Auster translates poems for, and edits A Little Anthology of Surrealist Poems. In 1974, he publishes his Dupin

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[1] The Red Notebook will be referred to as TRN after this point.

translations as <u>Fits and Starts: Selected Poems of Jacques Dupin</u>. On his return to New York, he continues translating his favorite readings. For example, in 1976, Auster translates and publishes <u>The Uninhabited: Selected Poems of André du Bouchet</u>. In 1977, Auster and Lydia Davis translate <u>Jean-Paul Sartre: Life Situations</u> which is published as <u>Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays</u> in 1978. In 1982, Auster edits, writes a preface, and contributes to the translation of <u>The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry</u>. In 1983 edits and translates <u>The Notebooks of Joseph Joubert</u>: <u>A Selection</u>. In 1983, he also translates Stéphane Mallarmé's <u>A Tomb for Anatole</u>. In 1985, Auster translates <u>On the High Wire</u> by Philippe Petit. In 1985, Auster also translates <u>Vicious Circles: Two Fictions</u> and <u>After the Fact</u> by Maurice Blanchot. In 1992 Auster translates with Stephen Romer and edits <u>Selected Poems of Jacques Dupin</u>. In 1999, his translations are published in <u>The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays</u> together with Lydia Davis and Robert Lamberton.

The importance of these translations is that he not only translates minor French men of letters like du Bouchet, Dupin but also edits anthologies worthy of wider notice. The Random House anthology shows Auster's comprehensive knowledge of modern French poetry. In addition, his translations of Sartre and Blanchot seem significant since they are important for not only French writing and thinking but also for Western thought in general. These translations show that Auster is interested mostly in French writing and intellectual life in his early period. Yet, it is important to note that when he takes up this deep interest in French writing, Auster has already immersed himself in the works of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Emerson and that by the time he goes to France, he has already read extensively from American literature. To illustrate this double heritage, Harold Bloom writes, "Auster can be said to cross Hawthorne with Kafka" (2004, 1) and points at the influence of Europe in Auster's writing as a mode of mixing. Therefore, the influence of Europe cannot be seen as an all-encompassing influence, a controlling center in Auster. In the preface he writes to his anthology of French poetry, Auster alludes to the American expatriate literature of the 1920s: "the image of the starving young writer serving his apprenticeship in Paris has become one of our enduring literary myths"

(Collected Prose 406)[2]. Auster seems to have wittingly become a contemporary example of the mythical American writer who serves his apprenticeship, develops his talent, and enriches his literary identity in Paris. Apparently, Auster himself seems to be an American writer, translator, essayist, and poet who is discovering and cultivating his literary talents in Europe like his predecessors in the 1920s.

There is yet another element to be included while looking at Auster: Auster is an American Jewish writer. Jewish writers constitute the major topic in Auster's critical essays. In his 1970 essay "The Art of Hunger", Auster carries out a discussion of the despair of the soul and how this despair devours the soul through references to Knut Hamsun's novel Hunger (1890) and Franz Kafka's story "A Starvation Artist". In both works, endless wanderings, internal monologues, self-imposed starvations, and constant quests for authentic lives echo existentialist themes. Through Kafka's hunger artist, Auster presents Jewish tropes of losing God, lack of salvation, and desire for finding one's true voice and place. In 1974, Auster writes "Pages for Kafka" and depicts him as the wandering Jew, who is always on the move on his exile, never resting, never reaching the promised land, and never hoping to reach his destination. In 1975, in his essay "The Poetry of Exile", Auster talks about the impossibility of poetry after the Holocaust in the example of Paul Celan. In Celan, whose poetry is informed by the memory of the Holocaust, "The unspeakable yields a poetry that continually threatens to overwhelm the limits of what can be spoken" (CP 352). In the work of Edmond Jabés, Auster finds a similar theme. In "Book of the Dead" (1976), Auster points at the nullifying impact of the Holocaust of humanity, of history, of the possibility of literature Edmond Jabés, an Egyptian Jew, reveals in his The Book of Questions. In 1987, Auster writes "The Bartlebooth Follies" on George Perec, who is a Polish-French Jew orphaned by the Holocaust. In Perec's works, Auster finds "efforts of the human mind to impose an arbitrary order on the world" and "an emphasis on the inevitability of failure" (392).

In these essays, we can start identifying an outline of the Jewish themes in Auster. Auster seems to point at the unsatisfiable 'hunger' of the Jew for homeland,

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[2] Collected Prose will be referred to as CP after this point.

for security, for a world that might replace the one that has become incomprehensible after the Holocaust. In Kafka's fasting hero, Auster finds the deepest despair of the human soul, the anguish of being, the suffering in the face of nothingness, and the desire for freedom. In Kafka, as a person, Auster finds the image of the wandering Jew, of eternal exile, and futile quest for homeland. Auster uses these Jewish themes in his novels and he presents characters restless in their own skin, always on the move, going after something that will help them define themselves, and never finding what they hoped to find. The memory of the Holocaust that haunts Celan, Jabés, and Perec also haunts Auster. For Auster, and for these writers, the Holocaust is the beginning of the end for many things like writing poetry, preserving the past, like confidence in reason, and faith in God. It is an irreparable fracture in the history of humankind. By writing about writers who have attempted to understand the Holocaust, Auster too sets himself the difficult task of making sense of, or of coming to terms with, the Holocaust. Yet, he seems to feel a burden of likely failure insofar as he allegorically sends his protagonist Anna Blume in <u>In the Country of Last Things</u>[3] to a dystopic, totalitarian country. Where human life is not valued, Auster shows through Anna, nothing makes sense.

A very remarkable work on Auster's poetry is Norman Finkelstein's essay entitled "In the Realm of the Naked Eye: The Poetry of Paul Auster". In this essay, Finkelstein draws attention to Jewish themes in Auster's poetry. He writes, "Like Jabés, Auster is haunted by Jewish themes, and perhaps more importantly, by the Jewish attitude toward writing: to witness, to remember, to play divine and utterly serious textual games" (qtd. in Barone 49). Finkelstein refers to Auster's "Fore-Shadows", which he finds "Celan-like" and which he takes "to be addressed to victims of the Holocaust generally, but perhaps to lost Jewish writers in particular" (49). It is useful to quote the last part of " Fore-Shadows" here:

> I haunt you
> to the brink of sorrow
> I milk you of strength.
> I defy you,
> I deify you

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[3] <u>In the Country of Last Things</u> will be referred to as <u>CLT</u> After this point.

to nothing and to no one,

I become
your most necessary and most violent
heir. (Collected Poems 78).

For Finkelstein, as the "necessary and most violent / heir", Auster belongs to a Jewish culture that is lost, except as "fore-shadows" (50). Auster defies and deifies such specters because he is haunted by these "fore-shadows" as much as he haunts them. Finkelstein explains, "It is just this exchange of spiritual energies, this ghostly confrontation in the domain of tribal memory, which inspires the poem" (50). Then, for Auster, the Jewish experience and his Jewish past are permanent in memory and recurrent in writing.

In other essays and some prefaces, Auster reveals additional sources that have influenced him. In the preface Auster writes for his Andre du Bouchet translation, Auster talks about the poet's theme of self. Auster writes, "Beginning with nothing, and ending with nothing but the truth of its own struggle, du Bouchet's work is the record of an obsessive, wholly ruthless attempt to gain access to self" (CP 399). Among Auster's overall themes, the question of the self, identity, is at the center and it also seems to be an important theme in his analysis of other writers' works. In 1975, Auster also writes "Truth, Beauty, Silence" for the American poet Laura Riding. In her work, Auster finds an attempt "a kind of universal truth in language, a way of speaking that would somehow reveal to us our essential humanness" (338-9). Another essay that was written in 1975 is "From Cakes to Stones: A Note on Beckett's French" where Auster talks about the void, the absence, the silence Beckett uses in his works. Auster is impressed with how Beckett "builds a world out of almost nothing" (350). In 1976, Auster writes "Northen Lights: The Paintings of Jean-Paul Riopelle" and talks about "go[ing] to the limit of life" (310) through art in order to survive. For Riopelle, whose aesthetic Auster defines as the art of knowledge and innocence, painting is "a necessary struggle to gain hold of his own life and place himself in the world. It is the very substance of the man" (314).

The themes that Auster refers to in the works of du Bouchet, Riding, Beckett, and Riopelle can be summarized as the relationship of art and the artist in the artist's attempts at knowing life and his self through his art. Springer observes a similar theme in Auster's poem "Disappearances" where the speaker sees controlling language as a way of controlling, or at least understanding the strange environment he is in (Springer 67). The speaker of the poem is an isolated individual, he is surrounded by a wall, and he has nothing except his language which is itself "a language of stones" that make up the wall (Collected Poems 107). He writes, "It is a wall. / And the wall is death" and he decides to "learn the speech of this place" (108). Yet, the place is too "brutal and incomprehensible" (Springer 67) and the speaker accepts failure in learning the language of that environment: "For the wall is a word. / And there is no word / he does not count / a stone in the wall" (Collected Poems 110). Like Laura Riding, Auster seems to attempt at discovering a truth, about his self and his world, through language and poetry. Or, like Beckett, Auster tries build his world from the nothingness the wall presents. However, he cannot gain access to his self, as he sees in du Bouchet's works, because he cannot gain access to the inherent mystery of language.

The apparent impossibility of using language in poetry as a means of making sense of the world, or carrying a worthy struggle for survival and solidarity in a human world, leads Auster to withdraw from poetry. In the late 1970s, Auster abandons poetry and has not returned to it yet. The period during which Auster abandons poetry is another important period in his life. In the late 1970s, Auster begins to discover changes in himself, and he experiences a withdrawal from poetry. He tries his hand at theatrical plays and prose fiction. Between 1876 and 1977, Auster writes four plays: "Laurel and Hardy Go to Heaven", "Blackouts", "Hide and Seek", and the unpublished "The Torch Song". According to Springer, the common theme of all these plays is identity crises caused by various forms of powerlessness, lack of certainty, and loss of loved one, which will feature in almost all novels of Auster (69). Yet, Auster's nurturing of suc of newly emerging literary tendencies lasts briefly due to his dire financial status. It is 1977, he has a new-born son and the family needs more money. Auster and Lydia Davis are forced to translate on a full-

time basis and they manage to keep up this routine for a year. Auster explains the toll this period takes on him,

> I barely wrote anything for close to a year. My wife and I were grinding out translations to put food on the table, and the rest of the time I was pursuing my half-baked money projects. There were moments when I thought I was finished, when I thought I would never write another word. (TRN 131).

Auster decides come up with a plan to make money than does not involve translation. He designs a card game for baseball but nobody likes his game, no company buys his game. Then, he decides to write a hard-boiled detective story for financial gain. Auster writes, "I was doing everything in my power to prostitute myself" (CP 237). Yet, editors turn him down and tell him that detective novels are *passé*. Soon, his marriage collapses, Auster and Lydia get divorced in November 1978. Around that time, two important things happen and everything about his life changes. In December 1978, he attends an open rehearsal of a dance piece and experiences "a revelation, an epiphany" (TRN 131) during the show. He writes, "I don't know how to call it. Something happened, and a whole world of possibilities suddenly opened up to me" (131). Next day, he writes "White Spaces", a ten-page work of prose-poetry, or in Auster's definition, "a little work of no identifiable genre" which he sees "as the bridge between writing poetry and writing prose" (132). Auster adds, "That was the piece that convinced me that I still had it in me to be a writer. A whole new period of my life was about to begin" (132). Such a period does begin. His father dies and he inherits some money.

In the morning of the night he writes "White Spaces, he learns that his father died that night. The inheritance his father leaves saves Auster from his financial trouble Auster has endured for about three years. He notes about that period,

> The money gave me cushion, and for the first time in my life I had the time to write, to take on long projects without worrying about how I was going to pay the rent. In some sense, all the novels I've written have come out of that money my father left me. It gave me two or three years, and that was enough to get me on my feet again. It's impossible to sit down and write without thinking about it. To think that my father's death saved my life. (132).

Once he finally finds the comfort of locking himself into his room and writing without worries over money, Auster begins writing his novels. Into these novels, he

pours all the existential, intellectual, and artistic experience he has collected until then. In his writing, he continues, albeit in a more complex mode, to attempt to understand life, to search for authentic identity, to question the attainability of existentialist values. Looking at his literary activities in the 1970s, we can consider him a highbrow European-American intellectual who shows passionate interest in sophisticated writers. Among his translations, his poetry, his critical essays, there are parallel themes that enable us to define a particular literary identity Auster develops in this first stage: a European-American writer whose themes include the Holocaust, language, self, and existence.

The publication of City of Glass in 1985 mark the beginning of the second stage in Auster's career. This novel is the first novel in The New York Trilogy—the second novel is Ghosts and the third is The Locked Room—which remains to this day the most-read, the best-known novel of Auster. It would even be right to say that The New York Trilogy is synonymous with Paul Auster. The identity crises Auster portrays in the three novels of the trilogy are presented through detective quest that give immense intellectual pleasure. The self-reflexivity of the novel seems to be almost a realistic necessity rather than a postmodernist game, and this *tour de force* makes Auster one of the most acclaimed contemporary novelists of America. After The New York Trilogy, Auster writes ten more novels and almost all receives admiration: 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 (2004), The Brooklyn Follies (2006), and Travels in the Scriptorium (2007).

These novels are translated into more than fifteen languages and he becomes famous all around the world. In the 1990s, Auster scholarship begins and Auster criticism mainly focuses on his usage of postmodernist themes like identity crises of individuals in the uncertainty and plurality of postmodern world and the metafictional quality of his novels. Not surprisingly, most of this scholarship comes from Europe. The presence of existentialist themes attracts wide readership from Europe. For instance, in 1993, Auster was awarded the annual French *Prix Medicis*

Étranger prize for literature for his novel Leviathan. Early in 2006, he received an important literary award in Spain*, The Prince of Asturias Award* in literature where Philip Roth was among the nominees. Thus, the second stage of Auster's career marks Auster's growing international fame and the success of his sophisticated mix of postmodernist and existentialist themes in his novels.

In the mid-1990s, Auster writes two screenplays, "Smoke" and "Blue in the Face", both filmed and released in 1995. He co-directs "Blue in the Face" with Wayne Wang. In 1995, "Smoke" receives three awards: The Silver Bear, Special Jury Prize; the International Film Critics Circle Award; and the audience award for Best Film at the Berlin Film Festival. In 1999, Auster writes and directs "Lulu on the Bridge", and quite recently, he writes and directs "The Secret Life of Martin Frost", an extended adaptation from The Book of Illusions which was released in New Directors Film Festival in New York in April 2007. Auster's pursuits in cinema, though well within the range of his general themes, are remarkable in the sense that his quest for proper mediums to express himself does not seem to be on the wane. is never settling. He is not restricting himself to any one role, as novelist, poet, translator, screenwriter, or film director.

It is also possible to observe a change in the highbrow literary profile he presents in his early works. In the 2000s, Auster shows unusual interest in the stories of ordinary people and he embraces their stories as eagerly as he does the sophisticated, philosophical discussions on the human condition. Earlier, he was referring to the fracture the Holocaust caused in the history of humankind through elaborate arguments. Now, he takes a more direct and down-to-earth interest in a first-hand representation of the Holocaust with his introduction to Zosia Goldberg's memoir Running Through Fire: How I Survived the Holocaust in 2004. perhaps just as revealing as the title is Auster's approach to this account of the Holocaust. In his early works, he was engaged in philosophical, literary discussions on the aftermath of the Holocaust. Now, he presents us with an artless account of the Holocaust, and while he is passionately involved in the story, he appears utterly free from the anxiety of commenting on it. Also, there is the portrayal of an ordinary American

character in Auster's lighthearted, humanitarian novel <u>The Brooklyn Follies</u> where Brooklyn, the American identity, roots become celebrated. The novel was scorned by many readers and critics on the basis that Auster went too mainstream. But, maybe, Auster took a breath with this novel without abandoning his style. In 2002, Auster finds himself collecting true stories of ordinary people and he edits "<u>I Thought my Father was God: And Other True Stories from NPR's National Story Project</u>". The sorrows, pains, dreams of these true stories touch him and he writes, "I learned that I am not alone in my belief that the more we understand of the world, the more elusive and confounding the world becomes" (<u>CP</u> 453). Yet, his interest in middlebrow, even lowbrow writing does not mean that Auster gives up his intellectual pursuits. In 2006, he edits four volumes of Beckett's complete works and continues his intellectual pursuits. It seems that Auster's identity as a writer and a person is still changing as he is explores the new territory of middlebrow literature while he considers the value of the representation of common man as such who himself epitomizes both postmodern uncertainties and existential crises that make up the bone and marrow of Auster's writing.

After referring two stages in Auster's career, we can now turn to the starting point of this thesis which is related to the lack of detailed studies of Auster's early works. This is because, in a sense, it might be argued that a consideration of the complete output of Auster is crucial in understanding both Auster's oeuvre and his life since focusing merely on his novels offers a rather limited view regarding the illuminating tendencies and patterns his early works reveal. After the publication of the <u>The New York Trilogy</u> and with his ever-increasing popularity in the following decade, his previous works were temporarily forgotten, and he became known for his novels and their precious hoard of postmodern themes. With the emergence of Auster scholarship in the 1990s and its development in the 2000s, his novels have been widely studied. However, only a few critics turned to his previous works, and in a sense, Auster was never really re-discovered and there is still no work devoted solely to his poetry or essays.

As the title of this thesis shows, the aim of this study is to discuss the notion of identity in Auster's novels. The discussion of the phases in Auster's career hoped to determine some key patterns in his literary and personal life. Stressing the importance of considering Auster within the larger framework which his complete output offers, the discussion on identity in Auster's novels will be supported with selected works from his oeuvre. These works, which are examples mostly from his early career like autobiographical accounts and critical essays, when considered together with his novels, reveal that in Auster, identity is a fluid entity which is manifested in two different ways: firstly, identity appears to be synchronic, or multiple, and secondly, identity appears to be diachronically mutable.

The synchronic, multiple aspect of fluid the identity as manifested in Auster's life and works has to do, primarily, with the American, European, and Jewish identities he presents and represents. In a very important sense, he embodies these identities simultaneously and he does not seem to be any one of them in an exclusive manner. Secondly, existentialism and postmodernism interpenetrate each other in his writing, and Auster embodies both modes of thinking simultaneously. It is my contention that Auster cannot be called a strictly American, European, or Jewish writer. Neither can he be called a strictly existentialist or postmodernist writer. His identity is marked by synchronic manifestations of these features and he reflects this fact in his writings. As far as his protagonists are considered, truths change for them in every couple of pages and they are portrayed as eminently able to adapt to these truths, new circumstances as soon as they meet them.

Fluid identities as manifested in time regards the change, the development Auster goes through both as a writer and a person. Although his reactions remain bluntly rebellious as well as refined, the reasons and sources of his reactions change along with changing his identity. From his response to American materialism and the Vietnam war, to his anxiety in facing the fact of the Holocaust and to his solemnly innovative stance toward its representation, Auster has exhibited and imporovised with a remarkably astute series of existential and literary modes of operation. The ground where he voices his thought has always been writing and inn this sense

although the medium stays the same, his perception changes and how he voices his reaction varies, changes in time. The identities of his protagonists also manifest a change, a development in character in time. The claim of this thesis, therefore, is to show that in Auster, identity is radically fluid whether in life or in representation because its fluidity is both synchronic, multiple and a diachronic restlessness and openness. .

In this thesis, the first chapter is devoted to a survey of identity. Firstly, an overview of Western thought on identity is offered in order to outline the change in the perception of identity from Enlightenment to postmodernism. Whereas Enlightenment asserted the rationality of individuals and defined reason as the source of stable, unique, coherent, and unified identities, structuralism argued identity and subjectivity to be constructed through language, society, and ideology. Poststructuralists refused both the Enlightenment argument of rational, coherent identities and the structuralist views of methods that explain identity. Poststructuralist thinkers rejected Enlightenment and structuralism for their controlling and repressing subjectivity through power and authority. In their emphasis on difference of identities and refusal of totalizing theories and systems, poststructuralism paved the way for the postmodern concepts of identity as plural, fragmented, and without a unifying core.

The second part of Chapter one focuses on identity in Auster and employs two approaches. Firstly, the construction of Auster's identity is examined. Auster's autobiographical account in Hand to Mouth (1996) is used as a source because it reveals the construction of his identity in his adolescence and young adulthood. The period Auster recounts in this work reveals his increasing alienation and isolation from his family and America and will establish the time-bound fluidity of his identity. His escape to France, his interest in Jewish writers, his engagement with French existentialism, and the reaction—albeit with differences in its context over time—he shows to his environment will be argued to be permanent, synchronic, and determining factors of the fluidity of his identity that he reflects in his work with themes that parallel his experiences.

The second approach this part employs will consider Auster's approach to identity. Focusing on Auster's critical essays on significant Jewish figures from his early writing, the part hopes to reveal how he conceives of the Jewish identity and experience. This analysis points at Jewish tropes such as the Holocaust, loss, fatherlessness, quest for unitary identity and origin and the impact of these tropes in Auster's novels. In addition, through Auster's search for his father's identity in his semi-autobiographical novel The Invention of Solitude, the theme of loss, which permeates his writing, will be established. The theme of loss is also be explained as Auster's manifestation of the Jewish theme of 'hunger', of longing for past and identity. Furthermore, the connection Auster points out at between American and European writing in the preface to the anthology of French poetry he edits at the beginning of his career is firstly considered as a demonstration of his perception of the identity of the writer, which is obviously fluid. Secondly, this connection is argued to be a variation of the essential connection of Europe with Jewishness, to which, as a Jew, Auster feels close.

The second chapter is devoted to an analysis of one of Auster's most important themes: the loss of the father, and the fatherless sons. The two novels this chapter discusses, The Invention of Solitude and Moon Palace are handled as case studies for the discussions presented on the theme of loss in the previous chapter. The fatherless protagonists of both novels are portrayed to manifest the unsatisfiable, insatiable Jewish 'hunger' for origin, security, and unitary identity through their yearnings for the father. In addition, the father-substitutes the protagonists try to find and their identifications with temporary father-substitutes point out at how loss results in fluidity of identities through never-ending quests for identity and the creation of substitutes to identify with.

Chapter three is devoted to a study of The New York Trilogy. The novel is presented as a parody of the classic detective story. The conventions of detective fiction Auster subverts help him reveal the futility of the quest for identity. This novel remains faithful to postmodern themes such as fragmentation, plurality, and

instability of identities in a world where nothing is certain. The novel is equally faithful to existentialist themes such as the quest for an authentic life, the desire for freedom, the anguish of being, and the suffering at the heart of existence. Auster interweaves these postmodern and existentialist themes in order to be able to operate as, or assume the posture of, a "detective of self" (Bruckner qtd. in Bloom 48). He creates interchanging and fluid identities for the detective, the writer, and the ordinary man in the novel in order to ask questions about identity. At the end of the novel, the mystery of the self remains unsolved, because the narrative has forcefully shown us that the possession of an identity appears radically untenable, which does not mean that we do not commonly hold onto one identity or another.

Chapter four presents another subversion of conventions. In his last novel, Travels in the Scriptorium, instead of laying claim to historical events and persons and fictionalizing them through trans-contextualization, Auster borrows protagonists from his previous novels, arranges a meeting with them in Travels in the Scriptorium and transgresses ontological boundaries of fictional worlds. Thus, Auster plays with the conventions of historiographic metafiction. He fictionalizes his own identity as a writer, treats elements of his literary past not as fictional constructions but as real-world events and persons. The protagonists, who seem to migrate between fictional worlds, appear in this novel with somewhat altered identities. Auster's identity as a writer also undergoes considerable change. In a sense, he portrays identities to be fluid whether in fiction or in reality. Also, through the metaphor of the 'scriptorium' of the novel and the symbolic writer's estrangement in the room of the book, Auster will reveal a change in one of his most persistent themes: the metamorphosing identities of the room and the writer which seems to turn into the writer's loss of identity, or incapability of shifting his identity between the room and himself. Hence, Auster indicates the loss of possibilities for his identity when it ceases to be fluid.

In conclusion, the novels that are discussed in the last three chapters are treated as examples of the synchronically and diachronically fluid of identities in Auster which Chapter one establishes. Through Auster's early works such as his autobiographical accounts and essays on Jewish figures, Auster's synchronous, but

not exclusive, identities as an American, a European, and a Jew are indicated, and the impact of his multiple identities are observed to inform his themes in his novels. Pointing at Auster's simultaneous attraction to existentialist and postmodernist themes again through his early works, it is argued that both modes of thought appear concurrently in Auster in his attempt to define and draw attention to the contemporary search of authentic identities and authentic lives under circumstances that constantly threaten the viability of such felicities.

CHAPTER ONE
A SURVEY OF IDENTITY

1.1. Identity in Western Thought

The discussion on identity has been going on since the beginnings of philosophy. In order to understand Western thought on identity, this section will look at theories from the Enlightenment onwards. Emerged in England in the seventeenth century and developed in Europe in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment doctrine in philosophy and culture asserted the power and authority of rationality in both intellectual and practical life (Brooker 73). Referred to as the foundation of Western humanist ideology, Enlightenment thought considered human beings as stable, coherent, rational individuals, expected them to have a unique selfhood, or identity, and thus established the theory of subjectivity based on rationality. Later, however, these notions were strongly criticized in the works of the poststructuralists and the postmodernists.

Fidelma Ashe writes that Enlightenment thinkers borrowed Aristotle's idea of essence, which is accepted as "the core, unchangeable component that ma[kes] a stone a stone or a society a society" (89). According to Ashe, Enlightenment thinkers also thought that the subject had "some sort of essence that made it what it was, regardless of time and place" (89). Descartes defined the essence of human beings to be their minds, and with his famous claim "I think therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), he asserted the idea of consciousness and rationalism as conditions for an awareness of existence. Against the Cartesian reasoning about the human mind's role in having a knowledge of self, empiricist David Hume offered experience as the way to achieve knowledge. However, Kant offered a new theory of self-knowledge and criticized both rationalism and empiricism. For Kant, rationalism omitted the knowledge of exterior world while trying to achieve self-knowledge. Kant argued that the knowledge of an "objective world" should be included in "our becoming self-consciously aware of out own existence" (Ashe 91). In addition, contrary to Hume's precondition of experience for knowledge - *a posteriori* knowledge-, Kant asserted the necessity of knowledge that exists prior to experience -*a priori* knowledge- to help us understand what a particular experience means.

Common to these ideas is the view on subjectivity which has the power "to control itself and the world around it" through a knowledge of selfhood (93). However, Ashe writes, "Contemporary opponents of this view reformulate the notion of the subject as a product of culture, ideology, and power. Rather than seeing subjectivity as autonomous and fixed, they view the subject as open, unstable and tenuously held together (93). For instance, the theory of Enlightenment that explained selfhood and identity in terms of essentialism and rationalism is challenged by poststructuralism. Poststructuralism, Ashe notes, argues that there can be no unitary, stable self because selfhood is shaped by social forces that change in time along with the subject and its selfhood. In poststructuralist thought, "The subject is 'decentered' and so is understood not to be an autonomous self-producing agent but a product of changing cultural and discursive fields," and the formation of the self

happens through "the subject's internalization of social and cultural norms and assumptions" and not through its "rationally disengaged mind" (89, 94).

According to Ashe, in their opposition to the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous and self-conscious subject, four thinkers and concepts are particularly notable: Freud and the unconscious, Lacan and language, Althusser and ideology, Foucault and power. Freud believed a significant part of subjectivity to be unconsciously established. According to Freud, the id, which is "the reservoir of unconscious drives," was an uncontrollable mechanism devoid of reason (94). The id was controlled by the superego, unconsciously created by the subject, following the norms and prohibitions of society. The controlling of the superego and the irrational desires of the id were mediated by the ego, which Freud presented as the only rational part of the human psyche. Therefore, Freud claimed that desire was the determining factor in human behavior, where reason had little shaping power. With individual reason lacking force, social norms had more effect. The control of the id by the superego placed the "moral laws and prohibitions of society" within the self, and thus, in Freud's theory of the unconscious formation of self, the subject is not autonomous but dependent on social norms (94).

Lacan employed a structuralist theory of identity. Deriving from Freud's view of the unconscious, Lacan defined the unconscious (and identity), to be structured like language, whereby he borrowed Saussure's structuralist approach to language. Ashe writes that Lacan's theories of identity and subjectivity have influenced "parts of contemporary social and political thought" (96). According to Ashe, Lacan argued that the subject has no essence and it is constituted by external forces. In this way, Lacan "took apart the essentialist theories of subjectivity" (96). Lacan finds a fundamental lack of core or origin in the subject, and defines this lack as the primary feature of the subject attacks the notion of the self as a centered, stable, and autonomous entity (96).

Identity, for Lacan, is formed in the symbolic order which is the phase the subject enters when it sees its image in the mirror. The subject "sees a unified,

independent self in the mirror but perceives this self as separate from its own viewing self and the observing parent" (Brooker 138). The subject, as a result, is constituted by "the experience of division and loss, as being in lack" (116). Once in the symbolic order, or the realm of language, the subject begins "a quest for the unobtainable lost object which offers apparent fullness of being" (117). In the symbolic order, "misrecognition of its real self" occurs since the image in the mirror is mistaken to be "more complete and in control of itself than it really is" (Ashe 97). Similar to the image in the mirror, identifications with others also occur and the subject deceives itself to have a unitary identity.

Lacan explains the structure of the symbolic order by applying Saussure's structuralist theory of linguistics, or semiotic theory, to his theory of subjectivity. In his semiotic theory, Ferdinand de Saussure analyzed language "in terms of its present laws of operation, without reference to its historical properties and evolution" (Best 19). For Saussure, the linguistic sign is comprised of two parts: the signifier (an acoustic-visual component) and the signified (a conceptual component). In addition, Saussure defined two properties of language. Firstly, Saussure claimed that "the linguistic sign is arbitrary, that there is no natural link between the signifier and the signified, only a contingent cultural designation" (19). Secondly, "he emphasized that the sign is differential, part of a system of meanings where words acquire significance only by reference to what they are not" (19).

Lacan applies the structure of language Saussure describes to the structure of the unconscious and offers a psychoanalytic theory of identity. Ashe explains that in Lacan's theory of identity,

> The subject, as sign, operates as both a representation in language, or signifier, and the meaning that is represented, or signified . . . On entering the symbolic realm, the subject takes up a position in language, a signifier, as a separate speaking "I" with a particular social identity. But the subject is barred from access to a stable signified, or a fixed meaning outside the shifting sands of language. The unconscious is structured around this absence, shifting between signifiers and attempting to establish a fixity that, for Lacan, is always illusory and impossible. (97-8)

Thus, Lacan explains that identity is formed by the subject's entrance into the symbolic order where the subject becomes another arbitrary sign of language, eternally seeking a fixed position, oblivious to the fact that the "I" it assumes is always "shifting between signifiers" (98). In Lacan's theory, the subject is unstable and possesses no direct knowledge of, and authority on, its identity.

Agreeing with Lacan's theory of the subject as "a contingent entity constituted by symbolic systems," Althusser adds that the subject and the social world are pulled together through ideology (98). By determining ideology as the producer of the subject, Althusser too announces the lack of autonomy and stability in identity and offers another structuralist theory of the subject. Ashe writes that according to Althusser, "We do not have an identity but are assigned one by ideology, the mechanism through which the subject is subjected to capitalist exploitation" (99). Like Lacan defining the subject as a product of language, Althusser defines the subject as a product of ideology.

In such structuralist approaches, identity is seen as a construction whose process of formation can be explained with its relation to language, society, and ideology. Poststructuralists also follow the notion of the socially produced subject. Yet, poststructuralism refuses structuralism for two reasons. Firstly, poststructuralists assert that the world, the systems are not "intrinsically knowable" as structuralist suggest. Secondly, poststructuralists maintain that we cannot have a method, as structuralists offer, a grammar "to unlock the various systems that ma[ke] the world" (Sim 4). For example, Michel Foucault, according to Ashe, offers "the most vivid illustration of the modern subject's production in networks of power" (100). In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explains that institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals are centers of discipline where soul, body, and subject are 'created' through discipline. These institutions regulate souls, bodies and identities of individuals through timetables, surveillance and monitoring methods, and written evaluations of individuals to determine if they should be rewarded or penalized. Best and Kellner explain, "The ultimate goal and effect of discipline is 'normalization', the

elimination of all social and psychological irregularities and the production of useful and docile subjects through a refashioning of minds and bodies" (47). Thus, the discipline that institutions apply shapes and constitutes the identities of individuals.

Best and Kellner add that, in The History of Sexuality, Foucault offers another example of how power constructs subjectivity. Foucault refers to the Victorian period and argues that sex was not repressed in that period. On the contrary, in order to create sexual norms and exert power on individuals to conform to those norms, various discourses were produced on sexuality. Foucault asserts, "Power operates not through repression of sex, but through the discursive production of sexuality and subjects who have a 'sexual nature'" (quoted in Best 47). Through producing "medical and psychiatric discourses on sexuality," artificial truths were produced in the Victorian era, and people were forced to conform to the appropriate norms (Ashe 103). The abundance of discourses on sexuality, therefore, is a sign of the operation of power and its production of knowledge in order to control individuals and their bodies and self-conceptions. Through the examples of discipline and discourse, Foucault shows that power operates in such a way as to force individuals to internalize the social control they are subjected to. Foucault rejects the notion of a unified self and "calls for the destruction of the subject" as a solution (Best 51).

Lyotard also rejects the Enlightenment doctrine. In The Postmodern Condition (1979), Lyotard writes that there is a conflict over the power to control knowledge and this is the main problem. He attacks grand narratives, or metanarratives, which are "theories that claim to be able to explain everything, and to resist any attempt to change their form (or 'narrative')," like the Enlightenment doctrine, Marxism and scientific knowledge (Sim 7). According to Lyotard, grand narratives impose authority, repress individual creativity, are used for political control, and they turn knowledge into commodity. Lyotard considers the Enlightenment a grand narrative and thinks that it presents a fallacious story of "infinite progress in knowledge and liberty" (Grant quoted in Sim 13). For Lyotard, grand narratives have no credibility left. Against the authoritarianism exerted through

grand narratives, Lyotard urges the necessity of "little narratives" which are formed by "small groups of individuals for specific purposes and which do not pretend to have answers to all society's problems" (Sim 8). Lyotard praises little narratives because he thinks that they can "break down the monopoly traditionally exerted by grand narratives" (Sim 8).

Nietzsche's critique of Western thought is said to have provided a ground for such poststructuralist attacks. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner write that Nietzsche "provided the theoretical premises of many poststructuralist and postmodern critiques" with his critique of Western philosophy (Best 21). Among the philosophical concepts Nietzsche refused are the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system. According to Best and Kellner, Nietzsche offered "a perspectivist orientation for which there are no facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various individual groups" (22). Deriving from Nietzsche's theories, "poststructuralists stressed the importance of differences over unities and identities while championing the dissemination of meaning in opposition to its closure in totalizing, centred theories and systems" (22-23).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari demonstrate "another poststructuralist attack on authoritarianism" and the control of subjectivity (Sim 6). Their theories also present the distinguishing factors between modernism and postmodernism. In Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus (1972), Deleuze and Guattari argue that traditional categories such as man and nature are replaced with different categories of 'machines' like desiring-machines, producing-machines, and schizophrenic-machines in the postmodern world. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that individuals are "driven by libidinal energy rather than reason" and they lack "the unity normally associated with individual identity in Western culture" (198). For individuals who are driven by libidinal energy and lack unitary identities, Deleuze and Guattari use the term "desiring-machines". According to Deleuze and Guattari, the ruling authority sees "desiring-machines" as a threat to the social order. In order to eliminate this threat, Deleuze and Guattari argue, institutionalized social structures, processes, and theories are used. The purposes of such mechanisms are to shape

subjects and to control their expression of desire. Deleuze and Guattari see psychoanalysis as one of these mechanisms and argue that it is used as a tool to repress individuals and their desires. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the Oedipus complex and write that it is one of the methods modern psychoanalysis uses in order to repress desire and make individuals conform to social behavior norms. In this way, modern psychoanalysis attempts to control desiring-machines, functioning like a political authority. Put differently, Deleuze and Guattari see Oedipus as a symbol of the authoritarianism imposed through psychoanalysis in modern societies.

In order to illustrate the situation of the subject in the postmodern era, Deleuze and Guattari look at two mental illnesses that go under psychoanalytic treatment: schizophrenics and neurotics. In these two mental illnesses, Deleuze and Guattari find metaphors for the condition of the subject and the construction of identity under controlling mechanisms. They write that schizophrenics have multiple identities and psychoanalysis fails to force each identity to conform to norms whereas neurotics have a single identity, surrender quickly to the authority and co-operate with the repressive authoritarian system. In other words, schizophrenics resist psychoanalytic treatment because they have multiple identities and each identity manages to preserve its distinct characteristics rather than erasing them and conforming to a single norm that is imposed on them. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari use schizophrenics as a metaphor for the subject that demonstrates postmodern plurality and fragmentation. The postmodern refusal of authority is exemplified in the act of schizophrenics who distort the process of the authority-imposing, "politically inspired social control" of psychoanalysis (Sim 303). Deleuze and Guattari praise the plurality of postmodernism and define it as a strategy against authority.

In their discussion on plurality of postmodernism, Deleuze and Guattari offer another explanation. In <u>A Thousand Plateaus</u> (1980), Deleuze and Guattari use the botanical term rhizome to explain how systems in the postmodern world could work. In botany, rhizome defines "a continuously growing horizontal underground stem with lateral shoots and random roots at intervals" (310). By comparing the rhizome

structure of a moss and the hierarchical structure of a tree, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish postmodernism from modernism. According to the writers, rhizome is a structure that has no center and has no order. In this way, the postmodern refusal of center, authority and order is illustrated with rhizome's structure. Whereas trees assert an order by a structure of roots and a center, the pluralism of rhizome-like postmodernism is in opposition to the restriction and authoritarianism of tree-like modernism.

As seen in this brief survey, the understanding of the "subject" has changed since the Enlightenment. In the last few centuries, Western thought has considered the subject "a privileged being at the heart of cultural progress" (Sim 312) and assumed that the subject has "a unified self, with a central core of identity, motivated primarily by the power of reason" (Sim 312). However, this understanding of the subject as a rational, unified, powerful and controlling being has been refused. In poststructuralism and postmodernism, the subject becomes "a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity". In addition, the subject is "regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time" (Sim 312). Furthermore, Foucault likens the subject to a mark on sand and suggests that it can be erased easily and claims the death of the subject (Moses 6). For Deleuze and Guattari, there is only one way to liberate the subject: reject all social control on the flows of desire.

1.2. Identity in Auster

In this section, we will look at identity in Auster. When we talk about identity in Auster, we refer to two things: the construction of Auster's identity and Auster's approach to identity. While looking at the construction of Auster's identity, we will focus on his adolescence as told in his autobiographical Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure, (1996) and consider his relations with his family and his years in college. While talking about Auster's approach to identity, we will consider three themes that dominate his works and inform his perception of identity: the theme of loss, the connection of America and Europe, and the Jewish identity and experience.

In his autobiographical account <u>Hand to Mouth</u>, Auster reveals the painful period of his adolescence. The distinct period Auster grows up, the America of 1950s and 1960s, leads him to refuse identification with his family. He feels isolated, detached from his parents because he resents and criticizes his parents' contribution to the American materialistic society and their conformism. Therefore, he abandons his identity as a member of his middle-class family representing the materialistic, conformist, and hypocritical values of society and constructs his identity as a person who refuses to take part in such a society.

Auster's refusal to belong to his materialistic and conformist family and society gains another dimension in his college years. In those years, the notions of freedom, unconformity, and rebellion against authority that are sustained by French existentialism influence the world-views of many Americans, who, like Auster, are dissatisfied with the social and political climate of the 1950s and 1960s America. In his questioning of America's commitment to democratic values, the war in Vietnam, and the failure of the Civil Rights Movement, Auster is like one of the student activists of the 1960s calling for social change. Like his contemporaries, Auster finds his voice through French existentialism. However, different from other student activists, Auster carries out his protests rather passively. Instead of getting involved in public protests, he isolates himself from his environment. In other words, he again isolates himself from the society he dislikes. This isolation turns into a mode of introversion: he retreats to his own sphere, focuses on his literary pursuits and tries to establish his identity as a writer. Among American writers that influence Auster are Thoreau and Emerson and it can be asserted that he conceives of his isolation and introversion as modes of soul-searching and self-realization as these writers suggest. Also, during this period, apart from French existentialism, Auster shows as much interest in French prose and poetry as he does in American writing. In addition, upon graduation Auster goes to Paris and spends four productive years in Paris. Therefore, it can be argued that his attraction to French writing is a part of his construction of his identity as a writer.

While looking at Auster's approach to identity in his works, two important things are will be considered. Firstly, it should be noted that, it is possible to observe the reflections of such autobiographical facts like Auster's isolation from his family and society as well as his affiliation with European and French writing on his approach to identity in his works. Secondly, and more importantly, both the theme of loss and the America-Europe connection he experiences in his adolescence are indications of his perception of the Jewish identity and the Jewish experience. Auster is an American Jew, and, although questions over the Jewish identity, or the American identity, or the American Jewish identity do not inform his writing, as they do in Philip Roth, Auster's themes seem to be reflections of some tropes of Jewishness such as fatherlessness, split identities, landlessness, the Holocaust. In other words, it will be argued that elements that shape Auster's identity surface in his writing as themes. The surfacing of these themes in his works is connected to his perception of the Jewish identity and the Jewish experience.

1.2.1. Construction of Paul Auster's Identity

Analyzing the cultural context of a writer helps determine how the social and political environments affect the writer's identity, and feature in and shape the writer's works. Auster's autobiographical account <u>Hand to Mouth</u> is a useful source in doing so. Although this autobiographical account seems to provide insight into Auster's adolescence, it in fact outlines the views of Auster's generation as well as revealing how his literary identity is affected by that environment.

It should be noted that Auster's semi-autobiographical novel <u>The Invention of Solitude</u> is generally accepted to be the key to all the elements that feature in Auster's oeuvre (see Bruckner, Shiloh, Springer). In <u>The Invention of Solitude</u>, themes such as identification with the father and the loss of the father, chance and its ruling of our lives, the fragmentation and fluidity of identities appear. These themes recur abundantly in almost all of Auster's later novels. However, if <u>The Invention of</u>

<u>Solitude</u> presents the themes that dominate all Auster novels, then, <u>Hand to Mouth</u> can be argued to be an account that clarifies why and how such themes are dominant in Auster at first place.

According to the accounts in <u>Hand to Mouth</u>, it can be argued that there are two important phases in Auster's life. The first phase spans the years he spends with his family in the 1950s and 1960s. His family is "a virtually assimilated Jewish family in the New Jersey suburbs of New York" (Springer 49). He says that his middle-class family provided him a comfortable childhood and that he "never suffered from any of the wants and deprivations that plague most of the human beings who live on this earth" (<u>CP</u> 155). However, it is in his family life that Auster begins to identify the very things he dislikes about American life: materialism and conformism. Auster's family reflects the postwar period of rise in prosperity and mass consumerism. He writes, "I was repulsed by the outward trappings of wealth, and every sign of ostentation my parents brought into the house I treated with scorn" (159). In a period marked by excessive purchasing especially of electrical home appliances, Auster treats his family's tendency to buy with contempt. Also, he refuses to ride with the family car for he sees it as a manifestation of his family's materialism, "an invitation to the world to admire how well off we were" (159). Auster writes, "a car like that filled me with shame- not just for myself, but for living in a world that allowed such things to be in it" (160).

Both of his parents have experienced the Depression and they had conflicting views on money, which eventually broke their marriage apart. Auster writes, "My father was tight; my mother was extravagant . . . she cultivated shopping as a means of self-expression" (155). He remembers how, as a young child, he "was caught up in the middle of this ideological war" (156): admiring his mother for her skills in the fascinating world of shopping at the same time admiring his father "for resisting that same world" (156). Nevertheless, despite his father's tight attitude towards money, the fancy family car shows that he too had his share of materialistic culture. Moreover, being tight about money is a manifestation of valuing money. At around age eleven, Auster's confused feelings toward his parents settle, and he begins to

withdraw from his parents merely because of the values they represent. Auster explains, "I was becoming an internal émigré, an exile in my own house" (158). Materialism seems to be the determining factor as Auster comments on his situation in relation to the situation of America:

> It wasn't just the pain of having to witness my parents' crumbling marriage, and it wasn't just the frustration of being trapped in a small suburban town, and it wasn't just the American climate of the late 1950s—but put them all together, and suddenly you had a powerful case against materialism, an indictment of the orthodox view that money was a good to be valued above all others. My parents valued money, and where had it gotten them? They had struggled so hard for it, had invested so much belief in it, and yet for every problem it had solved, another one had taken its place. American capitalism had created one of the most prosperous moments in human history. It had produced untold numbers of cars, frozen vegetables, and miracle shampoos, and yet Eisenhower was President, and the entire country had been turned into a gigantic television commercial, an incessant harangue to buy more, make more, spend more, to dance around the dollar-tree until you dropped dead from the sheer frenzy of trying to keep up with everyone else. (158)

The critical attitude Auster develops towards his family and America leads him to lose faith in the values they represent. He writes, "The moment you began to study the facts, contradictions bubbled to the surface, rampant hypocrisies were exposed, a whole new way of looking at things suddenly became possible" (159). He questions the teaching of "liberty and justice for all" and argues that it is replaced with "the pursuit of money" (159). This questioning, he shares with his generation, shapes his world-view.

Auster's views on money that he voices in Hand to Mouth are seen in much of his writing. In his novels, Auster always treats money, whether in large sums or little sums, as always an accidental thing and none of his characters accord money the status Auster's parents did. In the Invention of Solitude, Moon Palace, and The Music of Chance, sons inherit considerable amounts from their fathers at the most unexpected times. All the heirs are portrayed to be in deep financial distress when the money arrives and they are rescued. Although inheritance generally makes characters lucky, secure, and privileged, in Auster, the inheritance lasts short and the sons use the money without investing it or making any plans for future security.

Furthermore, Auster explains his resentment of the inequality money causes in Hand to Mouth. Auster writes, "Money divided the world into winners and losers, haves and have-nots. That was an excellent arrangement for the winners, but what about the people who lost?" (159). He adds, "I found it increasingly difficult to reconcile my good luck with the bad luck of so many others . . . All my sympathies were for the downtrodden, the dispossessed, the underdogs of the social order" (159). For Auster, money is important to the extent it provides basics. Therefore, in his novels, when a character worries over money it is usually because of hunger. None of the characters in these novels value money in a materialistic way and money never attains the status of primary goal in life. Thus, it might be argued that Auster reflects his own view of money as a means of staying alive in these novels and this seems to be a continuation of his criticism of materialistic society he despised and withdrew from in the 1950s and 1960s.

His college years constitute the second important phase in Auster's life. Between 1966 and 1970, Auster attends Columbia University where he studies English Literature. These years are marked in American history with the emergence of the New Left and students' support of the Civil Rights Movement and protests of racism, institutions that support racism, the war in Vietnam, and America's commitment to the war and claims of democracy. During these years, French existentialism becomes the voice of the counter-culture youth that points at the corruption of fundamental American values like freedom, pursuit of happiness, and democracy and they call for social change.

Whereas the first phase establishes Auster as a dissenter from his family and social environment due to his criticism of materialism and conformism they value, the second important phase points at Auster's years at college when he fully develops his identity as a dissenter from the so-called American values such as equality and commitment to democracy. Starting in 1968 until Auster's graduation, Columbia, like other campuses where radical students protested against racial discrimination and Vietnam War, "became a war zone of demonstrations, sit-ins, and moratoriums. There were riots, police raids, slugfests, and factional splits" (174). Auster

participates in some of the demonstrations. For instance, he assists in the occupation of one of the campus buildings, but mainly he keeps his distance from these protests. Regarding what was going on around him, he sees himself as "a bystander, a sympathetic fellow traveler" (174). Although he adopts the spirit of the protests, his reaction is somewhat different. In Columbia, Auster establishes his identity as an artist who has a social awareness. He refers to the four years he spends at college, "They were about books, the war in Vietnam . . . I imagined some kind of marginal existence for myself—scrounging for crumbs at the far edges of the workaday world, the life of a starving poet" (167).

It is important to note that Auster's keeping away from the protests is due to his temperament. Auster explains, "Much as I would have liked to join, I found myself temperamentally unfit for group activities. My loner instincts were far too ingrained" (175). Thus, he spends the last two years of college in solitude, writing novels, plays, poems, and translating French poetry. It can be suggested that Auster experiences a new kind of withdrawal in college: he experiences the solitude of the artist that he talks about in his novels. In this solitude, there is a quest for self. The question he asks himself is "Who am I?", and he tries to find the answer through his literary pursuits: through establishing his identity as a writer. Therefore, for the reason that he avoids active involvement in the protests, it can be maintained that he perceives himself as an artist who manages to cope with the absurdities of the world only by escaping into art. He begins to see solitude and introversion as ways of defining himself in his childhood and this view strengthens in his adolescence.

Auster's solitude in college years turns into a condition of literary creativity for him. Auster sees writing as a way of coming to terms with unresolved issues in life, or a way of dealing with the absurdities of the world. In the preface Auster writes to "A Little Anthology Surrealist Poems" which Auster translates and publishes in 1972, the writer explains:

> 1969. I was twenty-one, a junior at Columbia, and these poems were among my first attempts at translation. Remember the times: the war in Vietnam, the clamor of politics on College Walk, a year of unending protests, the strike that shut down the university, sit-ins, riots, the arrest of 700 students (myself among them). In the light of that tumult (that questioning), the Surrealists

were a major discovery for me: poets fighting against the conventions of poetry, poets dreaming of revolution, of how to change the world. Translation, then, was more than just a literary exercise. It was a first step toward breaking free of the shackles of myself, of overcoming my own ignorance. You must change your life. Perhaps. Back then, it was more a question of searching for a life, of trying to invent a life I could believe in. (CP 457)

In addition, the image of Auster withdrawing from his social sphere into his own sphere in order to write results in the connection of solitude, writing, and soul-searching which is a recurring theme in Auster's novels. In some of his novels, there are protagonists who write in isolated settings. In these novels, the activity of writing is associated with the protagonists' attempt, whether consciously or unconscious, to solve the mysteries of self, to find identity. It seems that these protagonists are the prototypes of the artist, the writer as Auster imagines. In other words, Auster perceives the writer at work as a person on a quest for self and knowledge. As Hand to Mouth points at, the source of this theme seems to be Auster's own experience of alienation from his environment, his isolation, and his quest for self though writing at college years.

In order to explain the motives behind Auster's turning back on his family, withdrawal from the social environment, and his rather passive social activism with a theoretical ground, George Cotkin's discussion in Existential America (2003) will be helpful. In this book, Cotkin analyzes the dominance of French existentialism in the 1960s and sets out to offer a cultural and intellectual history of America that was informed by the existentialist movement. Although Cotkin writes that "existentialism resists easy definition" (3), he explains it as follows:

> existentialism, as a way of thinking about and depicting the world, emerged most strongly out of the tremors that shook modern Europe beginning in the nineteenth century. The inhuman, alienating implications of modern capitalist production and warfare, the unfulfilled promise of science, the decline of religious certitude, the challenges issued by Darwin, Freud, and modern physics- all contributed to existentialism's claim to pertinence. Sartre and Heidegger expressed, in philosophical and literary terms, the essentials of existentialism. In so doing, they attempted to characterize the aspects of the timeless nature of the human condition and to respond to the quickening pace of alienation and despair in their own era. (4)

Cotkin states that Americans confronted existentialism for the first time in the late 1920s with the introduction of the religious philosophy of Danish existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to the American philosophical scene. For Cotkin, existentialism in America reached its peak popularity after World War II with the arrival of Jean-Paul Sartre and French existentialism. In these years, New York intellectuals showed great interest in the movement and they, Ralph Ellison and Norman Mailer among them, "played a significant role in making the ideas of French existentialism part of the intellectual coin of the realm in the postwar years" (Cotkin 7). "For many intellectuals, Sartrean existentialism perfectly captured the human condition in general, and more specifically, the reality of an existence lived under the totalitarian butcheries and potential atomic annihilation" (Cotkin 7).

Cotkin writes, "Nearly everyone, it seemed, coming of age in 1950s and 1960s America danced to the song of French existentialism" (Cotkin 1). According to Cotkin, some poets and novelists "embraced existentialism to distance [themselves] from bourgeois culture" (1), and existentialism permeated into their politics, as they "followed the leftist commitments of Sartre and Beauvoir" (2). For the college students and writers of the 1960s, "the very word 'existentialism' summoned up a world of 'hard talk and intellect' to which [they] wanted to belong" (1). Cotkin illustrates this with an example from his life: He explains that upon reading Albert Camus's <u>The Stranger</u>, "I was excited by the roll of the word 'existential' . . . It distanced me from the Coney Island scene and transported me into French café life, into a rich intellectual world full of serious ideas about the depths of the human condition" (2). Cotkin draws attention to Walter Kaufman's anthology <u>Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre</u> (1956) which was owned by almost every college student in the 1960s (1), and he sees its publication as "the single most important moment in the popularization of existentialism in America" (147).

Of course, there is a solid ground behind the popularity of existentialism that Cotkin seems to playfully refer to. Cotkin's depiction of the period in which Auster

grew up summarizes the cultural and political scene of 50s and 60s America and reveals the popularity of existentialist mode of thinking during those times:

> Reasons for rebellion were everywhere to be found in the 1950s and 1960s. The Cold War and the nuclear arms race threatened the survival and solidity of American society. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 evoked a sense of living on "the edge of destruction", as a popular song phrased it. To many young people, American ideals of democracy and freedom were compromised, if not obliterated, by the denial of civil rights to African Americans. The presumed comforts of conformity became deadening. New voices in American society, ranging from the Beats to Lenny Bruce, suggested in no uncertain terms that something was amiss with the American dream. When poet Alan Ginsberg intoned about the destruction of "the best minds of my generation", he spoke from personal experience, and he reached outward to touch the experience of others. Many balked at the paradox of living in a land of individualism where attempts at free expression, spontaneity, and authenticity were denigrated as antisocial and procommunist. American power, increasingly consigned to the morass of Vietnam, proved to many the emptiness of the American ideal of beneficent democracy and freedom. Hardly surprising, then, that a generation would find reasons, both personal and political to rebel. In a period when the personal increasingly became political, the search for authenticity would have immense ramifications. (239-40)

Cotkin thus draws attention to the American social and political scene that turned existentialism into a mode of resistance to alienation as well as a mode of rebellion. Paul Auster, born in 1947, can be seen as a typical middle-class youth who was affected deeply by the events of the era he came of age.

Auster's criticism of his cultural environment is supported by the French existentialists. Cotkin writes that for Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus, Americans "lacked a sense of anguish about the problems of existence, authenticity, and alienation; instead, American character swaggered with confidence and optimism" (2). He adds that "Camus derided American materialism and optimism" and that these French existentialist thought that America, "home of the brave, land of the free, was nonexistential" (2). However, Cotkin maintains, "The very notion of America as bereft of anguish is absurd" and adds, "Death and despair appear as much in the American collective consciousness as does the luck-and-pluck optimism" (2). He points at the "existential anguish at the heart of the African-American experience" and concludes that "existential modes of thinking had long before sunk deep roots in

American thought and culture" (2). He observes the presence of existential concerns like dread, despair, death and dauntlessness in the works of Jonathan Edwards, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, William James, and Edward Hopper. These Americans, according to Cotkin, "belong to the pantheon of thinkers and artists who are labeled existentialist precursors" (6).

Furthermore, Cotkin argues that "the intellectual history of civil rights and New Left leaders Robert Moses and Tom Hayden cannot be understood apart from their engagements with the thoughts of Camus" (7). Robert Moses was an African-American who, in the 1960s, fought for blacks' right to vote, and it was existentialism that gave him courage and inspiration. According to Cotkin, Moses "found in Camus an attitude that helped him understand and resist racial injustice and oppression" (230). Tom Hayden, a leading radical student activist in the 1960s, was also influenced by existentialism, especially Camus. Another example Cotkin presents is Betty Freidan, whose The Feminine Mystique (1963), Cotkin asserts, has "developed out of her early confrontation with existential modes of thought, and specifically in tandem with her reading of Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1952)" (7).

The thesis Cotkin offers in his book is in direct accordance with the case of Paul Auster. Cotkin writes, "The achievements of the sixties generation emerged in large part out of their grappling with existentialist issues and writers" (7). He believes that "the American confrontation with an existential perspective has been creatively valuable and culturally significant" and asserts, "Many intellectuals and artists of influence found their voice through existentialism" (8). Existentialism led these intellectuals and artists, "even when they retreated from politics, to at least understand the despair that leads to totalitarianism. Many of them were able to create art, the ultimate existential testament to overcoming the despair inherent in the human condition" (8).

Auster is one of those people whose lives Cotkin argues were transformed by "the meaning, excitement, and fashion of existentialism" (1). He is one of the students "coming of age in the 1960s" who, for Cotkin, "were thoroughly acquainted

with the writings of Sartre, Camus, and Beauvoir" (7). The discussion of Auster's critical essays in the final section of this chapter exemplifies how Auster reflects his existential concerns in his literary pursuits. In the existential despair of Jewish writers like Kafka, Celan, and Jabés, Auster finds the same struggle he is engaged in: the results of being outsiders, being on exile and going on endless, yet futile-journeys of self-creation.

One important detail not be missed here is the difference of American existentialism from European existentialism. Cotkin draws attention to the form existentialism took in the American mind:

> While American existentialist did not put a happy face on the pessimism and despair of European existentialism, neither did they contentedly wallow in such despair. They refused to make a fetish out of nihilism. In the hands of Americans, the existential grounds of anguish and despair functioned not as benumbing forces but as goads to action and commitment. (7)

According to Cotkin's analysis, Auster can be seen as one of the American writers who adopt European existentialism except its nihilism. Auster presents accounts of existential crises where the quest for meaning in life, quest for authenticity, quest for identity never ends and nihilism is not a concern.

Robert G. Olson in <u>An Introduction to Existentialism</u> (1962) argues that existentialists are not nihilists: they are "advocates of a class of human values" (1), and they try "to mitigate or overcome frustration and disillusionment" (2). In <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, Sartre urges obtaining an authentic life through "accepting the freedom to create oneself, to develop an identity" (Cotkin 137) Although Olson does not distinguish American and European modes of existentialism, his argument seems to be useful for the manifestation of existentialism in Auster's writing. For Olson, existentialists value an awareness of the horrors of life and mastery of despair. However, this does not mean that existentialists try to find a way for satisfactory life. Rather, Olson suggests, existentialists mock the notion of satisfactory life and argue that "the life of every man is marked by irreparable losses" (14). For existentialists, frustration, insecurity, and painful striving are at the center of human pursuit. They condition an experience of anguish of being and suffering in order to attain the

existentialist values which Olson lists as freedom of choice, individual dignity, personal love, and creative effort (15-17). Through an acceptance of suffering and anguish of being as prerequisites of these values, an individual achieves existential consciousness. Olson explains, "To be incapable of suffering and tears is to be swallowed up in the dread of nothingness of unconsciousness" (28).

It is possible to observe these existential values in Auster's The Music of Chance. The protagonist of the novel, Jim Nashe, feels the anguish of being and his suffering leads him to accept that there might be as well nothingness and he accepts nothingness as a mode of being. Although Nashe's acts seem to be nihilistic at first when, devastated by the shattering of his family, he abandons everything he has worked for in his life and lets the events take their own course. He abandons himself to chance, forgets about who he is and has been. His act parallels with Olson's definition of the anguish of being: "everything and everybody might go out of existence in an instant" (31), and individuals cannot intervene with the course of events. Yet, in accordance with the expected result of such consciousness, Nashe takes responsibility of his life; even if it seems to be an abandoning of himself to the flow of life, he indeed makes a choice and exerts his freedom to choose by doing that. In the end, existentialism urges individuals take responsibility of their lives by making decisions and Nashe's decision is *not to* make decisions about his life and to surrender to the flow of life. Nashe can be seen to struggle to achieve the authentic life Sartre suggests.

Auster's affiliation with French existentialism is a reflection of the intellectual and political scene of his college years and the postwar student movements that he was a part of. In fact, a discussion of existentialism in America, postwar student movements hold a significant place. Cotkin refers to student activists as "Camus's rebels" and writes, "In the 1960s and later, Camus dominated the consciousness of radical students" (226). Camus's themes included "questions of suicide, commitment, and rebellion" (225) and, "For a generation coming of age in the 1960s, confronting the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam, Albert Camus perhaps more than Jean-Paul Sartre offered intellectual inspiration and

guidance" (Cotkin 226). Camus became the voice American radical students needed to hear for support, and "young Americans in the process of figuring out how to express their anger, frustration, alienation, and rebellion" (228) turned to Camus and read about "confronting the absurd" in his The Myth of Sisyphus, and "the necessity of rebellion" (228) in The Rebel. Cotkin maintains that Camus was taken as a role model by the American youth with his "romantic combination of philosopher and literary figure, of activist and intellectual" (228). Thus, the college students of the 1960s "identified with his injunction to resist the absurd and to fight oppression" (228). In other words, for Cotkin, whether they followed Camus or Sartre, college students saw existentialism as their philosophy. "Existentialism spoke to their feelings of alienation, their rebellion against authority, their frustration with absolutes, and their concerns about a culture of conformity" (Cotkin 229). Such instances can be observed to dominate Auster's adolescence in the autobiographical account he provides in Hand to Mouth.

Auster shows further typical mannerisms of his generation. It seems almost natural that Auster, a translator, has translated Sartre's Life/Situations in 1977. In addition, he acknowledges Kafka, along with Beckett, as his master. In 1974, on the fiftieth anniversary of Kafka, Auster writes his essay, "Pages for Kafka" (1974) and refers to Kafka's "Starvation Artist" (1924) in his essay "The Art of Hunger" (1970). Cotkin talks about the distinct place Kafka has among the New York intellectuals between 1940s and 1960s and explains that by the time French existentialism arrived in New York, Kafka and Dostoyevsky were already keeping the New York intellectuals busy with their existential themes with "their emphasis on the absurd and tragic nature of the human condition" (108). Cotkin writes that Kafka was a writer with whom the New York intellectuals especially identified. Kafka's allegories, his "symbol-laden prose" captured the "anguish of modernity, the alienation of modern men and women in a world where God's presence, or role, appeared mysterious or ambiguous at best" (108). Auster seems to find in Kafka the fragmented identity of the Jewish artists, his homelessness and his eternal search for self.

In conclusion, Paul Auster is a writer who is influenced considerably by his cultural environment. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s America, Auster feels alienated by the materialistic and conformist society, and withdraws from it. He resents the hypocrisy of American freedom and democracy in his protests of the war in Vietnam and the chaos of Civil Rights Movements. Although he does not become an activist for social change, he shows his rebellion as an intellectual by withdrawing into solitude and by struggling to achieve authentic life. Following existential values, Auster tries to determine who he is, what constitutes his identity and feels a "need to affirm myself as an outsider and prove that I could make it on my own" (CP 147). Through his self-conception as the "starving poet," he manages to avoid the world he dislikes in his escape into art.

1.2.2. Paul Auster's Approach to Identity

It is possible to analyze Paul Auster's approach to identity as a manifestation of the elements that shape his identity. Autobiographical facts like loss, alienation, soul-searching, uprootedness, and connection with Europe appear to influence his perception of identity. Remarkably, these autobiographical facts also seem to be related to some tropes of Jewishness. However, it should be noted that, on the one hand, these autobiographical elements surface as themes in his writing and point at Auster's conception of Jewishness. On the other hand, Auster's autobiographical accounts or interviews reveal little about his Jewish identity. Therefore, in this section, it seems helpful firstly to establish how Auster sees Jewishness, and then to look at the themes of loss and the connection of America to Europe and analyze their connection to Auster's perception of Jewishness.

Generally speaking, religion is one of the major sources of identity. However, for Paul Auster, an American Jewish writer whose fundamental theme seems to be identity, religion's role in identity construction is as ambiguous as identity itself. Auster says in an interview: "I don't consider myself a religious person. I'm not a practicing Jew . . . What interests me is the history of the Jewish people. Certain aspects of Jewish thinking fascinate me. I have read the Old Testament with a lot of

attention" (TRN 39). In another interview, Auster states: "I feel very close to the history of the Jewish people, with all its ramifications. But I don't feel any desire to write about Jewishness. It is not my principal source, rather, one element among many, which, like the others, has contributed to my formation" (Springer 39). Therefore, in Auster's novels, it cannot be expected to find characters looking at their Jewishness as a determining factor in identity formation. What meaning, then, does being a Jew have for Auster and how does Jewishness inform his writing? Before looking at two novels and three essays of Auster to investigate possible answers to that question, Auster's own Jewishness will be the focus. In his novels Moon Palace and In the Country of Last Things, characters lose their Jewish identities in the erosion of all values. In his essays on Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, and Edmond Jabés, Auster portrays the Jewish artist in an eternal exile. In his autobiographical The Invention of Solitude, Auster reveals his assimilated Jewish identity. In this book, Auster also talks about the absence of his father and this corresponds to a historical Jewish theme: "the starting point or enduring feature of Jewish identity was *absence*, the loss an organizing reality" (Omer-Sherman 8).

In The Invention of Solitude, Auster's family background is revealed. His grandparents immigrate to the United State from Eastern Europe and he is a third-generation American Jew who is fully Americanized. Obviously, his parents are typical second-generation immigrants who give up their customs. One of the most notable Jewish customs is their eating habits and the consumption of kosher food. Auster is alien to these customs as his mother never cooks Jewish food at home and they abandon this fundamental Jewish tradition. His father occasionally takes him to Jewish restaurants and it is only in these restaurants that he tastes Jewish food. Auster writes that he cannot touch his food in these Jewish restaurants and he finds the Jewish cuisine disagreeable to his taste, which reflects American preferences. He acknowledges his assimilation, "I . . . was brought up as an American boy . . . knew less about my ancestors than I did about Hopalong Cassidy's hat" (IoS 28)[4].

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[4] Hopalong Cassidy was a fictional cowboy-hero.

Auster grows up an assimilated Jew, yet, this does not mean that he is alien to Jewishness. Behind this surface assimilation, his writing manifests some themes that are central to the Jewish experience and we can assume that he leaned about his ancestors and Jewishness not in his family but on his own. Derek Rubin points out at three ways that figure Auster's Jewishness in The Invention of Solitude in his essay entitled "The Hunger Must Be Preserved at All Costs: A Reading of 'The Invention of Solitude'". Firstly, according to Rubin, Auster's desire to create a past for his family through figuring his father's identity is a reflection of the Jewish theme of the historical search of "Jewish people as a whole" (qtd. in Barone 61). In this way, Rubin argues, Auster tries to determine the past, the society, and the origin to which he belongs. Secondly, Rubin observes the importance of the commentary or interpretation of the Old Testament that are "central to Jewish life, religion, and culture" (Rubin in Barone 61). Rubin seems to suggest that Auster's attempt at writing this autobiographical novel is due his conception of the Old Testament that enables one to understand life. By writing his own life story, Auster tries to interpret and understand his life.

The third Jewish theme, in fact the key Jewish theme Rubin finds in Auster's book, is Auster's manifestation of the Jew's 'hunger'. This theme, Rubin writes, "links Auster in a fundamental way to his Jewish past and to earlier Jewish-American writers" (qtd. in Barone 61). Rubin adds, "at the core of Auster's character, of his perception of the self and of the individual's relation to the world around him, is the characteristically Jewish trait of longing, of yearning, of 'hunger'" (qtd. in Barone 61). Rubin refers to Isaac Rosenfeld's analysis of hunger in Abraham Cahan's The Rise of David Levinsky (1917). According to Rubin, Isaac Rosenfeld's essay entitled "The Fall of David Levinsky" (1952) illuminates his argument of 'hunger' in Auster. Put differently, the 'hunger' of the Jew Rosenfeld finds in Levinsky is parallel with theme of 'hunger' Rubin observes in The Invention of Solitude.

According to Rosenfeld, David Levinsky is physically, spiritually, emotionally, and sexually deprived in his youth. These depravations locate dissatisfaction at the core of Levinsky's character to such an extent that Levinsky's

mature self is fixated on his fierce desire for fulfillment. For Rubin, a similar desire that leads to constant yearning is central to the first part of The Invention of Solitude. In the first part, Portrait of an Invisible Man, Rubin argues that Auster yearns to find his father who never showed him love and attention. Auster's hunger for his father is established early in his life and continues in his maturity. Auster writes, "You never stop hungering for your father's love" (IoS 34)[5]. Auster craves for his father but as the title of the novel indicates, his father is an invisible person, a phantom. With a phrase from Auster, a phrase which echoes the wandering Jew theme, Rubin attracts attention to the defeat Auster seems to accept in his task to find his father, his need to satisfy his hunger: "Just because you wander in the desert, it does not mean there is a promised land" (32). Thus, the 'hunger' David Levinsky and Paul Auster portray is not one that can be satisfied. On the contrary, the continuation of the 'hunger' reminds them of who they are.

Rubin also draws attention to the fact that the 'hunger' observed in Levinsky and Auster is in fact a particular Jewish experience. Rubin again refers to Rosenberg who defines the Diaspora, and "the theme of Return" (qtd. in Baron 63) to be the source of the 'hunger' of the Jew. In the Diaspora, the desire to return to Israel is a fierce desire that cannot be satisfied. The Jews, according to Rubin, are nourished on their desire for Israel when they are on exile and thus stay linked to their Jewish past. Then, the continuation of Auster's desperate quest for his father is a reflection of the Jewish 'hunger' which makes a Jew a Jew, and Rubin seems to argue that the futility of his quest is what constitutes Auster's character. Omer-Sherman comments on the Diaspora and writing:

> 'Diasporism' has long been a creative current in postmodern Jewish philosophy and poetics. variously voiced by Paul Auster, Daniael Boyarin, John Hollander, Edmond Jabés, George Steiner, and many others, it posits that language is the only natural homeland of the Jew. Together, such writers, have transformed nomadism into a source and justification of the Jewish text . . . [t]hey have created a discursive space in which the Jewish self-image has been projected onto other identities, as well as the vocation of literary writing as a whole. (111)

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[5] The Invention of Solitude is referred to as IoS.

Then, following Omer-Sherman's argument, it would not be wrong to assert that Auster's "hunger" for his father's love is a reflection of the Jewish exile, uprootedness that haunts Auster. Though writing about finding his father, he turns his Jewish self-image into one that yearns for the father and deals with it through writing. This image is adopted in place of writing about homeland and the yearning for the homeland, longing for unity of the Jews as a nation, a desire to have origins, and past. Hence, Auster tries to satisfy his hunger for his father because the father figure signifies the possibility of unity, he represents the past, the origin of the family that is a central quest in Jewishness.

After noting Auster's references to Jewish themes in his autobiographical novel The Invention of Solitude, his explicit engagement with the Jewish identity in two of his novels will be discussed. In Moon Palace Marco Stanley Fogg and in In the Country of Last Things Anna Blume have brief scenes with rabbis. These scenes illustrate Auster's approach to the Jewish identity. At the end of Moon Palace when Fogg's identity crisis is at its peak, he finds his father who was missing until then. Soon after he finds him, his father dies. Fogg does not inform anybody of the funeral, for, he says, "I wasn't up to spending the day with strangers, I didn't want to talk to anyone" (Moon Palace 292)[6]. There is only him along with a rabbi in the funeral. Fogg asks the rabbi not to deliver a eulogy in English and the rabbi "confin[es] himself to a recitation of the traditional Hebrew prayers" (292). However, it is not that Fogg is a religious person and wants Jewish prayers. He explains, "My Hebrew had all but vanished by then, and I was glad I wasn't able to understand what he said". The rabbi notices Fogg's indifference to the ceremony and to his religion, and seems to disapprove of him. Fogg too notices the rabbi's attitude: "Rabbi Green considered me insane, and during the hours we spent together, he kept as much distance between us as possible" (292). Objectively, it may eventually be normal for a religious figure to disapprove of Fogg since he is indifferent to religious practices. Yet, the fact that Fogg believes that the rabbi sees him as "insane" is worrying. In fact, the rabbi proves Fogg right after the funeral. Fogg explains,

> [A]fter the ordeal, he reached out and shook my hand, patting my knuckles
> softly with his left palm. It was a gesture of consolation that must have been

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[6] Moon Palace will be referred to as MP after this point.

as natural to him as signing his name, and he hardly seemed to notice he was doing it. 'You're a very disturbed young man,' he said. 'If you want my advice, I think you should go to a doctor'. (293)

Fogg recognizes that the rabbi is not genuine in his comforting and does not comment on the humiliating advice of the rabbi. The rabbi seems to think that Fogg is detached from religion and is thus disoriented. Fogg, on the other hand, is deeply troubled by his personal matters and his Jewish identity is far from helping him, as is the rabbi in his judgmental and dismissing attitude. According to Springer, the rabbi "cannot discern Fogg's identity crisis and embodies values to which Fogg is only marginally connected and which cannot influence his situation in the least" (39).

Anna Blume's meeting with a rabbi In the Country of Last Things, is, similarly, another revelation of the lack of faith in Jewish identity as a factor that strengthens identity. In a library, Anna meets a man and has a conversation with him. When she understands that the person she is talking to is a rabbi, she remarks in surprise, "I thought all the Jews were dead" and the rabbi answers, "It's not so easy to get rid of us" (CLT 95). Suggestive of her acceptance of the persecution and annihilation of Jews, Blume goes on to tell that she is Jewish, too, yet she declares her loss of faith in God. In this way, Blume declares how her Jewish identity failed to survive, or she failed to keep it, in the face of all the hardships she went through. Blume reveals that, for her, being a Jew is not a solution to the crises the world presents. She explains that speaking to the rabbi reminds her of times that she conceived the world to be a peaceful place: "Perhaps he reminded me of how things had been when I was very young, back in the dark ages when I still believed in what fathers and teachers said to me" (96). Thus, the dissolving of metanarratives becomes evident: Blume sees that, as Lyotard argues, the teachings of universalizing theories like patriarchal order or religion have "no relevance to our lives" because they cannot present answers to everything as they claim to do (Sim 3).

In the examples of Marco Stanley Fogg and Anna Blume, Auster depicts Jewish identity as prone to disintegration and does not see it as a major constituent of identity. This disintegration might also be considered a reflection of the assimilation

of the Jewish identity Auster observed in his parents. In addition, Springer argues that Jewishness is not a perfect model for identity after all, with its splits in itself. Springer notes that being a Jew is associated with homelessness, isolation and there is "the topos of the 'wandering Jew'" (38) which leads to the quest theme or the quest for home, God, unitary identity. Springer writes, "Jewishness appears as a culture with a double or split identity" with geographical division of Jews such as Israeli Jews, American Jews etc. as well as a lack of unified Jewish language such as Yiddish, Hebrew, English etc. (38). Although these historical Jewish themes do not appear explicitly in Auster's novels, some of his critical essays deal directly with them. Auster's essays on Franz Kafka, Paul Celan and Edmond Jabés are illuminating examples on Auster's views on Jewishness, the relationship among Jewishness, art and life.

In "Pages for Kafka on the Fifteenth Anniversary of is Death" (1974), Auster portrays Kafka as one of the primary examples of the wandering Jew: "

> He wanders toward the promised land. That is to say: he moves from one place to another, and dreams continually of stopping. And because this desire to stop is what haunts him, is what counts most for him, he does not stop. He wanders. That is to say: without the slightest hope of ever going anywhere. P 303)

For Auster, being an outsider, being on exile, and having an awareness of the infinity of these conditions are the driving forces for the Jewish artist. Auster's Kafka knows the paradoxical situation of a Jew: hat is, try as he might, he will never attain his goal. The impossibility of his goal and the acknowledgement of this condition keeps him going. Auster explains how the quest of the Jew is doomed to become a vicious circle: "For even though he lingers, he is incapable of rooting himself. No pause conjures a place. But this, too, he knows . . . And if his journey has any end, it will only be by finding himself, in the end, where he began" (304). Thus, in an existential manner of thinking, Auster finds in Kafka the eternal quest for self which is full of anguish, suffering and it is the consciousness of this tragic condition that leads to a praise of existential values of individual dignity and attaining an authentic life.

In "The Poetry of Exile" (1975), Auster talks about Paul Celan who is "[a] Jew, born in Romania, who wrote in German and lived in France" (CP 351). These remarks open the essay and emphasize the uprootedness of the Jewish poet. However, the physical detachment from homeland is not the only isolation he suffers from. Auster writes, "Paul Celan was a poet of exile, an outsider even to the language of his own poems" (351) and stresses the extent of his isolation. Celan is "an eternal stranger: separated not only from his homeland Romania but also from the area where his language was spoken" (Springer 59).

The experience of being a Jew through Second World War, surviving the death camps and losing his family to the Holocaust inform Celan's poetry until he commits suicide at age fifty. According to Auster, in Celan's work, "The unspeakable yields a poetry that continually threatens to overwhelm the limits of what can be spoken" (CP 352). He adds, "For Celan forgot nothing, forgave nothing . . . [he] poured all his grief and anger into his work . . . [and] never stopped confronting the dragon of the past, and in the end, it swallowed him up" (352). Auster's main point in this essay is how Celan's confrontation with the Holocaust through poetry becomes a means for him to survive the traumas he experienced. In Celan, Auster finds the example of the Jewish intellectual who tries to restore his identity. Auster explains, "Celan did not write solely in order to express himself, but to orient himself within his own life and take his stand in the world, and it is this feeling of necessity that communicates itself to the reader. These poems are more than literary artifacts. They are a means of staying alive" (355). What Auster sees in Celan is therefore an attempt at reconstructing the disintegrated Jewish identity through art. The portrait he draws for Celan echoes Auster's own despair in his youth, his own existential crisis in the 1960s that separated him from his society.

However, the memory of Holocaust, the destruction of the Jewish identity, and recovering from them are immensely destructive. For example, Theodor W. Adorno claims that after the Holocaust, the possibility of writing poetry as a romantic or realist is forever aborted. Furthermore, Holocaust is said to have marked the beginning of the impossibility of literature, of humanism, and of communication.

In this line of thought, Auster writes, "Celan's poetry is continually collapsing into itself, negating its very premises, again and again arriving at zero" (356). This claim reminds us of the vicious circle Auster talks about in Kafka, that is, Celan returns to the state of not being able to understand the Holocaust and his identity after fierce attempts at understanding. Thus, Celan seems to experiencing the impossibility of literature in the world after the Holocaust.

Auster illustrates this matter further and writes that Celan's poetry "push[es] his life into the void in order to cling to his identity" (359). Auster uses the word "void" because he thinks that Celan "never abandons the struggle to make sense of what has no sense" (358). According to Auster, it is not possible to make sense of Holocaust and attempts at making sense of it are futile. Holocaust, in Auster's words, is "the first cause and the last effect of an entire cosmology" (358): it destroys the universe, its meaning, conception and the new world it creates constitutes a world of nothingness, empty of meaning and explanation. Auster points at the same issue in Edmond Jabés' writing and once again shows the impossibility of maintaining a Jewish identity, dealing with Holocaust and presenting the Holocaust.

In his essay "Book of the Dead" (1976), Auster focuses on Edmond Jabés's The Book of Questions. Auster describes The Book of Questions as a collection of "a mosaic of fragments, aphorisms, dialogues, songs, and commentaries" (367). All these forms ask the same question: "how to speak what cannot be spoken" (367). Here, Auster notes that Jabés's "question is the Jewish Holocaust, but it is also the question of literature itself. By a startling leap of imagination, Jabés treats them as one and the same" (367). Jabés seems equates the Holocaust with the impossibility of literature that occurs after the Holocaust. Auster quotes Jabés to show how he establishes this equation: "I talked to you about the difficulty of being Jewish, which is the same as the difficulty of writing. For Jewishness and writing are but the same waiting, the same hope, the same wearing out" (qtd. in Auster 367).

Jabés's exile begins when after Suez Crisis in 1956 when his peaceful life as an Egyptian Jew is disrupted and he is forced to leave his life in Egypt and go to France. Auster writes that Jabés,

> [E]xperienced for the first time the burden of being Jewish. Until then, his Jewishness had been nothing more than a cultural fact, a contingent element of his life. But now that he had been made to suffer for no other reason than that he was a Jew, he had become the Other, and this sudden sense of exile was transformed into a basic, metaphysical self-description. (368)

Auster connects Jabés' unfortunate 'recognition' of his Jewish identity with his attempt at writing about and thus discovering, his identity as a Jew. Like Celan, Jabés too turns to writing to talk about his identity but Jabés explicitly questions the possibility of writing to provide meaning before looking at the possibility of questioning Holocaust. For Jabés, as Auster maintains, the exile, the uprootedness of the Jew is similar to the "exile of doubt" to which a writer has to abandon himself (372). In this way, language can be pushed to its limits, create "a poetics of absence" which seems to be the only place to come to terms with Holocaust (372). Holocaust, which is seen as a fracturing in the history of humanity, a fracture that opens a debate on the meaning of being human, of the meaning of history, and the presence of God, becomes unrepresentable in literature. This failure to represent it, define it, talk about it is due to the burden it brings on the human life and mind.

There is also a recent example that displays Auster's interest in the Holocaust, which was mentioned briefly in the introduction. In 2004, Auster wrote an introduction to Zosia Goldberg's memoir Running Through Fire: How I Survived the Holocaust. Zosia Goldberg was an assimilated Polish Jew who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto in the prewar Poland. She left the Ghetto before the Jewish community was exterminated by the Holocaust and she survived the war by hiding her Jewishness. Auster's interest in Goldberg's memoir shows that he is supporting attempts at presenting the horrors of Holocaust and taking active role in such documentations, in memorializing, textualizing the Jewish experience.

In the light of accounts from Auster's novels, essays, and his contribution to Goldberg's memoir, it can be argued that, although for him Jewishness does not

appear to have a fundamental role in constructing identity—considering his assimilated upbringing and Fogg and Blume's distance to their Jewish identities— historical Jewish tropes are ingrained in his writing. In fact, the lack of Jewish identity as a primary model in identity formation in his novels is understandable regarding the essays: the Jew is already in an identity crisis, already in exile, in a quest. Hence, what is more than natural is the abandoning of Jewish identity as unifying power. For Auster, being a Jew means being burdened by the history of Jewishness: the Holocaust, being uprooted, homelessness, having identity problems. Auster is interested in such historical facts about Jewishness and these facts inform his approach to identity.

In light of another argument Omer-Sherman makes, it is possible suggest that Auster's approach to Jewishness—both to the Jewish identity and the Jewish tropes—is due to his having a liminal Jewish American identity. Omer-Sherman writes:

> A belonging to nothing and therefore everything . . . The Jewish diasporic experience is deeply embedded in the way he imagines the economic, political, and cultural struggles of other human beings. The liminality of Jewish identity suggests . . . a new way of thinking about the American urban experience, the paradoxical condition of organic continuity coexisting with ultimate estrangement. Enacting a myth of self-making as epic as Emerson's, it also constitutes a refusal of assimilation in the broadest possible sense. (118)

This argument of liminality of Jewish American identity seems to match with Auster's case. Liminality refers to being neither this nor that. To claim the liminality of a person's identity is to suggest that the identity is indeterminate, it is ambiguous and open. In this sense, liminality is the postmodern dissolving of the identity and the dissolution of its unity. Auster might be said to have a liminal identity, or in other words, his Jewish American identity might be seen as a liminal identity. He does not define himself as a Jew. However, he adopts Jewish themes. He also defines himself as an American. Without foregoing any, he remains close to both American themes and Jewish themes. In this sense, Auster's Jewish American identity is liminal; it is between these two identities and does not belong to any one of them exclusively. Accepting Auster's Jewishness to be the source of his liminal identity, other facts can

be presented to support an all-encompassing liminality in Auster's identity that is also the his result of his synchronic, multiple identities. While discussing themes that mark Auster's approach to identity, therefore, a frame that analyzes these themes in terms of their connection to the Jewish experience becomes the basis. The theme of loss and the American-European literary connection are treated as themes that display Auster's approach to identity.

Firstly, his isolation from his family and his lack of identification with his family as we discussed in the previous part can be seen to be the source of the theme of loss that permeates Auster's writing and perception of identity. In many of his novels, characters lose their relationships, connections with their families. This loss sometimes happens through the death of a family member, sometimes through the absence of that person, and sometimes through falling apart. For whatever reason it happens, after the loss, the characters suffer from a second loss: the loss of identity that the intimate or the family relationship provided. Therefore, the characters enter a liminal state that seems to be permanent for a while. They fail to construct new identities and the liminality turns out to harmful for them. For instance, as in The Invention of Solitude, the death of the father causes the son's confusion of identity and the son constantly tries to define his identity. Thus, the theme of loss initiates an identity crisis in many Auster novels (Springer 22). Losing roles in intimate relations results in the emergence of existential values such as a desire to find authentic identity and create authentic life, confront the anguish of being, and a desire to attain freedom. It can be maintained that Auster handles the theme of loss as a human condition and has an existential attitude towards it.

The theme of loss and its consequences in Auster may be explained with Erik H. Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity. According to Carsten Springer, Erik H. Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity is of special importance in assessing identity issues in Paul Auster's works. Erik H. Erikson is a German developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst. In Identity and the Life Cycle (1959) and Identity Youth and Crisis (1968) he develops his theory on social development of human beings and offers eight stages of development that cover entire lifespan. According to Erikson, the individual is faced with a conflict in each stage where an important

event resolves the conflict and a virtue is obtained. Namely, the eight stages Erikson offers are: the first stage is oral-sensory when trust is established; the second stage is muscular-anal when autonomy is established; the third stage is locomotor when independence is established; the fourth stage is latency when school relationships establish inferiority and industry; the fifth stage is adolescence when peer relations establish identity; the sixth stage is adulthood when intimate and love relationships gain importance; the seventh stage is middle adulthood when parenting is important; the eight stage is maturity when one accepts life and establishes integrity.

From Erikson's eight stages, stage six is relevant to the discussion of identity in Auster's works. In Erikson's theory, stage six takes place in adulthood between years nineteen to forty. This stage presents a conflict of intimacy versus isolation and resolves with an identification with a role in an intimate relationship. In this stage, according to Erikson, if the individual establishes and maintains an intimate, deep, emotional relationship with others, the individual does not suffer from isolation. Yet, if such an intimate relationship does not exist, or the person loses his role in an intimate relationship, the individual is confronted by feelings of isolation and suffers from an identity crisis for he loses his source of identification and cannot find new identifications. Therefore, for Erikson, constituting an identity depends on interaction.

Loss of the identity due to loss of a close person in an intimate relationship occurs frequently in Auster and, as Erikson suggests, results in an identity crisis. In Auster's novels, the characters (mostly male), who have titles such as father, husband, and close friend, suffer a loss of the intimate relationship, by death or abandonment. Losing the relationship is always extremely damaging for Auster's characters: for them, isolation comes along with the loss of identity the relationship had granted them. Losing their identities as fathers, husbands, and sons mark the beginning of identity crises for Auster's characters.

Springer defines the loss that comes often at the beginning of Auster novels to be the main theme of the writer. Auster, too, acknowledges the frequency of the loss theme. In an interview, he explains,

> I do feel that in many cases, my books begin where someone has lost something or somebody. Hence, their ties to the so-called everyday world are cut and, then, a story begins. I think when people are at this moment of loss, losing a wife or husband or family, some sense of living for others, of responsibility for others, you're turned into a very unusual place in your life and things you wouldn't normally notice suddenly become apparent to you. You become opened up, so to speak (Interview with Stephanie Bunbury [The Age Dec 16, 1995, p.7] qtd. in Springer 22).

Therefore, Auster considers loss to be a central fact in life. His view echoes the central role of the theme of loss and its variations like loss of God, home, future, identity, and possession have in the history of Jewishness. While talking specifically about the loss father motif, which is the dominant form of loss in Auster, the loss of the father theme in American letters is worth mentioning since Auster's "American literary tradition is extensive" (Bloom 1). Following the rags to riches story of the orphan set by Benjamin Franklin, American literature has developed a tradition of the lost father motif (Springer 23). However, fatherless American Adams who are tough and brave, who are confident to go anywhere and build their own realms, seem to contradict Auster's postmodern fatherless sons who are in endless search for substitutes for the loss.

In the postmodern period, according to Springer, studies about the loss of the father have abounded and the subject was theorized by many thinkers. For instance, Springer refers to the psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich[7] who talks about the 'de-fathering' of society. In Mitscherlich's view, due to the absence of father who works a lot or is frequently away from home for various reasons, the child begins to search for new a figure to identify with. He argues that such a figure may be a substitute for the absent father as well as "comparable 'authorized' integral concepts" (23). In addition, because of the abandoning of the father and the destruction of his role as the model for identification, the traditions that passed on to the young disappear

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[7] Springer offers his own translation from Mitscherlich's "Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft" (München: P,per, 1972).

along with the disappearing image and authority of the father. Springer writes that what Mitscherlich points at is that through 'de-fathering', society is liberated from traditions. Yet, he leaves the discussion of Mitscherlich's views here and does not discuss the consequences of the 'de-fathering' of society.

Chapter two borrows Mitscherlich's term 'de-fathering' and, in fact, uses it in an antithetical way. The flip side of 'de-fathering' that Chapter two tries to point at considers the results of the 'de-fathering' of society. For Mitscherlich, 'de-fathering' liberates the society from traditions, or from the paternalistic worldview. Hence, the purpose of Chapter two is to discuss the consequences of 'de-fathering' by applying the term to two of Auster's novels and attempting to show the devastating effects of the collapse of the father figure and the values he represents. Because, the 'de-fathered' sons in Auster's novels suffer from lack of someone to identify with: try as they might, they never manage to replace the authority of the lost father, never find permanent and fulfilling substitutes. In other words, in Auster, the 'de-fathering' of sons initiates identity crises where substituting the father is beyond possibility.

On the matter of 'de-fathering', Julia Kristeva seems to support the antithetical reading of Mitscherlich's 'de-fathering' as Chapter two does. Julia Kristeva sees the phenomenon of the lost father as an important issue. Springer writes that Kristeva "sees the 'crisis of the father function' concurrent with a 'crisis of sign and meaning' and concludes that both aspects are decisive for what she calls the 'crisis of western rationality'".[8] Springer concludes, "loss of the father is thus seen as equivalent to the loss of a meaningful element in life, or 'metanarrative'" (23). In Lyotard's terminology, metanarrative describes a theory that claims to provide universal explanations or to be universally valid (Sim 270). Also, Lyotard sees metanarrative as restrictive, authoritarian. Thus, following the claims and teachings of a metanarrative, as Lyotard suggests, an individual may locate his or her place, role, importance, and duty in the society, in life through imposition, reinforcement, however mostly unconsciously. In the lack of a metanarrative to

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[8] Springer borrows these quatations of Kristava from her "Die Aktualität Célines" included in Joseph C. Schöpp's "Ausbuch aus der Mimesis: Der Amerikanische Roman im Zeichen der Postmoderne", München: Fink, 1990. Translation is Springer's.

identify with, to take as a guide, such as the father, the individual may feel lost. Thus, Springer seems to be right when he explains that the loss of the father is like the dissolution of metanarrative: when the father is lost, wisdom, identity, source of identification, and meaning in life are lost as they are attributed to the father.

It can be argued that loss of the father is so central to Auster's poetics because of his own experience of the loss of his father. The Invention of Solitude, the first novel to be discussed in Chapter two, begins with the death of Auster's father but the expression of "loss of the father" is twofold for Auster in this novel. Apart from his death, the loss of the father also refers to the father's aloofness, his detachment from his son. After his father dies, Auster admits that his father has always been absent from his life and his death concretizes the loss he has suffered all his life. In sense, the father's detachment from his son signifies the abandoning of God of the Jews during the Holocaust.

This chapter also discusses Moon Palace where the loss of father and the ensuing loss of identity are elaborated in Marco Fogg's case. Fogg, an orphan, devotes his life to finding substitute fathers in order to have a sense of self. He seems to be the epitome of fluid identities: in the absence of a father figure, he can identify with the tweed suit his father substitute has given him, or he can identify himself as a starving protester. On the other hand, his identity is as uncertain as the events life brings: with the sudden death of his symbolic father, Fogg enters a self-destructive period of grief that leads him to attempt to annihilate his self. Fatherlessness makes him believe that the world is too insecure and absurd a place to live in. At the end of the novel, Fogg finds his missing father. However, this does not solve his problems. It turns out that the postmodern fragility, instability of identity are factors that constitute his identity, and he can feel a sense of sense only in the temporary roles the fluctuating relations grant him. His roles as a son, lover, or friend are never certain and stable. In the end, Fogg concretizes the result of the loss of loved ones: identity is devoid of origins. As such, the self shall never reach unity and identity will always be fluid, shifting among possibilities that grant him a sense of self.

All the reasons and consequences that we have defined above regarding the theme of loss may eventually be seen as manifestations of the Jewish trope of loss of nation, of sense of belonging, of sense of origin as being reflected by Auster in a different context, i.e., the theme of loss. Both in Auster and the Jewish experience, such losses are sources of quest for identities. The liminality of Auster's identity, that is, being both a Jew and an American, leads him to reflect his Jewish identity on the theme of the loss of the father which is portrayed as the marker of an identity crisis that leads the son look for new identifications in order to have a sense of self.

The fluid identity Auster develops as a result of his liminal Jewish American identity is manifested in another autobiographical fact that shapes Auster's perception, approach to identity. Thus, the second aspect that can be analyzed after the theme of loss might be the relationship Auster defines between America and Europe for an American writer. Auster's construction of his literary identity through an affiliation with French writing in his college years can be argued to have influenced his views on the identity of the American writer, which is, for Auster, a fluid identity, being both French, both American at the same time. In other words, the fact that Auster retreats from his environment in college years and establishes his identity as a writer who is strongly influenced by French writing can be considered another example of his approach identity. Despite his deep interest in American literature, his affiliation with France does not allow Auster to be called a strictly American writer.

In the discussion on the construction of Auster's identity, it was suggested that Auster is a member of the New York intellectuals affected by French existentialism in the 1960s and that the views of the era have permeated his writing and shaped his literary output. This section points at instances where Auster theorizes the European influence on American writing. In addition, how Auster demonstrates both American approaches to identity and European approaches to identity will be revealed. The main concern here, then, is firstly to determine his identity as a writer who oscillates between European and American writing. Secondly, to determine how

Auster's own identity as a writer, who has both American and European influences, informs his particular treatment of the identity issue in his writings.

In 1982, before his novels were published and he attracted great attention, Auster published <u>The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry</u> which he edited as well as translating some of the major French poems he selected. Auster also wrote a significant preface to the anthology. This preface is a useful guide in understanding Auster's views on the connection of American writing to French writing and serves as a practical source in assessing Auster's views on his own connection to European, notably French, writing. What is meant by French writing here exceeds French existentialist writings and includes almost all the French literature. In this preface, Auster firstly talks about the relationship of the English language to French. He notes, "It is not simply that French must be considered an 'influence' on the development of English language and literature; French is a part of English, an irreducible element of its generic make up" (<u>CP</u> 403). In addition, Auster claims, "English and American poetry of the past hundred years would be inconceivable without the French" (404). Although Auster's "American literary culture is extensive and finally decisive" (Bloom 1), his deep interest in French poetry, as well as prose, is important.

Auster talks about the emergence of the "Paris-New York connection" (<u>CP</u> 405) in the early twentieth century and offers the inspiration of French poetry as a prerequisite for the growth of American poetry in the early twentieth century. Paul Auster, in the final analysis, seems to be a contemporary example of the Paris-New York connection he talks about in the preface. Considering Auster's own resemblance to those American intellectuals and poets, or in Auster's words, considering his likeness to "the image of the starving young writer serving his apprenticeship in Paris" (406), Auster seems to be the modern representative of the Paris-New York connection.

Auster writes, "Beginning with Gertrude Stein, who arrived in Paris well before World War I, the story of American writers in Paris during the twenties and

thirties is almost identical to the story of American writing itself" (406). Among writers that "either visited or lived in Paris", Auster counts Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, e e cummings, John Dos Passos, Williams, Pound, Eliot and George Oppen. Auster adds, "The experience of those years has so thoroughly saturated American consciousness that the image of the starving young artist serving his apprenticeship in Paris has become one of our enduring literary myths" (406). After undergraduate study, Auster lives in Paris for four years and these years mark his attempts at discovering his literary skills. In this sense, Auster can also be seen to have served his apprenticeship in Paris, and his literary output can be seen as a saturation of American and French themes.

Auster also talks about the importance of translations in this tradition. Auster observes translation as an important factor in the literary growth of the translating writer. We have made the same point in the Introduction by dividing Auster's career into two stages in order to see his development in the first stage through his translations of French writing and poetry. Auster writes, "many of the most important contemporary American and British poets have tried their hand at translating the French" (407). Auster refers to Pound, Williams, Eliot, Stevens, Beckett, MacNeice, Spender, Ashbery among them. According to Auster, "It would be difficult to imagine their work had they not been touched in some way by the French" (407). While talking about the influence of French on English and paying attention to translations, Auster refers to the impact of the translation of Charles Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal" at end of nineteenth century. According to Auster, since Baudelaire's translation and his introduction to the English-speaking world, "modern British and American poets have continued to look to France for new ideas" (404). Auster also refers to the invitation Stéphane Mallarmé received from Oxford in 1893 to give a lecture in order to point at the impact of the French Symbolists and their influence in England. Then, Auster begins to talk about two American poets, Pound and Elliot in order to show the results and the stimulating influence of the discoveries of French writing. Auster writes that both Pound and Elliot

> came upon the French independently, and each was inspired to write a kind of poetry that had not been seen in English. Eliot would later write that ". . . the kind of poetry I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in

England at all, and was only to be found in France." As for Pound, he stated briefly that "practically the whole development of the English verse-art has been achieved by steals from the French.' (405)

Auster touches on the matter of "steals" Pound mentions and writes that when Pound and Eliot discovered French poetry, the influence of French went beyond being a source for imitation and became a source of inspiration and offered examples for the possibilities poetry offers. For instance, Auster refers to the Imagist Group that English and American poets formed prior to World War I. Auster writes that "they were the first to engage in a critical reading of French poetry, with the aim not so much of imitating the French as of rejuvenating poetry in English" (405). These poets, Pound among them, wrote critical essays on French poets like Tristan Corbiére and Jules Laforgue. However, Auster adds, "Eliot's reading of the French poets began as early as 1908, while he was still a student at Harvard. Just two years later he was in Paris, reading Claudel and Gide and attending Bergson's lectures at the Collegé de France" (405).

Here, it must be noted that Auster draws a similar self-portrait in his autobiographical Hand to Mouth. Similar to Eliot, Auster is an avid, passionate reader of French at a very young age and who, under the influence of what he reads, dreams of going to Paris. Auster makes his first visit to Paris after he graduates high school. Upon his return, he devours countless numbers of books about every possible subject and genre. He feels that this trip and his experience in Paris have changed him. Two years after his first visit to Paris, he gets a second chance to go there. When he is a student at Columbia, Auster finds the opportunity to during his junior year at college, Auster signs up for the study abroad program. Yet, he is disappointed because he writes that he had

> all sorts of grandIoSe plans, assuming I would be attending any lectures and courses I wanted to (Roland Barthes at the Collegé de France, for example), but when I sat down to discuss these possibilities with the director of the program, he flat out told me to forget them. Out of the question, he said. You're required to study French language and grammar, to pass certain tests, to earn so many credits and half-credits, to put in so many class hours here and so many hours there. I found it absurd, a curriculum designed for babies. I'm past all that, I told him. I already knew how to speak French. Why go backward? Because, he said, those are the rules, and that's the way it is. (172)

After this disappointment, Auster quits college and goes to Paris. Yet, with the help of the dean that understands Auster's argument, he is accepted back to school upon his return from Paris. This story clearly shows that Auster is a contemporary representative of the artists that belong to the Paris-New York axis of the early twentieth-century American writers. There are some critics that point out at the European influence on Auster. For instance, in his essay entitled "Paul Auster, or the Heir Intestate", Pascal Bruckner writes,

> Auster is an American entirely oriented toward Europe. But this proximity is misleading. A reading of Auster produces a double sensation of familiarity and disorientation, for Auster, deeply anchored in the New World, does not write European books in America; he enriches the American novel with European themes. (qtd. in Bloom 47)

Thus, on one hand, Bruckner confirms Auster's idea of the American writer's affiliation with European writing and thus enhancing the themes and style of his writing. Similarly, Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney refer to Auster as "the most 'European' of contemporary American authors" (13). On the other hand, Harold Bloom states, "Auster can seem a French novelist who writes in American English" (Bloom 1). However, Bloom carries Auster's claim one step further and announces Auster's hybridity. At a second glance, Auster's claims in the preface regarding the above mentioned poets' translations and his argument about the influence of French in their writing also hint at hybridity. Auster writes,

> In a sense, then, this anthology is as much about American and British poetry as it is about French poetry. Its purpose is not only to present the work of French poets in French, but to offer translations of that work as our own poets have re-imagined and re-presented it. As such, it can be read as a chapter in our own poetic history. (407)

In this sense, Auster's arguments on the American poets of the 1920s also match this part's claims regarding the liminal identity of Auster. If not a hybrid in the sense of incorporating the different influences and blending them, Auster oscillates between them, preserves their heterogeneity while keeping them together, and perhaps offers a new sense of hybridity. In Auster's view, European writing is an essential part of American and British writing, and he is another American writer

who is touched by French writing and whose literary presence would not have been what it is without that touch (406).

Auster's preface to the The Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry thus helps us establish the connection of American writing to French writing of which Auster is a contemporary representative. This connection has produced generations of American writers who are as European as much as they are American. Apart from his fluid, hybrid, liminal literary identity Auster has, there is a second matter to be investigated: how Auster employs both American and European conceptions of identity in his works. In his essay titled "The Bureau of Missing Person: Notes on Paul's Auster's Fiction", Charles Baxter claims that Auster manifests both the American and the European approaches to identity. In the American approach, the sources for identity are stable and reliable. In the European approach, the sources of identity are accidental and unreliable. Baxter writes, "Americans tend to be very proud of their identities: the flag, the South (or any other region), occupation, parenthood, all the notational marks that make one recognizable" (Bloom 4). As Baxter observes, objects, affiliations, and roles in family or intimate relationships can serve as sources for identity.

When we look at Auster's novels, we note such instances where such things operate as sources of identity. In Auster's Moon Palace, for example, Marco Fogg establishes his identity with the suit his uncle, his substitute for his missing father, gives him. For Fogg, the suit provides him with the identity he needs. He wears the suit one whole year until it is torn apart. Fogg's obsession with the suit shows that the suit, as well as his possession of the suit and what the suit signifies help him constitute an identity. Another example is in The Music of Chance where the protagonist Jim Nashe is a father and a husband and these roles constitute his identity. When he loses these roles with a divorce, he feels he has lost his entire identity. Such a loss of identity, especially when its source is family, is contradictory to the American approach which asserts family as a source of identity. However, according to Baxter, the family, for Auster, is "more a source of loss of identity" (4). Fathers suddenly cease to be fathers and they lose their identities along with their

fatherhood; sons never know their fathers and it is through fatherlessness that they constitute their identities. Auster does portray characters that establish their identities through their families, and as Baxter observes, they always lose their identities within the family. The loss, then, marks the beginning of the quest for self.

Two further observations can be offered based on these two examples from Auster's novels because they match Baxter's further claims. Firstly, Baxter maintains that Americans believe in earning an identity and that this is a variation of the Puritan myth of selfhood. Baxter writes that in this "late-Puritan myth of selfhood", identity is "the one genuine achievement a person could lay claim to" and adds that in America the view is that "you have got to make yourself into something" (4). However, the identity Baxter points at is problematized in Auster's works. The identifications with the notational marks Baxter mentions are present in Auster but they are present in Auster because he uses them in order to show how prone the American sources of identity are to erasure, slippage rather than standing as emblems of everlasting sources of identity. The suit of Marco Fogg and the familial roles of Jim Nashe among all other examples form other Auster novels, are lost along with the identities of the characters. Then, Auster's version of identity construction seems to be structurally similar to the American way: Little things, objects, familial roles can serve as identity sources. Nevertheless, in Auster, these identities are lost with the blink of an eye. This stands against the nature of American identity as stable and reliable.

As far as European approach to identity is concerned, Baxter notes that the European approach treats identity as accidental, happening by chance and that these accidental identities are easy to be lost. Baxter compares the American and European approaches to identity; "In the European intellectual tradition, every identity may be contingent and can be taken from you; in America, we tend to think of identity as unstealable, as permanent as a backyard swimming pool" (4). Following this argument, it seems that it is due to Auster's use of European notion of identity that his characters lose their identities- and the emblems of their identities- that suddenly. It is the American approach to present characters who, for instance, establish their identities with their uncle's suits or with their statuses in family. And, it is the

European treatment of identity to erase these identities with a sleight of hand and strip characters of their identities unexpectedly. Baxter adds, "Paul Auster's great popularity in Europe probably has to do with his refusal to share in the prideful and rather curious American faith in family as a source of identity" (4).

In conclusion, when we look at Auster's literary identity, we see that he is an American writer whose poetics is thoroughly saturated with European writing. His passionate reading and translation of French writing, his visits and stay in Paris are facts that help us establish his connection to the generation of American writers Auster claims to be as European as American in the preface of his anthology of French poetry. When we turn to the manifestation of the hybrid, liminal, fluid literary identity of Auster, we see that his handling of the theme of identity is one of the best examples. The European approach to identity permeates his writing and leads to a twofold conception of identity in Auster's treatment of the theme. Baxter claims that this twofold approach of identity is significant in Auster's oeuvre: "The achievement of Paul Auster's fiction—and it is considerable—is to combine an American obsession with gaining an identity with the European ability to ask how, and under what conditions, identity is stolen or lost" (4). Auster's literary identity as a European American writer, then, is best seen in his mixing of American and European treatments of the theme of identity in his writings.

The premise of this chapter has been that Auster embodies a literary identity that is influenced by various sources like postmodernism, existentialism, American literary tradition, European mode of thinking, and French influences. The importance of his rather liminal American Jewish identity has been taken to situate liminality, multiplicities of these various influences and their heterogenous co-existence at the core of Auster's poetics. In the next chapter, in order to investigate Auster's manifestation of these influences in his works, two novels of the author, both of which portray the problematical father-son relationship and the sons' identity crises, will be taken into consideration.

CHAPTER TWO
IDENTITIES IN INTERACTION: "DE-FATHERED" SONS IN
THE INVENTION OF SOLITUDE AND MOON PALACE

2.1. The Quest for the Father, the Quest for Self in The Invention of Solitude

How could you be yourself in a world where your father was disengaged?

Pascal Bruckner

Paul Auster wrote his semi-autobiographical novel <u>The Invention of Solitude</u> after his father died. At the time of his father's death, Auster's life-long problem with his father was still unresolved: his father had always been away from him; he lacked his affection, recognition, appreciation, and he had never had a chance to attain them. He was invisible to his father, who was himself invisible, "a perpetual outsider, a tourist of his own life" (<u>IoS</u> 9). In his constant search for his father, Auster voices the Jewish 'hunger' in this novel. The novel revolves around the fierce desire to determine a past and a present, to find and belong to an origin depicted to be embodied in the father figure. Separation, distance, isolation from the father represents an exile-like wandering for the son whose hunger for the father, whose lack of identification with the father, and his lack of means to identify with the father burdens his self-perception.

The novel is the product of the son's despair after the death of the father. As soon as his father dies, Auster begins to write about him. By writing about him, Auster firstly tries to rescue the memory of a ghost, as his father was absent not only from him but he was detached from the world as well:

> What people saw when he appeared before them, then, was not really him, but a person he had invented, an artificial creature he could manipulate in order to manipulate others. He himself remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain. (<u>IoS</u> 16)

According to Shiloh, Auster's above quoted words show that Auster sees "fragmentation, invisibility, [and] solitude" as the fundamental features of his father's identity (Shiloh 18). In the process of writing, thus, Auster hopes to find an essence behind these features. He also hopes to create an identity for himself through giving his father a presence. He has suffered from the lack of identification with his father all his life, so managing to give his father an identity means giving himself one, too. Pascal Bruckner notes, Auster's father "remained a stranger to Auster, and made Auster stranger to himself" (qtd. in Bloom 43). The reflection of this matter constitutes the discussion of <u>The Invention of Solitude</u>.

On the autobiographical quality of the book, Auster comments in the interview with Joseph Mallia, "I don't think of it as an autobiography so much as a meditation about certain questions using myself as the central character" (TRN 196). There are two parts—written one year apart—in the novel which are told in two different narrative perspectives. The first part, Portrait of an Invisible Man is written in the first person, and the second part, The Book of Memory is in the third person. This chapter will elaborate on the first part of the novel as its main subject is the problematical father-son relationship and the son's quest for identity. In the second part, Auster continues his quest for identity but excludes his father from his quest. Since the focus of this chapter is an investigation of identity construction through the father-son relationship, The Book of Memory is excluded from the discussion.

Portrait of an Invisible Man is Auster's response to the sudden death of his father. He explains,

> the shock of it left me with so many unanswered questions about him that I felt I had no choice but to sit down and try to put something on paper. In the act of trying to write about him, I began to realize how problematical it is to presume to know anything about anyone else. While that piece is filled with specific details, it still seems to me not so much an attempt at biography but an exploration of how one might begin to speak about another person, and whether or not it is even possible. (TRN 106)

The highly personal tone of Portrait of an Invisible Man thus, in a way, makes first person narrative meaningful. Through his own experience, Auster is trying to communicate a universal truth, the truth that the son's identification with his father constitutes the core of his self, and his first-hand knowledge gains importance in the first person.

Auster's conception of his father's absence begins in childhood. As a young boy, Auster remembers his father to be always away from home in his waking hours. His father leaves for work before he wakes up and returns home after he goes to bed. He writes, "Earliest memory: his absence" (IoS 20). Therefore, in the first years of his life, Auster lives in the orbit of his mother and spends a lot of time with her. In order to illustrate how terribly he misses his father, Auster refers to his frequent doctor visits due to his recurrent stomachaches. He writes, "I would cling to these

doctors in a desperate sort of way, wanting them to hold me" (IoS 21). Since the father is never around, he begins to look for substitute father figures. In retrospect, Auster concludes, "From the beginning, it seems, I was looking for my father, looking frantically for anyone who resembled him" (IoS 21). These early memories abound in the novel, and they reveal how his father begins to establish his absence which gradually intensifies.

Auster's later memories of his father take the context of absence further. At first, the father is at work and Auster never catches a glimpse of him at home. Yet, as he grows older, the physical absence of his father turns into his indifference to Auster, and the son he realizes that he cannot attract his father's attention. At around age eight, Auster remembers being in crowded places with his family, and he remembers how he was unnoticed by his father. However, he writes, "It was not that he disliked me. It was just that he seemed distracted, unable to look in my direction. And more than anything else, I wanted him to take notice of me" (IoS 21). Evidently, his craving is not for full attention, he simply needs his father's slightest interest in him.

There are some instances that his father shows Auster the interest he craves for. Once, when the family is killing time while waiting for a table in a restaurant, his father invites Auster to play a game with a penny. With this game, Auster thinks that his father is accepting him into his world, letting him share his boredom, and he feels crushed with happiness. As this trivial game shows, the son longs for a recognition of his presence and his desire for father's recognition turns into a constant preoccupation. He writes, "In the back of my mind: a desire to do something extraordinary, to impress him with an act of heroic proportions. The more aloof he was, the higher the stakes became for me" (IoS 23). It seems that he channels all his energy to the possibility of attracting his father's attention, to gaining his approval, and his identity is affected by this struggle to be visible to his father.

However, being visible to his father is almost impossible for Auster. With two incidents twenty years apart, Auster further illustrates his father's indifference to

him and to the events that mean a lot to him. At age ten, Auster is the star player of his baseball team and on a special Memorial Game, his father attends a game. This is the first time his father will see him play and Auster says, "I thought that if he saw me play, just once, he would begin to see me in new light" (IoS 23). Auster deludes himself into thinking that his success in the game will grant him the recognition and admiration he longs for in his father's eyes. Unfortunately, under the pressure of his expectations and due to the excitement of the chance he finally gets to impress his father, Auster gets nervous and performs his worst. The talk after the game, however, upsets Auster even more than the chance he has lost. With "an abstracted tone of voice", his father explains him that he "played a nice game" and when Auster objects, his father responds, "You did your best . . . You can't do well every time" (IoS 23). In these words, Auster finds the utmost level of indifference and resents his father's response which he accepts to be "delivered without feeling, an exercise in decorum" (IoS 23). The automatic response he gives is a sign that he is not in the least degree interested in his son's performance, and he is too distracted to care if his indifference is noticed or not. He offers no genuine consolations, no words for his son to cheer up and shows no sincere concern about his son's feelings. He just utters the appropriate words for the occasion while remaining as distanced from his son as he has always been.

Twenty years later, another important thing happens in Auster's life: he has a son. When his father meets the baby for the first time, he looks at the baby for a couple of seconds and explains Auster, "A beautiful baby. Good luck with it" (IoS 23). He asks no questions about the baby, makes no gestures toward the baby and looks at his first grandchild as if looking at a by-passer's child. In this expressionleesness of his father, Auster finds the same "abstracted tone of voice" of twenty years earlier, the same "exercise in decorum" (IoS 23).

The words of his father upon seeing his grandson act like an epiphany for Auster. The fact that his father responds to him and to events that matter to him (which are twenty years apart) in the same indifferent tone causes him to realize a basic fact about his father. He concludes that it is not because he is not successful

enough, neither because he cannot live up to his father's expectations nor because his father has thoughts, opinions about him. Rather, he accepts, it is because of his father's character which renders both himself and Auster invisible. He concludes,

> The important thing is this: I realized that even if I had done all the things I had hoped to do, his reaction would have been exactly the same. Whether I succeeded or failed did not essentially matter to him. I was not defined for him by anything I did, but by what I was, and this meant that his perception of me would never change, that we were fixed in an unmovable relationship, cut off from each other on opposite sides of a wall. Even more than that, I realized that none of this had anything to do with me. It had only to do with him. Like everything else in his life, he saw me only through the mists of his solitude, as if at several removes from himself. The world was a distant place for him, I think, a place he was never truly able o enter, and out there in the distance, among all the shadows that flitted past him, I was born, became his son, and grew up, as if I were just one more shadow, appearing and disappearing in a half-lit realm of his consciousness. (IoS 24)

This passage is crucial as it hints at Auster's self-perception as a person that has tried to construct an identity not for himself but in order to have a presence, existence in the eyes of his father. He understands that it was wrong of him to try to gain existence in his father's mind as he already had one: he was his son and his father expected nothing of him but to be, and remain his son. If he was the President of the United States, or a serial killer, or the richest businessman, he would still have no other existence, no other identity than 'the son.' Therefore, of equal significance is Auster's realization of the futility to achieve that identity he compelled himself to achieve. He admits that his father sees him as *a* son that was born to *a* father; that is, their roles in the relationship are defined by the bond that binds them and his father does not see the necessity to personalize their relationship. In fact, he seems to be incapable to enter into such a human contact.

The result is that the son who tries to establish an identity turns to his father for identification but first he fails to locate him as he is never around. Then, he heart-breakingly tries to impress his father and wants to construct an identity that his father will appreciate, but nothing seems to break the spell. When his father dies, Auster does not stop looking for his father.

After the death of his father, Auster goes to his father's home to sort his father's furniture and possessions for sale. In the bedroom closet, he finds several hundred of family photographs and an empty photo album entitled "This is Our Life: The Austers." The album is empty and the photographs are stashed carelessly in piles or scattered in drawers. This can be seen as a metaphor of the Auster family: the family is scattered like their photographs and there is nothing that brings them together. From the way the photographs are stored, Auster understands that his father never looked at them and never considered filling the family photo album with them. It seems that his father's indifference to the family photographs is a manifestation of his indifference to his family, or to his role as a father. He shows no interest in keeping the family together and connected. Auster's conception of his father as an absent member of the family is thus a reflection of his lack of interest in the family photographs. Auster almost devours the photographs once he finds them. He takes them home and studies them enthusiastically and finds them "irresistible, precious, the equivalent of holy relics" (IoS 14). Paying most of his attention to the photographs of his father, he hopes to discover secrets about him in those shots and hints at his need to feel close to his father:

> It seemed that they could tell me things I had never known before, reveal some previously hidden truth, and I studied each one intensely, absorbing the least detail, the most insignificant shadow, until all the images had become a part of me. I wanted nothing to be lost. (IoS 14)

By trying to absorb the instances, relics, and the memories of the past the photographs present, and by making them part of himself, Auster wishes to satisfy his need to have a connection with his father and his past. However, for him to have that desired connection, he firstly needs to negate the absence his father has created, that is, Auster needs to establish his father's identity. The photographs serve him well for that purpose. He writes, "Discovering these photographs was important to me because they seemed to reaffirm my father's existence in the world, to give me the illusion that he was still there" (IoS 14). Yet, the existence he hopes to affirm is the existence of a deceased person. His father is no longer alive, thus, reaffirming the father's identity is dependent on the idea, memory of him and Auster is well aware of this fact: "I had lost my father. But at the same time, I had also found him. As long as

I kept these pictures before my eyes, as long as I continued to study them with complete attention, it was as though he were still alive, even in death" (IoS 14).

This is what Pascal Bruckner means when he writes that Auster "had to lose his father in order to find him" (qtd. in Bloom 43). Although his father was figuratively absent when he was alive, it is only after he becomes physically absent that a construction of his presence is made possible. In other words, since both the image and the memory of his absent father were unknown to Auster when his father was alive, his only chance is to recover them after he is gone. Auster explains, "Even before his death he had been absent . . . a block of impenetrable space in the form of a man . . . In the deepest, most unalterable sense, he was an invisible man. Invisible to others, and more likely invisible to himself as well" (IoS 6-7). Therefore, since Auster's attempts to find his father were fruitless when he was alive, his death does not mean the end of the quest: it constitutes another and more liberating attempt at finding him. In Auster's words:

> If, while he was alive, I kept looking for him, kept trying to find the father who was not there, now that he is dead I still feel as though I must go on looking for him. Death has not changed anything. The only difference is that I have run out of time. (IoS 7)

He feels that he has "run out of time" because he resents that now that he lost his father, he has no memory of, no connection to his father that might help him to identify with him. Auster seems to feel as if he was supposed to be given something, at least something, to identify with his father. The only person that can give him that something is gone now, and this is the reason that he shows such extreme interest in the photographs. He almost fetishizes the images of his father. By looking too much at the image of his father, he almost develops a mirror-identity with him. Yet, the process of identifying with his father through his photographs is interrupted. While going through the photographs, he comes across a family portrait[9] which reminds him of a family secret that was revealed a few years back. When he associates the family portrait with the secret, he has an epiphany.

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[9] The family portait is reproduced in the 1989 Faber and Faber edition of The Invention of Solitude".

In the family portrait, his father is a baby, he is sitting on his mother's lap and is surrounded by his siblings. When he finds the family portrait, Auster notices that it is torn down and then clumsily mended, causing a tree to hang in mid-air. He assumes at first that it was torn down by accident. However, the second time he looks at the photograph, he studies the tear closely and notices the remains of a person in the shot. He sees fingers grasping the body of a child who seems to be standing alone and there is no one in the picture to own those fingers. Soon, he understands the reason behind the tearing down of the photograph: somebody is deliberately removed from the photograph and that person is his grandfather.

This photograph revives the memory of the disturbing secret behind the death of his grandfather: he was killed by his wife; i.e., Auster's grandfather was killed by his grandmother. Although Auster's grandmother was found innocent and the murder was accepted to be suicide, everyone in the family knew the fact because the man was killed by his wife in the kitchen and two sons witnessed the murder. When Auster learns about this family secret, he cannot see the effect of the murder on him. but, when he sees the family portrait, he has a belated epiphany: he realizes that his grandfather was absent from his father's life as much as his father was absent from his life.

This epiphany, in fact, acts as a strange source for Auster's identification with his father. He concludes that both he and his father are sons of absent fathers. In their fatherlessness, Auster finds the relation he has always desired to find to connect to his father. He meditates on the impact of the murder on his father's identity. He writes, "A boy cannot live through this kind of thing without being affected by it as a man" (36). Of all the equally unbearable things Auster's father possibly went through, some that come to mind may be exemplified as his being forced to erase the memory of his father, pretending he never existed, pretending the murder never took place, forgiving the mother, and accepting the mother's covering up the murder as the father's suicide. None can be experienced without permanent damage to self. The

event is too difficult to digest and Auster recognizes that his father's identity as an absent person is a result of his own fatherlessness.

Soon, Auster realizes the futility of establishing his identification with his father based on their common fatherless situations. He has nothing other than that connection, which in the end means too little. The image, the identity of his father is still missing and Auster still has to give his father an identity in order to have one himself. With the urge he feels to write about his father, Auster sets out yet another attempt at finding his self. As it turns out, one of the first things Auster thinks about upon learning his father's death is to write about him. Auster comments on a sudden, mysterious urge to write about his father: "It was simply there, a certainty, an obligation that began to impose itself on me the moment I was given the news. I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish along with him" (IoS 6).

He feels compelled to write in the face of death that threatens to erase everything and with these remarks, Auster echoes Maurice Blanchot's views on death and its relation to writing. Auster's impulse to write in order to fight the total annihilation of his father seems to correspond to Blanchot's ideas about the urge to write, or the demand of writing, that occurs when confronted with the risk of nothingness death brings. In The Infinite Conversation (1969), Blanchot talks about the central role death has in literature. He explains that when we relate to death, we experience a feeling of dread. This feeling of dread makes us realize our nothingness or insignificance "at the heart of our existence" (Haase 51). For Blanchot, this feeling of dread leads to the demand of writing which he asserts to be a response to the nothingness of existence. In Portrait of an Invisible Man, Auster experiences the response Blanchot argues we give when confronted with death. When confronted with his father's death, Auster questions the meaning of life and death, and the novel begins with these words: "One day there is life . . . and then, suddenly, it happens there is death" (IoS 1). His helplessness about the suddenness of death appears to be a result of his relationship with his father. He has always been trying to reach his father, connect to him, and now that he is gone, his chances seem diminished. He

accepts death to be "the irreducible fact of our mortality" (IoS 1) and adds; "for a man to die simply because he is a man, brings us so close to the invisible boundary between life and death that we no longer know which side we are on. Life becomes death, and it is as if death owned this life all along" (IoS 1).

Auster then feels an urge to write about his father because he fears that his father's death renders him non-existent, or a person who never really existed. What Blanchot calls the "demand of literature" invades Auster. Auster explains: "I knew I had to write about my father. I had no plan, had no idea of what this meant (IoS 2). Afraid to lose him completely, he feels he needs to save his existence from being nullified by death, he feels compelled, in his words; "to affirm my father's physical presence in the world" by writing (IoS 14). At this point, "the experience of dying is that of an indescribable horror of meaninglessness" (Haase 65). As Blanchot suggests and as Auster illustrates, the meaninglessness of life signified by death compels the writer to write, and it is only through this demand of literature that we can reaffirm our existence. Therefore, the role of death in Auster is similar to what Blanchot argues it to be: "Death allows me to grasp what I want to attain . . . [W]ithout death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness" (Bruns 46).

What Auster wants to attain is not only a re-constitution is his father's identity. He needs to re-affirm his identity, too, and this is the foremost reason of his fierce desire to give his father an identity. Bruckner illustrates the situation with this question: "How could you be yourself in a world where your father was disengaged?" (qtd. in Bloom 43). Auster's quest for his father gives a sense of the reflection of the Jewish tropes of split identities due to homelessness and the Jewish 'hunger' for origins, home, and a unifying force. Home is, or, a nation is necessary to belong to a definite past and present. Auster's fatherlessness thus manifests itself like a variation of exile. Auster feels detached, isolated from a past, an origin he belongs to and cannot find his identity in this detachment and continuously suffers from the lack identity. His act of writing about his father thus turns into an attempt at giving his father an identity, situating him into a past and thus providing himself the origin he yearns for. If he succeeds, he can finally have his own identity. Blanchot finds a

function of self-creation in the act of writing. In <u>Literature and the Right to Death</u> (1948), Blanchot writes that the writer "needs the work he produces in order to be conscious of his talents and of himself. The writer only finds himself, only realizes himself, through his work; before his work exists, not only does he not know who he is, but he is nothing" (Blanchot 361). In this sense, too, Auster's attempt to constitute or re-constitute an identity for his father is at the same his quest for his own identity. If, by restoring the image of his father, he can fill the void that his lack of identification with his father created in his self, he can finally find himself.

In conclusion, although the fact that his grandfather was murdered by his wife makes the status of Auster and his father identical as sons of absent fathers, absent in the sense of affecting the son's identity, Auster is utterly helpless in finding means to identify with his father. As Springer observes, Auster cannot give his father an identity because his father too lacked a father and never had an identity (Springer 87). In the end, Auster is compelled to create an identity for his father through writing about him, because otherwise, he cannot establish himself a past, and a present, and determine who he is. Yet, his writings do not go beyond affirming his father's absent character, and in this sense, if there is one thing that is definite, it seems to be that Auster is bound to remain a fatherlessness son. The same fact is also realized by Marco Fogg in <u>Moon Palace</u>, who, like Auster, does his best to find his identity that was burdened by his fatherlessness only to accept it as the only mode of existing.

2.2. A Narrative of Transcendence: The Ghost Father and His Substitute in Moon Palace

You never stop hungering for your father's love

<u>The Invention of Solitude</u>"

In Moon Palace, intimate relationships are presented as the only means of constructing identities. Echoing Erik Erikson's sixth stage, failure to maintain roles in intimate relationships results in isolation and identity crisis. The fathers and sons in Moon Palace base their identities on their roles as fathers and sons. Any damage to the father-son relationship distorts their self-perception and their identities are lost along with the loss of the position in the relationship. This section looks at how the protagonist of Moon Palace, Marco Stanley Fogg constructs his identity with roles he acquires in intimate relationships. Fogg is a fatherless son who tries to substitute for his lack with symbolic fathers and thus, being a son- albeit without a father- is what constitutes his identity.

Fogg's mother was a single mother who died in a car accident when Fogg was eleven. Fogg explains, "there was never any father in the picture" (MP 3) and he learns hat he is an illegitimate child when his mother dies. When he thinks of his childhood he remembers some details about his mother. Yet, he remarks, "with my father, however, all was a blank . . . There was no evidence of him. Not one photograph, not even a name" (4). In the face such an absolute lack of information, he creates an imaginary father; "For want of something to cling to, I imagined him as a dark-haired version of Buck Rogers, a space traveler who had passed into the fourth dimension and could not find his way back" (4). He sees himself "like some pathetic orphan hero in a nineteenth-century novel" (4). When his uncle, Uncle Victor begins to care of him after his mother's death, "Victor did not pretend to be something he was not. He knew that fatherhood was beyond him, and he treated me less as a child than as a friend . . . It was an arrangement that suited us both" (MP 5). However, Fogg's acts show that he is deeply attached to his uncle. For example, when he moves to New York for college, he constantly wears a tweed suit his uncle has given him in order to feel close to his uncle. He becomes connected to the suit "for sentimental reasons": "I was satisfying the desire to have my uncle near me. If Victor had given me a purple zoo suit, I no doubt would have worn it in the same spirit that I wore the tweed" (MP 15). Fogg's attachment to his uncle's suit is

reminiscent of Auster's fetishizing of his fathers photographs in <u>Portrait of an Invisible Man</u>.

The death of Uncle Victor shows that Fogg has indeed substituted him with the missing father. After his uncle's death, Fogg withdraws from the world, goes on a self-inflicted starvation, reads his uncle's books and tries to keep him alive. This period and Fogg's gradual process of self-annihilation show that Uncle Victor was helping him to cope with his insatiable hunger for the father. Now that Uncle Victor is dead, Fogg feels isolated from the world and in this way, Fogg fits into Erikson's model where loss of intimate relations result in solitude. In Fogg's case, solitude extends to an existential crisis where he strips himself from all his belongings, spends all his money, loses his apartment, lives in the streets, starves himself to death and tests his limits in order to find his self. Fogg explains how he feels after his uncle's death: "I wanted to live dangerously, to push myself as far as I could go, and then see what happened to me when I got there" (1). Lacking what he needs most for self-definition, a father or a substitute for the father, Fogg withdraws from the world. According to Shiloh, this is Fogg's "journey to the end of the self", his "stripping away the bare code of selfhood" (Shiloh 137).

His reaction to his uncle's death takes the form of a "metaphysical rebellion" (Shiloh 138). Firstly, he feels furious for the sudden death of his fifty-two year old uncle. He says, "how does one prepare for the death of a fifty-two-year-old man whose health has always been good? My uncle simply dropped dead one fine afternoon in the middle of April, and at that point my life began to change, I began to vanish into another world" (<u>MP</u> 3). It seems that for Fogg, his healthy uncle's death is as absurd as his never knowing his father. In a world where fathers abandon sons and healthy men drop dead unexpectedly, Fogg feels that the ground is shaking.

His isolation is thus firstly the result of a revolt against the absurdities of the world. Fogg is a successful student at Columbia and is very well-read. Even when drinking in bars, in order to impress his friends he "quot[es] verses from minor

sixteenth-century poets, mak[es] obscure references to Latin medieval philosophers" and defines himself as "the sublime intellectual, the cantankerous and opinionated future genius" (15). After the death of his uncle, his economic condition deteriorates and Fogg initially considers quitting college, but decides to keep his promise to his uncle that he would graduate at all costs. Considering his economic condition, he explains, "All kinds of options were available to people in my situation- scholarships, loans, work-study programs- but once I began to think about them, I found myself stricken with disgust" (20). He sees his refusal of such privileges his as "a sudden, involuntary response, a jolting attack of nausea" (20). He strips himself of his previous identity as a prospective student worthy of support and concludes that he cannot continue to be a part of institutions and social customs. Losing his uncle makes everything so meaningless and absurd that Fogg isolates himself from the world at the cost of suffering financially. He says, "I wanted no part of those things, I realized, and therefore I rejected them all- stubbornly, contemptuously, knowing full well that I had just sabotaged my only hope of surviving the crisis" (20). The psychological and emotional state of Marco Fogg echo Auster's state of mind during his college years. Like Marco Fogg, Auster too was entering a period of withdrawal by stepping away from the social environment whose values and judgments he despised.

While trying to pay tuitions and survive, Fogg cuts some expenses and makes up philosophical reasons to hide the motive behind the measures he takes. He disconnects his phone to save money and is compelled to claim that it is a "simulacra of ourselves...communication between ghosts" (25) in order to hide his financial crisis. He stops smoking, drinking, eating in restaurants and when his friends ask the reason, he comes up with answers that show him as "an anarchist hermit, a latter-day crank" (MP 26). He cannot afford the electricity bill and his electricity is disconnected in his apartment which he anticipates himself to be forced to leave soon. Against all odds, he continues his attempt to survive with literally nothing. When he reflects on his situation in retrospect, Fogg writes,

> I invented countless reasons at the time, but in the end it probably boiled down to despair. I was in despair, and in the face of so much upheaval, I felt that drastic action was necessary. I wanted to spit on the world, to do the most

outlandish thing possible. With all the fervor and idealism of a young man who had thought too much and read too many books, I decided that the thing I should do was nothing: my action would consist of a militant refusal to take any action at all. (20)

Behind his decision to do nothing about his financial crisis lies the fact that Fogg is entering a period of self-annihilation. Although he convinces himself that he is disgusted by the system and he rejects being a part of it, he is not motivated by social reasons. His troubled state of mind is a result psychological chaos and he is voluntarily directing himself to deprivation. Fogg explains his self-delusion: "I sought out the hidden advantages that each deprivation produced, and once I learned how to live without a given thing, I dismissed it from my mind for good" (MP 27). His gradual process of self-annihilation gains another dimension when Fogg is portrayed as in utter solitude in the bareness of his room: now, he begins to deprive of himself of his self. Marco seems to suffer from an existential anguish of being, and before he reaches a consciousness of the particular human condition he is in, he suffers immensely, both mentally and physically.

Before his uncle's death, Fogg leaves the apartment he shares with a roommate and begins to live alone. When he moves to his own place, the first thing he does is to retrieve the seventy-six cartons of books Uncle Victor had sent him months before along with the tweed suit. He does not open the boxes but arranges them to function like pieces of furniture in his empty apartment. After Uncle Victor dies and after Fogg abandons his life, he locks himself into his apartment and begins opening the boxes and reading his uncle's books. He likens reading Uncle Victor's books to mourning him: "That was how I chose to mourn my Uncle Victor. One by one, I would open every box, and one by one, I would read every book. That was the task I set for myself, and I stuck with it to the bitter end" (21). Every book he reads he sells to a bookstore and the money he gets becomes his only means of survival. Yet, selling the books has a twofold impact on him which he himself comments on later: selling the books empties his apartment slowly by making his furniture made of boxes disappear as well as turning the apartment's physical condition into a model of his inner emptiness. Fogg explains, "My life had become a gathering zero, and it was a thing I could actually see: a palpable, burgeoning emptiness" (24). Reading the

books means "venture[ing] into [his] uncle's past" (24) and by separating himself from the books, Fogg feels as if he is detaching himself from his uncle and leaving both his uncle and himself behind. The result of losing his uncle is an utter loss of identity for him. Fogg explains how he identifies himself with the room:

> I had only to look at my room to know what was happening. The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much of me was no longer there. I was both perpetrator and witness both actor and audience in a theater of one. I could follow the progress of my own dismemberment. Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear. (MP 24)

The emptiness of the room comes to represent the growing emptiness and solitude Fogg deliberately builds around and within himself. Getting rid of the books means baring his living space. In addition, the books are his connection to his uncle, and severing his ties with books signals his separation from his uncle. In this way, Fogg's environment becomes as bare as he wishes his inner world to be. As Shiloh maintains, for Fogg, "The room becomes a metonymy for the self, the external void, a reflection of the void in him" (Shiloh 138). Here, the fluidity of Fogg's identity is visible: from identification with symbolic father, he shifts to identify himself with the room.

Once the room- and Fogg- are devoid of all earthly possessions, Fogg takes his second step in emptying his inner world, in destroying his self: he starves himself to death. As stated above, Fogg lets the events take their own course and refuses to take action about his economic condition. Naturally, he can buy almost nothing to eat and tries to think that his starvation is part of the difficulties he is able to cope with. He believes that he is doing well with his destitution, and writes, "Slowly, but surely, I discovered that I was capable of going very far" (26). In fact, Fogg is deceiving himself to have authority over his life, trying to believe that he can survive with what he decides to survive with. Yet, his eating less and less reaches a point that cannot be explained with his lack of means to buy food: Fogg chooses to eat as little as possible. As Shiloh observes, "he eats less and less, both from necessity- because of his dwindling resources- and from choice, because he would have easily avoided the need for self-deprivation" (Shiloh 139). This pattern of self-starvation is seen in other Auster novels. In "City of Glass", Quinn forgets about eating and refuses to eat on his way to self-destruction, which he thinks is a quest for self. In "In the Country of

Last Things", Anna Blume loses weight very quickly when her quest for her brother seems to fail.

In looking at why Fogg deliberately starves himself, Auster's essay "The Art of Hunger" (1970) serves as another theoretical ground. In this essay, Auster talks about the protagonist in Knut Hamsun's novel "Hunger" and in Kafka's story "A Fasting-Artist"[10]. Fogg is reminiscent of the heroes in these works: all these fictional heroes enter a period of self-starvation and their motivations for fasting is the same: they see it as a mode of self-expression.

Shiloh offers a psychoanalytic reading of Fogg's self-imposed starvation. First, she refers to Lacan's views on the fasting of the anorectic in his "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis". Shiloh writes that according to Lacan, the refusal of an anorectic person to eat shows that the person is in fact refusing "to console herself with substitutes for the lost breast of infancy; she becomes infatuated with nothingness" (Shiloh 141). This infatuation results in fasting, which, according to Shiloh, reveals in clinical terms a quest for self-annihilation. Thus, Fogg's self-imposed starvation as a manifestation of his desire to annihilate himself is supported by Lacan's views on anorexia. However, in Fogg's case, it is the loss of the father, or his absence, and/or the death of the symbolic father that constitute the loss that Fogg feels since his infancy. He could not establish his identity on lack of a father and substitutes his uncle for the father figure that he desperately needs. With the death of Uncle Victor, his insatiable hunger for the father resurfaces, and Fogg's surrender to the inevitability of fatherlessness leads him to an existential crisis where refusing food equals refusing the absurdities of life, refusing himself, his identity. He almost wants to reduce his being to nothingness.

In addition to Lacan, Shiloh also refers to Freud and asserts that Fogg's starvation can also be seen as a refusal of not only his self but also of the outer world. Shiloh refers to Freud's views on eating as a form of ingesting the external world. Shiloh observes that for Freud, through oral activity, human beings decide what to

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[10] [10] Although Auster refers to Kafka's story as "A Hunger Artist", there is also the title "A Starvation Artist" used by Norton Critical Edition's "Kafka's Selected Stories".

take inside and what keep outside. Something that gives pleasure is eaten and something that tastes bad is not eaten. In this process, every bad and alien thing is associated with the external. Such identification leads Freud to assert that eating- the introjection of food- becomes a way for the ego to introject external models. "Freud", Shiloh says, "argues that the ego is constructed through a series of identifications with other beings, and that the very notion of introjection originates in cannibalism" (Shiloh 142). Moving from this theory, Shiloh writes, "The need to eat reveals the subject's fundamental incompleteness" (142). When the subject refuses eating, it can be seen as a refusal to connect with the world and results in a decision to close the self to itself. Shiloh explains, "By refusing nourishment, the subject attempts to establish his autonomy and self-sufficiency, to stave off the invasion of the Other in the form of food" (142). Thus, Fogg's refusal to eat is a sign of his attempt to keep the world outside and "preserve the intactness of the self" (142).

Shiloh's reading of Freud can matched with Kafka's hero. Before he dies, Kafka's hunger artist announces that he dissatisfied with the world and that he starved because he could not find the food he liked. It can be asserted that the hunger artist's failure to find the food he likes symbolizes his failure to make sense of things in the world and his refusal to accept them and the decision to close himself to the external world. In this way, there is a similarity between Kafka's unnamed protagonist and Fogg which is their motive for hunger and fasting. About Kafka's hunger artist Auster explains, "He has chosen to fast only because he could never find any food that he liked" (CP 324). When we look at Fogg and remember Shiloh's suggestion of Freud's theory of eating and absorbing the external world and its models, it can be asserted that both Kafka's hero and Fogg are deeply dissatisfied with the reality and they protest it by refusing it, which is carried out in a refusal to eat. When nothing in the world is liked, nothing will be eaten.

Fogg comments on his self-imposed deprivation in his apartment to be "a theater of one" where he "was both perpetrator and witness, both actor and audience" (MP 24). Shiloh notes that in this way Fogg sees his fasting as a spectacle that he stages for himself and he thus once again rejects external world (Shiloh 143). Fogg

adds, "This was nihilism raised to the level of an aesthetic proposition. I would turn my life into a work of art, sacrificing myself to such exquisite paradoxes that every breath I took would teach me how to savor my own doom" (MP 20).

Kafka's hero is the one who actualizes what Fogg wishes to do: he is a hunger artist who does indeed turn his life, and hunger, into a work of art, a spectacle. Although Auster talks about Kafka's story very briefly at the end of his essay, he claims to find the "most meticulous elaboration" of "the aesthetics of hunger" in it (CP 323). In this story, the hero, the hunger artist, travels from city to city in Europe with a manager who is referred to as "the companion of a career without compare" (Kafka 91). The manager conducts a show in every city they visit by locking the hunger artist in a cage. Out of formality, watchmen inspect the artist day and night to see if he secretly eats or not. The hunger artist despises this supervision because for him, "the honor of his art forbade such an action" (87).

The manager lets the artist starve maximum forty days "even in great metropolitan centers" (88). The manager reasons, "beyond that time there was no audience, significant decline in attendance could be registered" (88). Therefore, the purpose of his starvation, at least for the manager, is to amuse people and make money. Deeply dissatisfied with the limitation, the artist leaves the manager due to his forty-day rule and joins a circus where he thinks he can starve himself as long as he likes. He does set the time, that is unlimited time, for his starvation, but this time people pay almost no attention to him and prefer to see wild animals. In the circus, "he was nothing more than an obstacle on the way to the animal shed" (92). He is even made fun of for his "outdated number" and accused of "cheating" (93). Kafka writes, "it was not the starvation artist who was cheating, he performed his work honorably, it was the world that cheated him of his reward" (93). Here, his reward seems to be the society's acknowledgement of his dissatisfaction. As will be discussed below, he begins starving because he is deeply dissatisfied and he wants the world to realize his dissatisfaction.

In the story, thus, it is implied that starving is not an artificial, simulated performance for Kafka's hero, but it is his self-expression, a reflection of how he feels. Auster writes, "Beyond the theatrical device of sitting in his cage, his art in no way differs from his life, even what his life would have become had he not become a performer" (CP 324). Auster points out to the fact that hunger is a fact of the hero's life and adds, "His performances are therefore not spectacles for the amusement of others, but the unraveling of a private despair that he has permitted others to watch" (324). This "private despair" is his dissatisfaction. For the hunger artist, his performance has no fictional or artificial quality. At the end of the story, the artist dies and his last words explain why he starved. He recounts his reason, "because I could not find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a sensation, and I would have stuffed myself just like you and all the others" (Kafka 94).

While Kafka's hero starves out of disappointment, Auster writes that the hunger artist dies because "he forsakes his art" (CP 324) and does not obey the restrictions his manager imposes on him. Auster adds, "The hunger artist goes too far. But that is the risk, the danger in any act of art: you must be willing to give your life" (324). Foog's words support Auster: "I discovered that I was capable of going very far, much farther than I thought possible" (MP 26). And he does go too far. When his former roommate and future-girlfriend save him, he is extremely close to death and if had not been for them, Fogg would have died. Therefore, both Kafka's and Auster's protagonists see hunger, starvation as a way of life, of self-expression, a form of art, and they let their starvation take them wherever it may lead them to. For Auster, "an art of hunger" is "an art of need, of necessity, of desire" (CP 323). Fogg's desire is to have his father, and this unfulfilled need as well as his grief for the death of his symbolic father is manifested in his act of self-starvation. Auster writes the art of hunger is "an art that begins with the knowledge that there are no right answers" (323) and Fogg's failure to find explanations for his de-fathered existence leads him see hunger an art of unfulfilled desire.

In his essay "The Art of Hunger", Auster also talks about Knut Hamsun's novel Hunger and its nameless protagonist. The protagonist comes to a city which is "a labyrinth of hunger" (317). He is a writer without a steady job and he is "never

more than one step from collapse" and from going mad (317). Auster describes the paradoxical situation the hero suffers from: "he must eat in order to write. But if he does not write, he will not eat. And if he cannot eat, he cannot write. He cannot write" (317).

Similar to Fogg and Kafka's hunger artist, the nameless hero in Hamsun's novel is yet another protagonist to starve and suffer on his free will. Auster writes, "The hero suffers, but only because he has chosen to suffer . . . From the beginning it is made clear that the hero need not starve. Solutions exist" (318). However, Hamsun's hero refuses solutions and from this point on, Fogg's acts echo Hamsun's hero's acts. Besides, their hunger is not a temporary deprivation, a test of command for religious means (Shiloh 141). About Hamsun's hero Auster maintains, "He is not denying earthly life in anticipation of heavenly life; he is simply refusing to live the life he has been given" (CP 319). Fogg is not destined to starve because of his poverty as he himself acknowledges. Starving becomes a test he applies to himself in rejecting the meaninglessness of the world and keeping the bridges burnt between himself and life. Starvation, in another sense, is an existential mode of rebellion, an intentional suffering due to being conscious of the despair of life. As Olson writes, consciousness "varies in direct ratio with the degree of suffering and intensely lived experience" (Olson 28). Suffering, therefore, is a sign of the consciousness of being and existing.

Finally, it can be asserted that Hamsun's hero seems to be in much an identity crisis as Fogg seems to be in. Auster writes that Hamsun's hero disconnects himself from society and social conventions and loses the props he used to have for standing. What is more important, he adds, "He is rootless, without friends, denuded of objects, order has disappeared for him; everything has become random. His actions are nothing but whim and ungovernable urge, the weary frustration of anarchic discontent" (CP 320). Because of all these factors, Auster sees Hamsun's hero to be deprived of "everything- even himself" (320). For him, Hamsun's hero has no attachments, and is thus at "the bottom of a Godless hell" where "identity disappears" (320). It is for this reason, Auster claims, that the hero is nameless. Fogg,

on the other hand, has just lost his props and attachments and almost justifying Auster's above quoted claim, Fogg begins his journey to the bottom of the Godless hell and he begins to lose his identity. Auster's discussion of self-imposed starvation in Hamsun's and Kafka's works is illuminating in assessing Fogg's phase of starvation. "Art of Hunger" becomes Auster's own guidance for understanding Fogg's starvation in the process of his identity crisis.

Fortunately, Fogg is saved by his former roommate Zimmer and his future-girlfriend Kitty when he is about to die of hunger and malnutrition after a two-year period of self-destruction. He recovers in Zimmer's apartment and Zimmer resents Fogg for not turning to him for help. Zimmer's help and friendship touches Fogg's heart and he feels "ashamed" (MP 71) for hurting Zimmer by ignoring his friendship. It seems that Fogg finds the emotional attachment he needs in Zimmer's friendship. Looking back on his attempts at self-annihilation, Fogg begins to criticize himself:

> As time went on, it became increasingly difficult for me to make sense of the disaster I had created. I had thought I was acting with courage, but it turned out that I was merely demonstrating the most abject form of cowardice: rejoicing in my contempt for the world, refusing to look things squarely in the face. I felt nothing now, a crippling sense of my own stupidity. The days went by in Zimmer's apartment, and as I slowly put myself back together, I realized that I would have to start my life all over again. I wanted to atone for my errors, to make amends to people who still cared about me. I was tired of myself, tired of my thoughts, tired of brooding about my fate. More than anything else, I felt a need to purify myself, to repent for all my excesses of self-involvement. From total selfishness, I resolved to achieve a state of total selflessness. I would think of others before I thought of myself, consciously striving to undo the damage I had done, and in that way perhaps I would begin to accomplish something in the world...I was desperate for certainty, and I was prepared to do anything to find it. (71)

Finally, it appears that Fogg's identity crisis is resolved as soon as he (re)locates himself in another intimate relationship. He recognizes that he is cared for and his identity as a loved friend helps him recover his sense of self, which he believed to have lost with the death of his uncle. This schema fits Erikson's definition of the identity crisis that adults go through lacking intimate relationships. Therefore, by identifying himself as the close friend of Zimmer, re-establishes his sense of self by identifying with a position in another intimate relationship.

Much later, Fogg confesses to a doctor that his self-destructive period was in fact an attempt to discover certainty and harmony: "I thought that by abandoning myself to the chaos of the world, the world might ultimately reveal some secret harmony to me, some form or pattern that would help me to penetrate myself. The point was to accept things as they were, to drift along with the flow of the universe" (78). However, it seems to be too distorted a self-conception since Fogg had in fact closed himself to the world and, as he previously mentioned, "rejoic[ed] in [his] contempt for the world" (71) rather than waiting for the world to reveal the secret certainty, or harmony he was longing to find. It seems more likely that Fogg in fact rejected harmony and certainty rather than believing in it and waiting for it passively.

After ending his self-destructive grief and returning to life, Fogg looks for a job and takes the first one he finds. Thomas Effing, a blind old man, hires him as a live-in companion with duties such as taking him out for daily walks and reading to him. The philosophy books, the world classics Effing chooses for Fogg to read him lead Fogg to suspect Effing's plans on him and his insatiable hunger for a father figure surfaces in his relationship to Effing. Fogg explains, "At times, I felt that he was trying to pass on some mysterious and arcane knowledge to me, acting as a self-appointed mentor to my inner progress . . . This was Effing as crackpot spiritual guide, as an eccentric master struggling to initiate me into the secrets of the world" (105). Obviously, Fogg begins to see Effing as the father figure preparing the young for the world by giving him wisdom and direction.

As time passes, the relationship of Effing and Fogg turns into a period of revelations that leads to Fogg's discovery of the missing facts of his life. Effing decides that his time of death is soon and sets out to tell his life story to Fogg and arranges for Fogg to publish the writings as his obituary. Fogg learns that Effing's real name was Julian Barber and that he left his pregnant wife and unborn child, went on a journey to West, and took his friend's son with him. The unfortunate death of his friend's son in a fight hurt Effing greatly, he felt unbearable guilt because of failing to protect the boy and he decided to change his life and identity after the

event: Thomas Effing is not his real name, he is/was Julian Barber but out of despair and guilt, he wanted to be known dead and he disappeared completely. Years later, the attack of a stranger left Thomas Effing disabled: his spine is broken. Effing believes to have found the punishment he was looking for: "He had been punished, and because the punishment was a terrible one, he was no longer obligated to punish himself" (MP 183). Shiloh writes that Effing's guilt is "the guilt of the father who has forsaken his symbolic son" (Shiloh 125). After losing the first symbolic son, Effing adopts other symbolic sons, first, Pavel Shum whom he rescues from doing menial jobs. Effing employs Shum as a secretary and they become best friends. After Shum's death, Fogg replaces Shum and becomes Effing's new symbolic son.

The autobiography of Effing presents more facts to Fogg, each one unfolding another secret. Fogg finds the unborn child Effing has left, Solomon Barber and meets him four months after Effing's death. Fogg sympathizes with Solomon Barber:

> To have spent the first fifty years of your life thinking your father was dead, and then to discover that he had been alive all along, only to learn in that same instant that he was in fact now really dead-I could not even presume to guess how someone would react to a landslide of those proportion. (MP 228)

These words of Fogg are ironic for three reasons. Firstly, because Solomon Barber turns out to be Fogg's missing father and with an oedipal twist, Fogg almost kills his father once he finds the father whom he believed to be dead. Secondly, Barber had not known that he had a son, he was utterly unaware of it until he met Fogg after Effing's death. Barber sees in Fogg the walk of his mother and suspects that he might have impregnated Fogg's mother whom he never saw after that one night they spent together. Thirdly, as Effing turns out to be his grandfather, Fogg's comment for Barber suits Fogg's own situation. Effing is the grandfather he assumed to be absent all along and he learns his identity not when he was alive but after he dies.

Therefore, by finding Effing's missing son, Fogg also finds his missing father and learns that Effing is his grandfather. All these men are burdened with losses: Thomas Effing and Solomon Barber lose sons, and Fogg joins them when his girlfriend has abortion against his will. In this way, all of them become fathers with lost children while both Fogg and his father remain de-fathered selves. As Fogg says

at the end of the novel, the absence of the father, try as he might to fill with imaginary figures or substitutes, is the factor that defines him as a person. Fogg, aged twenty-four at the end of the novel, writes,

> For twenty-four years I had lived with an unanswerable question, and little by little I had come to embrace that enigma as the central fact about myself. My origins were a mystery, and I would never know where I had come from. This was what defined me, and by now I was used to my own darkness, clinging to it as a source of knowledge and self-respect, trusting in it as an ontological necessity. (286)

When Fogg learns that Barber is his father, he has difficulty in accepting him as his father. Prior to the revelation, they become acquaintances. They visit Fogg's mother's grave together. Barber grieves too much at the graveyard and Fogg understands that Barber is his father. Fogg's first reaction is rejection. He writes how he had internalized the absence of his father, "No matter how hard I might have dreamed of finding my father, I had never thought it would be possible. Now that I found him, the inner disruption was so great that my first impulse was to deny it" (MP 286).

This denial, Fogg writes, is not because Barber turns out to be his father: "Barber was of course not the cause of the denial, it was the situation itself. He was the best friend I had, and I loved him. If there was any man in the world I would have chosen to be my father, he was the one. But still, I couldn't do it" (286-7). It seems that Fogg's self-perception as an orphan allows him to have substitute fathers but does not allow him to see himself as the son of an existing father. The solution he finds is similar to what Effing does after losing his symbolic son: disappear, and make his identity vanish in this disappearance. Fogg reasons, "I had only to keep walking to know that I had left myself behind, that I was no longer the person I had once been" (297). The loss of origins is what constitutes Fogg's identity and he needs to be in a state of loss in order to construct his identity. Only in this way can Fogg have a quest for identity. Until he finds a new position in another intimate relationship, he will continue to define himself with temporary identifications. A similar pattern can be observed in The New York Trilogy where protagonists take up other identities on their quests for identities and their true selves remain mysteries.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PARODY OF DETECTION: PERSONA AS IDENTITY

IN <u>THE NEW YORK TRILOGY</u>

3.1. Overview

In <u>The New York Trilogy</u>, the identity problems of characters are foregrounded in detective quests. In <u>Postmodernist Fiction</u>, Brian McHale observes detective fiction to be the "epistemological genre *par excellence*" (9) and defines the detective's role to conceive the reality of the world, remove any ambiguities surrounding it and thus provide an understanding of the world. In the work of the detective, rationality, and logic are the main tools: he follows clues, investigates evidences, and decides if the witnesses or the clues and evidences are trustworthy (Shiloh 36). In Auster, these assumptions are challenged. Auster, in Linda Hutcheon's terms, uses and abuses the conventions of the detective genre: the epistemological quest of the detective turns into an ontological quest as Auster's detectives fail to solve mysteries by reason.

Therefore, although detective quests seem to be into the whereabouts of knowledge, to be epistemological in nature, in <u>The New York Trilogy</u>, they turn into quests for the ontological status of knowledge, being, and identity. Auster borrows the conventions of the detective genre (the epistemological quest of the detective to solve a mystery) and by subverting them (creating an ontological quest for knowledge and identity), offers a parody of the detective story, and writes metaphysical detective stories. In his "metaphysical quest", Auster asks: "Why is there a self rather than nothing?" and in order to "facilitate this task, he presents his fiction in the protective guise of the detective novel. In the end, however, nothing is resolved" (Bruckner 48 in Bloom).

In an interview, Joseph Mallia asks Auster if he felt like writing a mystery novel with <u>The New York Trilogy</u> and, Auster answers:

> "Not at all. Of course I used certain elements of detective fiction. Quinn, after all, writes detective novels and takes on the identity of someone he thinks is a detective. But I felt I was using those elements for such different ends, for things that had so little to do with detective stories, and I was somewhat disappointed by the emphasis that was put on them. That's not to say that I have anything against the genre...I tired to use certain genre conventions to

get to another place, another place altogether...The question of who is who and whether or not we are who we think we are...[The detective] is the seeker of truth, the problem-solver, the one who tries to figure things out. But what if, in the course of trying to figure it out, you just unveil more mysteries? I suppose maybe that's what happens in the books" (TRN 108-9).

With this comment, Auster hints at his parodic usage of the genre of detective fiction in order to ask the ontological questions he wants to ask. For Auster, the most important thing is "that lack of knowing what it is that surrounds us" (TRN 110) and detective fiction serves him to query that lack. In addition, Auster maintains, "I tried to use certain genre conventions to get to another place, another place altogether" (109) and echoes Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody: to reconstruct and integrate previous works, or forms with critical distance. In the interview, Mallia asks if that place Auster wanted to go was about identity issues, Auster answers in the affirmative.

In this sense, The New York Trilogy is a parody of the detective genre for its inversion of the detective story; its foregrounding of the ontological dominant; and the quest or identity. Therefore, understanding parody and the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction will precede the discussion of Auster's parody of the detective genre; the identity of the text; the identity of the persona of the detective in The New York Trilogy. Margaret A. Rose's and Linda Hutcheon's discussions of parody will offer an overview of parody. Brian McHale's discussion of postmodernist fiction will clarify the presence of ontological questionings in Auster's novels as McHale defines postmodernist fiction to have an ontological dominant. In part two, in order to show how Auster parodies the classical detective story and foregrounds the ontological dominant, the conventions of the detective story will be offered along with examples of Auster's parodic practices in The New York Trilogy. The last part will offer detailed analyses of each novel in The New York Trilogy with the purpose of providing accounts of all the theoretical approaches mentioned in the previous parts.

3.2. Parody and Postmodernist Fiction

In <u>Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern</u> (1993), Margaret A. Rose presents the history of parody. Rose's analysis covers the uses and meanings of parody from the ancient onwards because her aim is to clarify the "different understandings, and misunderstandings, of [parody's] background, functions and structure" (Rose 1). In order to distinguish parody's functions and features, and to reveal how the meaning of parody has been limited, and at times distorted, Rose offers a heritage of parody. According to Rose, in order to understand the various contemporary practices and definitions of parody, it is necessary that we firstly understand the original meaning of parody and then acknowledge the distortions to this original meaning for an assessment of its contemporary meaning and function. In Rose's words, "some awareness of the problems surrounding the definition of parody in the past must still be used in assessing its contemporary uses and definitions" (Rose 278). She devotes her book to defining parody with an essential comic effect and her argument, although, insightful, remains too comprehensive for our study.

In <u>A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art </u>Forms Linda Hutcheon points out at the presence of parody in many contemporary cultural art forms and argues that this fact requires a revision of "both its nature and function" (<u>Parody</u> 1). However, in contrast to Rose, Hutcheon makes a limited use of the heritage of parody in order to define post-modern parody. In fact, Hutcheon states that she will neither make a survey of parody nor offer a history of parody (20). Hutcheon's retrospective analyses of parody serve to figure a better definition for contemporary parody whereas Rose maintains that the deviations from the ancient meaning of parody need to be corrected. Hutcheon writes that modern[11] parody is ubiquitous and important because it is used in various art forms from literature to architecture. Yet, she points out at a lack of appropriate definition for modern parody and sets out to formulate a theory for it. Hutcheon writes, "we must broaden the concept of parody to fit the needs of the art of our century–an art that implies another and somewhat different concept of textual appropriation" (11).

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[11] [11] Hutcheon uses "modern" synonymous with "contemporary".

Hutcheon's defines parody to be "a bitextual synthesis" (33) that tries to differentiate itself from what it borrows through transforming that material. For Hutcheon, parody's 'target' text is always another work of art or, more generally, another from of coded discourse" (16). Hutcheon draws attention to parallels between parody and irony and defines irony to be "the major rhetorical strategy" used by parody and points at the "special interaction of irony and parody" (25). According to Hutcheon, there are two functions of irony: pragmatic (evaluating) function and semantic (contrasting) function. On the semantic level, parody and irony are similar: irony superimposes semantic contexts, that is, "what is stated/what is intended" (54), and parody superimposes textual contexts. Proceeding from this similarity, Hutcheon asserts that they are structurally similar because they both "combine difference and synthesis, otherness and incorporation" (54). In opposition to Rose, Hutcheon writes, "Irony's patent refusal of semantic univocality matches parody's refusal of structural unitextuality" (54). For Rose, the duality of irony and parody constitutes a superficial similarity whereas for Hutcheon their duality is the aspect that establishes their special interaction. Thus, according to Hutcheon, the duality of irony never turns into a single voice.

Hutcheon refers to the common duality aspect of parody and irony as a structural similarity constitutes "their mutual hermeneutic reinforcement" (25). In both, there is a recognition and interpretation (decoding) of a background text as well as a converting of a message into a code (encoding). Hutcheon writes: "both irony and parody operate on two levels—a primary, surface, or foreground; and a secondary, implied, or backgrounded one. But, the latter, in both cases, derives its meaning from the context in which it is found. The final meaning of irony or parody rests on the recognition of the superimposition of these levels" (34). For Hutcheon, then, both the coexistence of two levels of meaning and the need for encoding and decoding make parody and irony compatible with each other. Understanding irony and parody, then, depends on decoding what kind of a message the producer of the text encoded into the work. Or, in Hutcheon's words, we need to "decod[e] the ironic intent of the encoding agent" (53).

In Hutcheon's definition, contemporary parody refers to "extended ironic structures that replay and recontextualize previous works of art" (xii). Thus, parody activates earlier works by presenting them in "a new and often ironic context" (5). The major aspect of parody for Hutcheon, which is "repetition with critical distance" (6), can be achieved through imitation based on "ironic subversion" (6). As already mentioned, Hutcheon discusses the role of irony in relation to the duality principle of parody. Hutcheon defines two ways that a text may reveal its duality to the reader. Firstly, "narratorial comment or an internal self-reflecting mirror (*mise-en-abyme*)" (31) can point out at the duality of a literary text. Secondly, a text may indicate its duality "by using parody: in the background will stand another text against which the new creation is implicitly to be both measured and understood" (31).

Hutcheon makes a distinction between traditional parody and modern parody. Hutcheon suggests that traditional parody lets one text to be better, or worse than the other. Modern parody, however, both "emphasizes" and "dramatizes" that the two texts are different from each other. In order to "dramatize" how they differ, Hutcheon says parody uses irony. (31). According to Hutcheon, parody employs irony as "the main rhetorical mechanism for activating the reader's awareness of this dramatization" (31). Irony provides parody, and the reader, with the contrast between texts as well as providing an awareness of the encoding intent within the intertextuality of parody. The reader firstly recognizes and interprets the background text and then infers the intention of encoding. This is the difference of parody from intertextuality that requires only decoding. By employing irony, parody acts on the levels of encoding and decoding and is thus more complex than intertextuality.

On the relationship between intertextuality, or the relationship between texts, and parody, both Rose and Hutcheon's arguments are in contrast with each other. Rose suggests that the intertextuality of parody is derived from the more important function of the meta-fictional element of parody. Firstly, Rose distinguishes the duality of meta-fiction from that of intertextuality and writes: "While meta-fiction can be defined as a work of fiction which comments or reflects upon another text, its

'intertextual' element can be described as the presence in its text of the words, passages, or messages of others" (Rose 99). However, for Hutcheon, the problem regarding Rose's association of parody and intertextuality arises when Rose renders intertextuality to the presence of two texts together.

Hutcheon suggests that she considers parody "a formal or structural relation between two texts" (Parody 22) but states the need to look at parody's intertextuality in "a more extended context" (22). For Hutcheon, in order to understand the intertextuality of parody, we need to go beyond the formal structural definition of intertextuality as two texts interacting because Hutcheon defines the intertextuality of parody to have an encoded intention which will be decoded by the receiver through inferring. Therefore the duality of parody leads Hutcheon to employ an approach to parody that is itself dual. In other words, Hutcheon defines her "theoretical perspective" of parody to be a dual one: she uses both a formal and a pragmatic perspective for her theoretical approach to parody. The duality of her approach depends on her belief that a formal analysis cannot go beyond explaining the structure of parody that is "two texts interrelat[ing] with each other in a certain way" (22). Because, Hutcheon writes, "When we speak of parody, we do not just mean two texts that interrelate in a certain way. We also imply an intention to parody another work (or set of conventions) and both a recognition of that intent and an ability to find and interpret the backgrounded text in its relation to parody" (22).

Hence, through a pragmatic approach to the intertextuality of parody, Hutcheon aims to determine intention of encoding and the process of decoding in parody. However, following this argument, Hutcheon warns that the above stated function of pragmatic approach should not be taken as a suggestion that she equates parody with intertextuality. According to Hutcheon, intertextuality "depend[s] on an implied theory of reading or decoding" which asserts that a text is simply inserted into another text and thus transformed (23). What Hutcheon offers instead of such a view is that, (within her pragmatic theory) the intertextuality of parody refers to how readers decode the encoded material which can be achieved through a recognition of the intention of the parody and the parodied work itself. We have seen that irony's

role was especially at the level of signifying the encoded intent. Moreover, Hutcheon writes, "it is only the encoded intention, as inferred by the receiver as decoder, that will be dealt with here" (24).

Linda Hutcheon thinks that parody is present in many contemporary art forms, and this requires a revision "of both its nature and function" (Hutcheon 1). Hutcheon explains her concern: "If Post-Modern theorists do not often use the word parody itself, I would argue that this is because of the strong negative interdiction that parody is still under because of its trivialization through the inclusion of ridicule in its definition" (115). According to Hutcheon, the inclusion of the ridiculing aspect in definition of parody makes it look as if parody makes fun of past, but this is not the case in parodying (115). Like Rose, Hutcheon is critical of reductive definitions of parody. Her response to definitions that see parody as attacking and ridiculing the parodied text, like Rose's, is denunciatory. According to Hutcheon, parody can criticize a text or a form in a serious manner rather than being hostile. This serious criticism can be achieved through "a playful, genial mockery" (15).

Against the notion that parody ridicules, Hutcheon argues that parody does not ridicule because the parodied text "is often respected and used as a model" (103) within parody. However, different from Rose, Hutcheon does not call for achieving a comic effect in parody. Instead, she writes, "we must open up the range of pragmatic ethos or intended responses of parody. In doing so, we must consider the role of irony" (103) since both "the inferred production and the actual reception of parodic texts" (103) need to be taken into account.

In the discussion of the parody in <u>The New York Trilogy</u>, noting the ontological dominant of postmodernist fiction is crucial because asking ontological questions in the novel is one of the major goals. In <u>Postmodernist Fiction</u> (1987), Brian McHale defines postmodernist fiction to have an ontological dominant and he analyzes the strategies postmodernist fiction employs in foregrounding its ontological dominant. McHale defines the dominant as a tool that he borrows from the Russian formalists. McHale gives a quote from Roman Jakobson who writes,

"The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" (McHale 6). McHale defines modernism's dominant as epistemological and postmodernism's dominant as ontological. Based on Jakobson's views, McHale argues that the dominants of modernism and postmodernism are not separate but that they have a "bidirectional and reversible" (11) relationship because they are connected and they result in one another when pushed far enough. Thus, stating the possibility of coexistence of epistemology and ontology, McHale reminds the function of the dominant: to indicate "the order in which different aspects are to be attended to" (11). Therefore, the dominant of modernism is the result of the foregrounding of epistemology and the backgrounding of ontology and the dominant of postmodernism is the result of the foregrounding of ontology and the backgrounding of epistemology. With this explanation, his previously quoted statement, "different dominants emerge depending upon which questions we ask of the text and the position from which we interrogate it" (6) make better sense. The epistemological or ontological nature of questions determine the text's dominant.

As a consequence, the "historical consequentiality" McHale draws attention is the result of the switch from epistemology to ontology. A look at the epistemological questions of modernism and the ontological questions of postmodernism shows that they ask questions about same themes like world, knowledge, self, etc. yet, their standpoints differ. For instance, modernism asks, "What is there to be known? Who knows it? How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (9). The standpoint in epistemology assumes already set answers to its questions and looks for clues for the knowledge it seeks. For instance, McHale refers to the detective story to be best example of epistemological genre that present clues as keys to knowledge as exemplified in the quest of the detective. On the other hand, postmodernism asks, "What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (10). These ontological questions investigate not only the existence of knowledge but also

considers the possibility of the existence of knowledge since it may or may not exist, or be available. Therefore, although themes are similar, their evaluations are different because of the dominant's, in Jakobson's terms, ruling, determining and transforming aspect. For example, when the postmodern detective asks ontological questions, the conventionally epistemological detective story can become an ontological genre simply because of the shift in its dominant.

3.3. The Metaphysical Detective Story and Auster's Ontological Detective Stories

The three novels that make up The New York Trilogy are parodic inversions of the classical detective story. It is possible to call the three novels that comprise Auster's The New York Trilogy examples of postmodern parody because they integrate the conventions of the classical detective story; revise and replay; invert and trans-contextualize these conventions. In this process, Auster repeats the conventions of the detective story with a critical distance -as Linda Hutcheon argues parody to do- and the novels of The New York Trilogy differentiate themselves from what they borrow with that critical distance.

It is also possible to refer to these novels as metaphysical detective stories following the definitions given by John G. Cawelti, Patricia Merivale, and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. In this discussion, firstly, the conventions of the classical detective story that Auster subverts will be presented. Then, a brief overview of metaphysical detective story will be presented in order to point ay Auster's parodic usage of the classical detective formula. The aim is to show how Auster utilizes from epistemological concerns of the detective story and turns them into tools for foregrounding the ontological questions and quests for identity in the novels of The New York Trilogy.

In Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture, John G. Cawelti defines "the major archetypal patterns that underlie the particular story formulas" like adventure, romance mystery, and melodrama (3).

Nearly half of the book is spared for an in dept study of the formula of the mystery story, or the classical detective story. Looking at how Cawelti defines the conventions of the classical detective story will help identify Auster's parodic usage and subversion of these conventions in The New York Trilogy. In the analysis of Auster's parody of the classical detective story, the metaphysical detective story, which is a form of subversion of the classical detective story, will offer another theoretical basis.

Cawelti explains that Edgar Allan Poe was the first to clearly articulate the detective or ratiocinative story in the 1840s but the formula did not become popular immediately after Poe invented it. Rather, at the end of nineteenth century, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories made the classical detective story popular. The reason of this belated popularity is that Poe, according to Cawelti, did not use "the relation between crime and the family circle" which was fully elaborated on in the popular Sherlock Holmes (99). Cawelti explains that Poe brought a number of changes to the formal structure of gothic fiction that was the predominant model of mystery in his time and invented the classical detective story. He explains how Poe changed gothic fiction which "frequently centered upon the attempts of a mysterious and diabolic villain to seduce or murder a confused and bewildered victim" (100):

> Poe wrought a number of major changes in the formal structure of gothic fiction. First of all, he took the rambling and diffuse narrative and gave it a remarkably clear and unified form. Without eliminating the sense of terror and mystery, he brought it under a firm aesthetic control by such transformations as shifting narrative point of view from that of the confused and terrified victim, the favorite narrative center of the traditional gothic story, to that of the more detached observer who watches in mounting perplexity the decline of Roderick Usher. (Cawelti 100)

Thus, Cawelti defines Poe to be the "transitional figure" who "aestheticizes" crime (99). However, the formula waits for Sherlock Holmes for popularity and flourishes in the time of World War I. Among successful detective story writers Cawelti notes are Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, John Dickson Carr, Josephine Tey, Ngaio Marsh, and Michael Innes. After World War I, other formulas that mix elements of mystery, adventure, and romance, like the hard-boiled detective story, the spy story, the gangster saga, have become popular. Yet, Cawelti considers

classical detective story to be one of the most "sophisticated and explicitly artful of formulaic types" (43) due to the intellectual demands it makes on the reader.

According to Cawelti, the fundamental principle of the classical detective story is the investigation and discovery of hidden secrets. In this process, the detective tries to find solutions to problems and unveil mysteries which he assumes have rational solutions. Emphasizing the importance of reason in mystery, Cawelti writes, "Pursued as an end in itself, the search for hidden secrets is primarily an intellectual, reasoning activity" (43). In other words, in the detective story, each problem has a clear and rational solution. Therefore, classical detective fiction offers the possibility of solving mysteries and attaining truths through reasoning and for Cawelti, this is "the underlying moral fantasy expressed in this formulaic archetype" (43). This underlying moral fantasy shapes the narrative and informs the activities of the detective. As Cawelti explains, the detective isolates clues; makes deductions from these clues; attempts "to place the various clues in a complete scheme of cause and effect" (43).

The assumption that truth can be attained through reason and intellect is crucial in City of Glass. The detective protagonist Daniel Quinn goes after the moral fantasy in his detective quest and he takes it for granted that he will solve the case though rationality. However, through Quinn's assumption, Auster offers a parodic treatment of the successful ratiocination of the detective. According to Auster, try as he might, the detective cannot solve the crime by reasoning. Yet, unable to accept this fact, the detective looks for ways to obtain rationality. Eventually, he fails, and this failure creates a crisis firstly in his self-perception as a detective who can solve problems by reason and secondly in his general conception of himself as a person able to deal with the ambiguities of life. Auster illustrates these arguments in the example of Quinn.

In City of Glass, Quinn writes detective novels before he gets involved with a *real* detective case by chance. Before the events unfold in the novel, Quinn comments on the nature of authorship and writing detective stories. He identifies

himself as a writer that not only writes detective stories but one that writes *like* a detective. In this way, Quinn establishes a close relationship between being a writer and being a detective, unaware that he will be forced to act as a detective very soon and seek refuge in writing in order to grasp the events. According to Quinn,

> The detective is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eye, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. (NYT 8)

Later in the novel, Quinn accepts to investigate the case of the Stillmans and suffers from an impossibility of attaining any solution for the enigma of the case. At this time, he has stopped writing his pseudonymous detective stories and works full-time for the Stillman case. In accordance with his ideas above, Quinn buys a red notebook and records the progress of the case which becomes more and more confusing every day. Yet, as the case turns into a labyrinth with ever-separating paths and no valid answers for the enigmas, the act of writing fails the detective protagonist and his search for a stable identity as a writer that brings order through writing is thus dissolved. Thus, Auster parodies the detective's ability to solve mysteries by reasoning, and he does this parody by taking the convention of the detective's ratiocination for case's denouement and abusing it, subverting it to show that reason is useless in mystery solving.

Carsten Springer offers a similar argument. Springer writes, "The role of the writer as the person who describes events promises control over the confusing experiences of everyday life. In the ideal case, writing helps the author find explanations which are relevant both to himself and his social environment- just like the detective finds explanations for events through his work" (99). Then, Quinn's self-perception as a detective who can confront and deal with uncertainties through reason and his idea that through writing, "things might not get out of control" mean a lot for him (NYT 38). However, Quinn's attempts at writing about the Stillman case

do not help him. He writes in his red notebook in order to keep track of events but writing does not give the certainty, truth events lack in his detective quest. In fact, writing further complicates matters: what he writes does not reflect the reality, which he is far from obtaining, and he cannot find a coherent truth, clue to reality, in these writings. The quest for truth is always unproductive. Furthermore, Quinn's beliefs on the possibility of solving mysteries with reason turn out to be a fallacy. Because, Quinn

> had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation. (NYT 67)

Yet, Quinn realizes the uselessness of these ideas: "But after struggling to take in all these surface effects, Quinn felt no closer to Stillman then when he first started following him. He had lived in Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability" (67). Stillman's "impenetrability" points at Quinn's failure to go beyond appearances and reach the truth. Auster questions the possibility of ever doing so.

Cawelti explains the formula of the classic detective story with four aspects the story has: firstly, a particular kind of situation is defined and developed; secondly, the situation is developed with a pattern of action; thirdly, a group of characters are introduced and their relations are developed; finally, a setting that is appropriate for the characters and the action is established. Cawelti defines two stories of Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter" to be works that define these four aspects in the most sharp and effective way and adds, "until the emergence of the hard-boiled story with its different patterns, detective story writers largely based their work on Poe's inventions" (Cawelti 80). Therefore, Cawelti's analysis of the four aspects of the formula of the conventional detective story includes references to Poe's works that both define and exemplify these conventions.

The first aspect is the situation which opens the story. The unsolved crime is presented to be the situation and the story moves toward clarifying the mystery of the crime. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the opening presents the mystery of the identity and the motive of the criminal. In "The Purloined Letter", the criminal and his purposes are already known at the beginning, hence, the situation requires determining the means of criminal's deeds or establishing clear evidence of the crime.

The second aspect is the pattern of action which, as defined by Poe, is the investigation of the crime and the eventual solving of the crime. Again referring to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter", Cawelti outlines the six main phases of the pattern of action: "(a) introduction of the detective; (b) crime and clues; (c) investigation; (d) announcement of the solution; (e) explanation of the solution; (f) denouement" (82). These parts sometimes occur sequentially and sometimes collapse into each other but Cawelti explains that a classical detective story is inconceivable without them.

The detective's introduction establishes two things. Firstly, he solves a minor case at the beginning and his skills at his profession are demonstrated. Secondly, the detective is portrayed as detached from the crime he is called to solve. He has no "moral or personal involvement" in the crime which represents "a disorder outside the confines of his personal existence, which thrusts itself upon him for resolution" (83). After the introduction of the detective, the crime is described and the other phases of action follow.

The beginning of <u>City of Glass</u> follows the pattern of action of the classical detective story Cawelti defines. Quinn, the detective-to-be is introduced as a writer of detective stories. Although it is in fictional worlds he creates, he can solve mysteries and he seems to have knowledge of detective quests. His introduction establishes the two things Cawelti suggests. Firstly, his skills are demonstrated through his published detective stories. Secondly, he is portrayed as detached from the crime he is called to solve. His phone rings, an unknown caller insistently asks

for a detective by the name Paul Auster, and Quinn pretends to be Paul Auster the detective after the third call and he takes the case.

The third aspect of the formula is the characters and their relationships. Cawelti refers to four roles that are defined by Poe: the victim; the criminal; the detective; those threatened by the crime and unable to solve it (91). For Cawelti, without these roles as well the relationships between these characters, it is not possible to create a detective story.

In City of Glass, the characters and their relationships seem to be appropriate. There is the victim, Stillman Jr.; there is the criminal, Stillman Sr.; there is the detective, Quinn; and there is Stillman Jr. and his wife who are threatened by the crime but unable to solve it. Yet, this superficial similarity soon collapses as the victim has actually no proof that he is a victim or will be a victim; the criminal shows no signs of planning or performing a crime, and the detective has no case to solve, as there does not seem to be a crime. So, although it is possible to see the essential characters of the detective story, they have no roles that match their titles and the novel seems to mimic some aspects of the formula without the context they should offer or take place in.

The fourth aspect of the formula is the setting. Cawelti applies once more to Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter" and argues that with Dupin's apartment and the room where the crime takes place, Poe devises the isolated setting of the classical detective story. Thus, the locked room as the setting is established and Cawelti explains the function of the isolated setting to "furnish[h] a limited and controlled backdrop against which the clues and suspects so central to the story can be silhouetted" (97). In other words, with the isolation of the setting, the story is isolated, abstracted from the social world whose complexity and confusion disturbs the investigation. In the three novels of The New York Trilogy, the theme of the locked room appears. All the locked rooms signify the detective's -or the person who is acting like one- self-imposed isolation from the world when he is in search of truth. Yet, Auster uses the image of the locked room as a metaphor for the real quest

his protagonists are after: within the four walls of the locked room, there is only one secret to be found: the secret, the mystery of self.

After outlining the formula, Cawelti begins a discussion of the central artistic problems of the genre and points at three instances that define the major art of the classical detective story. According to Cawelti, the first artistic problem of the detective story is the establishment of a "proper balance between reasoning and mystifying" (107). Although these two have a difficult relation, a balance of these two elements is crucial. Cawelti writes that in the classical detective story, until the crime is solved, there must be effective mystification through which the reader will suspect even the least likely criminal. Presenting ratiocination and mystification synchronously and in a balanced way is thus an important artistic problem for Cawelti.

The second artistic problem Cawelti defines regards another balanced presentation: there must be a balance in the proportion of inquiry to that of action in the classical detective story. There is "the examination of clues and the questioning" at the heart of the detective story and the detective's interviews of witnesses and suspects take up a lot time in the story (107). Therefore, in order to prevent the weary effect such investigation will have in case the detective asks all witnesses and suspects more or less the same question, Cawelti suggests:

> the writer must necessarily use all his ingenuity and imagination to invent ways of staging the parade of clues and suspects in such a way that it will generate some human excitement without at the same time distracting from the basic interplay of investigation and mystification. (108)

After balancing the proportion of inquiry and action, the writer of the classical detective story needs to appropriate a third balance. Cawelti writes that clarity, order, and logic appear at the same time with crime, violence, and death. Therefore, a balanced representation of these elements is crucial, too. He explains,

> If there is not enough violence and danger lurking in the story, the order achieved will seem trivial and inconsequential. But, if the elements of threat and chaos become too strong or dominant, the resolution into order will appear artificial and implausible. (108).

These three areas that require balancing, namely the balances between ratiocination and mystification; inquiry and action; and formal order and threat of disruption, for Cawelti, are the major artistic problems of the classical detective story. He maintains that the masterpieces of the genre are short stories because of the difficulty of achieving these balances in longer narratives: "Certainly no writer working within the boundaries of the classical formula has accomplished better work than Poe's two major stories, or the best of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales" (109).

While drawing attention to the artistic problems of the genre, Cawelti also refers to a contribution the structure of the detective story makes to the art of dealing with life. According to Cawelti, the detective story takes human situations of death and horror and transforms them into problems the detached detective investigates. In this way, the writer and the reader may "confront and try to understand aspects of life that may be too painful or disturbing to confront without this mediating structure" (131). The detective who appears to be detached from the case is capable of "uncover[ing] secret terrors of the human soul without being overpowered by the dark tides of unreason, despair, and anguish" (131).

In City of Glass, Quinn's motive for writing detective novels after losing his family as well as his decision to pretend to be the detective, if we follow Cawelti's argument, are because of his desperate need to make sense of the events and realities of the world. Alternatively, because of his need of support while fighting the uncertainties he is confronting. Quinn assumes that with the detective persona, he can confront the difficulties. In addition, Cawelti writes, "the classical detective formula is perhaps the most effective fictional structure yet devised for creating the illusion of rational control over the mysteries of life" and Quinn seems to be attracted both to writing detective novels and to pretending to be a detective for the illusion of control as Cawelti suggests (137).

In fact, it is possible that Auster wrote this novel in order to feel a sense of control over his life. As will be discussed below, Auster sees Quinn's life as a version of what his own life might have become and through writing about Quinn, he

imagines the worst case. In order to discuss this matter, which is slightly off the topic of detective work of the novel yet significant for Auster's purpose at parodying the detective story at first place, the appearance of *a* Paul Auster in the novel will be considered before continuing Cawelti's discussion. The authors appearance points at the ontological dominant of the novel and foregrounds the fluidity of Quinn's identity as he shifts from his identity of the detective novelist to his identity as the impersonation of a detective who bears the name of the actual writer of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, Daniel Quinn receives a phone call that queries a detective named "Paul Auster". After hesitations, Quinn decides to pretend to be "Paul Auster" the detective. Then, through the end of the novel, Quinn visits "Paul Auster" the detective in order to give him the check the Stillmans wrote for "Auster". Thus, Paul Auster, the novelist as we know who wrote this novel, is introduced into the fictional world of City of Glass. "Paul Auster" is portrayed not as a detective but as a writer. He opens the door to Quinn with a pen in his hand, interrupted from his work. This proves that Quinn was right when he thought of the interchangeability of the writer and the detective because Quinn pretends to be the "Paul Auster" whom he assumes is a detective but turns out to be a writer. Therefore, both writers are temporarily interchanged with detectives. The first writer, Quinn, acts like a detective, and the second writer, "Paul Auster", is thought to be a detective. However, although Quinn had made this comment on interchangeability about his own act of writing in the fictional personae of detective Max Work, his foremost identification, his comment fits into the novel with as a metafictional statement, that is, with the entrance of the real-life author into the novel as a character.

Once "Paul Auster" the novelist is presented into the novel, his presence begins to make instantaneous remarks on various subjects. First of all, Daniel Quinn realizes that "Auster"'s life looks like what his own life might have become had his wife and son not died. Auster has a wife, who has the name of the real-life wife of real-life Auster, Siri, and likewise, the son who is named Daniel. At this point, we are led to think of Quinn as Auster's double: they have the same early career of writing poetry, essays and translations. Quinn's life changes when he loses his

family, and there is "Paul Auster" who does not lose his family. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Auster explains that before he started writing "City of Glass", he had divorced from his first wife, Lydia Davis, and he "lived in a kind of limbo" (TRN 141) until he met Siri Hustvedt. Auster adds,

> by the time I started writing City of Glass, my life has undergone a dramatic improvement. I was in love with an extraordinary woman; we were living together in a new apartment; my inner world had been utterly transformed. In many ways, I think of City of Glass as an homage to Siri, as a love letter in the form of a novel. I tired to imagine what would have happened to me if I had not met her, and what I came up with was Quinn. Perhaps my life would have been something like this.... (TRN 142)

The fact that Quinn loses his family and things turn out to be what they are after his loss corresponds to the imaginary scenario Auster presents. In other words, Quinn's life is the result of Auster's questioning of events in his past and their results are reflected in Quinn's life. According to Brian McHale, there is an ontological peculiarity of postmodernist fiction at such instances, and this constitutes the Chinese-box structure of postmodernist fiction. Following McHale's explanation, City of Glass can be argued to have "a world in which events apparently both do and do not happen, or in which the same event happens in two irreconcilably different ways" (McHale 106). Both McHale and Springer point out at the presence of such a situation in the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, especially in "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941). McHale explains,

> Borges analyzes narrative into a system of branchings. At each point in the story, the narrative agent is faced with a bifurcation, two possibilities, only one of which can be realized at a time; choosing one, he is faced with another branching; choosing again, he is faced with yet another, and so on, tracing his way through the tree-like proliferation-or to use Borges' preferred image, the labyrinth- of the story's potential and actualized happenings. (106-107)

In City of Glass, it is not only Auster but also Quinn to become aware of this proliferation of possibilities. Springer notes, "Quinn and "Auster" are practically *doppelgängers* whose lives have developed in a parallel way until a certain point of parting" (103). Auster believes he might have ended up like Quinn, and Auster creates Quinn as his *forking path* in life. In the interview Joseph Mallia, Paul Auster makes this forking path explicit by saying that City of Glass is "an attempt to

imagine what my life would have been like if I hadn't met [Siri]. That's why I had to appear in the book as myself, but at the same time Auster is also Quinn, but in a different universe" (TRN 108). For Auster, this "different universe" is the novel, <u>City of Glass</u>. As for Quinn's different universe, it is "Auster"'s life. Quinn goes under a dramatic change after his meeting with "Auster" and becoming aware of his alternative life is grave for Quinn:

> He felt as though Auster were taunting him with things he had lost, and he responded with envy and rage, a lacerating self-pity. Yes, he too would have liked to have this wife and this child, to sit around all day spouting about old books, to be surrounded by yoyos and ham omelettes and fountain pens. He prayed to himself for deliverance. (<u>NYT</u> 101-2)

> The worst part of Quinn's life begins after this visit:

> Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse that any end he could imagine...It's June second, he told himself. Try to remember that. This is New York, and tomorrow will be June third. If all goes well, the following day will be the fourth. But nothing is certain. (<u>NYT</u> 104)

Quinn's rightful desperation after seeing in "Auster" his *forking path* in life points at Quinn's need to make sense of the unfortunate events in his life. The act of writing detective novels seems to be his way of dealing with his lack of giving reasonable explanations for events. In addition, his impersonation of a detective reveals his need to confront mysteries in life. However, despite his belief that through the skill of the detective he can solve the mysteries, he fails miserably.

The presence of "Paul Auster" in the novel as a character further contributes to another point regarding authorship and Auster calls for a debate on the identity of the actual writer of a the novel . When Quinn visits "Auster", he is at work on an essay about authorship in Cervantes's "Don Quixote" which turns out to the favorite book of both Quinn and "Auster". "Auster" says "There is nothing like it" and explains that the essay "has mostly to do with the authorship of the book (<u>NYT </u>97). Who wrote it, and how it was written...the book inside the book Cervantes wrote, the one he imagined he was writing" (97). As "Auster" goes on explaining his views

about <u>Don Quixote</u>, he and Quinn begin a conversation. Firstly, "Auster" comments on Cervantes:

> Cervantes, if you remember, goes to great lengths to convince the reader that he is not the author. The book, he says, was written in Arabic by Cid Hamete Benengeli. Cervantes describes how he discovered the manuscript by chance one day in the market of Toledo. He hires someone to translate it for him into Spanish, and thereafter he presents himself as no more than the editor of the translation. In fact, he cannot even vouch for the accuracy of the translation itself. (97-8)

At this point, Quinn breaks into the conversation and talks about Cervantes's insistence on the accuracy of Cid Hamete's version of the story and his argument that sees all other versions as frauds. Quinn adds, "He makes a great point of insisting that everything in the book really happened in the world" (97). Auster agrees and explains, "the book after all is an attack on the dangers of the make-believe...He had to claim it was real" (98). Then, Quinn expresses his belief that Cervantes uses Don Quixote as a surrogate, "stand-in of himself" and "Auster" makes his key comment that also applies to <u>City of Glass</u>:

> In any case, since the book is supposed to be real, it follows that the story has to be written by an eyewitness to the events that take place in it. But, Cid Hamete, the acknowledged author, never makes an appearance. Nor once does he claim to be present at what happens. So, my question is this: who is Cid Hamete Benengeli? (98)

This discussion is of special importance regarding the metafictionally revelatory conclusion of <u>City of Glass</u>. At the end of the novel, in chapter twelve, there is sudden revelation about the author's identity. Until this point, there is a third person narration. Suddenly, the narrator reveals that his friend "Paul Auster" introduces him to the 'case' when he accompanies his search for the missing Quinn. They find the red notebook Quinn leaves behind and "Auster", who is upset, urges the narrator to keep the book. He goes further than keeping the book. The narrator who until chapter twelve narrates Quinn's story as an eyewitness, like Cid Hamede, and again like him, makes no appearance at the scene of the events, claims, "this story is based entirely on facts" (114). He maintains that Quinn's story is based on what Quinn wrote in his red notebook, which, he explains, "until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn's experiences" (114).

Later, however, he contradicts himself: "The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand" (133). It can be assumed that Paul Auster uses the narrator, the friend of "Auster" as his substitute and tries to convince the reader that he is not the writer. Auster gets access to the story, but leads his friend to make use of it, and the friend merely narrates the accounts in Quinn's red notebook without fictionalizing them. Or, at least, he claims to do so. Apparently, Auster wants the reader to question the identity of the narrator, to doubt his remarks at the end of the novel and to dismiss him as an unreliable narrator who seems to have tricked the reader by acting as an eyewitness. It is only in this way that, as "Auster" claims for Don Quixote, can the fictionality of the novel be foregrounded.

Auster comments on this matter in an interview by Joseph Mallia. Auster explains, "Quinn's story in City of Glass alludes to Don Quixote, and the questions raised in two books are very similar: what is the line between madness and creativity, what is the line between the real and the imaginary, is Quinn crazy for what he does or not?" (TRN 110). Springer notes the common characteristics of City of Glass and Don Quixote and writes that both "are highly self-reflexive texts, in which the production of text, the truth claim of the novel and the role of narrator and author are thematized" (102).

These four points discussed from City of Glass each point at a separate identity problematizations. The first and the second regard direct results of Auster's subversion of the classical detective story. Firstly, through Quinn's failure to solve the case, the convention of the detective's ability to solve mysteries through ratiocination is subverted. Secondly, Quinn's impersonation of a detective shows that he has no stable identity and his identity shifts from that of a writer to that of a detective. Quinn's discovery of the actual identity of the detective he was personating, however, is another step Auster offers in the gradual disintegration of Quinn's identity. After he meets "Paul Auster" in person, Quinn not only realizes that his identity has not been what he assumed it to be since the person he impersonated was almost his double, albeit with a difference: a double with a *forking path* identity. Thus, thirdly, Quinn sees what his life might been like in the same way

Paul Auster treats Quinn's life to be what his life might have been like finally, the discussion "Auster" and Quinn carry out on the real narrator of <u>Don Quixote</u> becomes a metafictional comment. The end of the novel reveals that the narrative of the detective quest of Quinn which turned into his quest for identity was itself a detective-like quest to the whereabouts of Quinn and his identity.

After referring to instances that Auster problematizes identities in various ways in <u>City of Glass</u>, the final discussion of Cawelti to be included here concerns works that have the structure of the classical detective story but are in fact different from it. For example, Cawelti refers to Sophocles' "Oedipus" which has the three minimal conditions of the formula: "something is concealed; the form of the play is an inquiry; and the end of the play is a revelation of the hidden truth" (Cawelti 133). However, the play belongs to the antidetective genre that is created by Jorge Lois Borges and Alain-Robbe Grillet. In "Oedipus", the inquirer discovers that he is the culprit and he uncovers his own past crimes. In this sense, the play "undercu[ts] the formulaic expectations associated with the genre" (137).

About antidetective fiction Cawelti writes,

Robbe-Grillet, Borges, and Nabokov use the classical detective formula like a distorting fun-house mirror to reflect more sharply the ambiguity, irrationality, and mystery of the world. Mysteries are created rather than solved in their stories. Thus they become not only anti- but backward or inverted detective stories, a transcendence or rupturing of the formula. (Cawelti 137)

For a broader definition and analysis of antidetective fiction, we turn to Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's book devoted to metaphysical detective story. <u>In Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism</u>, the definition Merivale and Sweeney give for metaphysical detective story corresponds to Cawelti's definition of antidetective story. Merivale and Sweeney write that metaphysical detective story "adds to a mystery rather than solving it" (x) and this definition overlaps with Cawelti's statement that "Mysteries are created rather than solved" in antidetective stories (137).

As for the variation in titles, Merivale and Sweeney note that other names like anti-detective story; anti-detective fiction; postmodern mystery; post-*nouveau roman*

detective novel; and ontological detective story have been devised by literary critics. The authors explain the phrase "metaphysical detective story" was first coined by Howard Haycraft in 1941 and later refined by Patricia Merivale in 1967 and Michael Holquist in 1972. It is important to note why the authors prefer the phrase "metaphysical detective story" in their study:

> We have chosen the name "metaphysical detection," instead of these other designations, because it indicates explicitly how late modernist (sometimes proto-postmodernist) and postmodernist writers have altered the detective story. Such writers have used Poe's ratiocinative process to address unfathomable epistemological and ontological questions: What, if anything, can we know? What, if anything, is real? How, if at all, can we rely on anything besides our own constructions of reality? In this sense, metaphysical detective stories are indeed concerned with metaphysics... Metaphysical detective stories -composed in equal parts of parody, paradox, epistemological allegory (Nothing can be known with any certainty), and insoluble mystery- self-consciously question the very nature of reality. (4)

Merivale and Sweeney distinguish metaphysical detective story firstly as a genre that belongs to twentieth-century experimental fiction; has a "flamboyant yet decidedly complex relationship to the detective story"; and has "a kinship to modernist and postmodernist fiction in general" (Merivale 1). Regarding the genre's relation to postmodernism, the authors suggest that metaphysical detective story may be situated within the ongoing debate about postmodernity because they see the genre to offer "a useful way to understand postmodernism as a theory, a practice, and a cultural condition" (7). For instance, the authors refer to Michel Holquist who argues that in the way modernism uses mythology as a recurrent narrative subtext, postmodernism uses detective fiction (7). In addition, referring to Linda Hutcheon, he authors claim that the genre's "affinity for self-reflexive hermeneutics is also typically postmodernist" (7). Finally, in their view, "The genre exemplifies postmodernism's concern with intertextuality, pop-culture pastiche, metafiction, and what John Barth famously called 'the literature of exhaustion'" (7).

Secondly, the authors refer to "the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge" in order to distinguish metaphysical detective story (1). For Merivale and Sweeney, Poe's "self-reflexive, philosophical, consciously literary detective

stories in the 1840s" mark the beginning of the genre (4). "Indeed", the authors add, "Poe may well have invented not only classical detective fiction and its offshoot, the metaphysical detective story, but also the kind of playfully self-reflexive storytelling that we now call 'postmodernist'" (6). Then, Merivale and Sweeney maintain that Borges and Robbe-Grillet have inspired American writers like Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, and Paul Auster. To offer a general definition of the metaphysical detective story, the authors write,

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

In their definition of the metaphysical detective story, the role and identity of the detective have a distinct place and it is these facts that render the inclusion of the genre as a theoretical basis in the discussion of Auster's New York Trilogy. Merivale and Sweeney explain, "Rather than definitively solving a crime, the sleuth finds himself confronting the insoluble mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity" (2). This explanation corresponds to the detective quests that turn into quest for identity in Auster's novel. Moreover, the six characteristic themes the authors define metaphysical detective story to have are separately discernible in Auster's The New York Trilogy. These six characteristics Merivale and Sweeney offer are:

> (1) the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye; (2) the world, city, or text as labyrinth; (3) the purloined letter, embedded text, *mise en abyme,* textual constraint, or text as object; (4) the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaningless of clues and evidence; (5) the missing person, the 'man of the crowd', the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity; and (6) the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation.(8)

These characteristics can be observed to dominate The New York Trilogy. In City of Glass, Quinn is the private eye who gets lost in the city that becomes a labyrinth as he follows the criminal. All the evidences Quinn collects or the clues he thinks he finds happen to be ambiguous and irrelevant to the case he is working on and his detective quest ends without a solution. In Ghosts, the private eye Blue appears to be another defeated detective whose painstaking spying bears no

evidences or clues for the crime. In fact, the criminal becomes his double and the case ends without a solution. In Ghosts, there is also a *mise en abyme* structure. Hawthorne's short story "Wakefield" is both referred to explicitly in the novel and also Blue's stake-out resembles Wakefield's stake-out. In The Locked Room nameless narrator of the novel investigates the disappearance of his friend, Fanshawe, who is presented as the Other, and the method of solving a crime turns into "the detective's efforts to imagine, conjecture, or borrow another's identity" (17).

Merivale and Sweeney refer to The New York Trilogy as "necessarily the high point of any inquiry into the postmodernist private eye story" (13). In the classical detective story, as Cawelti explains, the work of the detective is seen to be a way to cope with the reality; capable of offering rational explanations to the events. In Auster's trilogy, detective work, no matter how much it is applied for order, "ultimately dramatizes detection as an unworkable confrontation with a reality whose dubious significance cannot be credibly decoded" (135). Instead of order, thus, chaos is found which is epitomized with the identity crisis of the detective. As Stephen Bernstein writes, "Auster's particular concern is the staple of detective fiction, the missing person. But his narrators and his detectives do not discover very much, except how little they know about themselves" (138).

For instance, In Ghosts, Blue, the detective protagonist, demonstrates two conventional detecting methods: he is part armchair detective- reading consists his only action-, and part gumshoe, private eye- who follows his target in the streets. Yet, both methods are useless in his quest. Merivale and Sweeney write that in metaphysical detective stories, "the detective cannot escape from the text he is reading (or reading with, and the private eye cannot establish anyone's identity -not even his own" (9). In the room that Blue spies on Black, reading the same books Black is reading and writing reports about Black are the only activities. They are not results of nor result in any kind of evidence necessary to solve the case. Blue feels trapped not only by the four walls of the room but also by the copy of Walden he reads. Furthermore, he not only fails to discover Black's identity but he also loses his

own identity. He feels that he is becoming Black as he spies on him. The authors note, "the gumshoe detective's search for another is a definitively unsuccessful search for himself: he is the principal missing person for whom the reader, too, is forced to search" (10). Thus, the subjectivity of the detective is central to the metaphysical detective story where "solipsism, self-projection, and the inability to position oneself in time or space or even one's own narrative" (16) as exemplified in Blue's experience (also in Quinn's).

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, in her article entitled "*Subject-Cases* and *Book Cases*: Impostures and Forgeries from Poe to Auster", discusses the identity issues in the metaphysical detective story. At the center of her argument lies the detective's being a part of the case he tries to solve (248). In other words, she argues that detective's quest for truth eventually turns into his quest to solve the mystery of his own identity. Sweeney maintains that the detective's self-discovery "reveals a modern anxiety about identity: a fear of being trapped within one's self, on the one hand, and of being without a self, on the other" (249). For these reasons, according to Sweeney, suicide, or the detectives' staging of their own deaths abound in metaphysical detective stories because through staging their deaths, these characters can usurp the lives of others. She adds, "Each protagonist tries to get out of his own case by supposing another" (249). Sweeney illustrates her argument with Poe's "William Wilson", Borges's "Death and the Compass" and "The Form of the Sword", and Auster's <u>The New York Trilogy</u>. She firstly discusses Poe's story for it sets the origin of doubled identities in metaphysical detective stories. Sweeney acknowledges that "William Wilson" is not usually considered a detective story, yet, she finds the story's prefiguration of the sameness of the victim, the criminal, and the investigator to be the precedent of the most important element of metaphysical detective story. According to Sweeney, "Wilson's cryptic self-murder, in particular, is as important as the armchair detective, the locked room, and all of Poe's other inventions". (251). Sweeney adds, "Indeed, this tale eventually led to metaphysical detective stories by Alfau, Nabokov, Borges, and Auster -whose protagonists also stage their own deaths, in order to attain new identities and gain control of the very texts in which they appear" (251).

In her analysis of Paul Auster's <u>The New York Trilogy</u>, Sweeney pays attention to the protagonists who assume other identities and lose their own. Quinn, the protagonist of <u>City of Glass</u> is a writer of detective novels but later he becomes a real detective. Both the private eye of <u>Ghosts</u>, Blue, and the nameless narrator of <u>The Locked Room</u> become images of the men they pursue. Sweeney writes, "For these men, the very process of detection involves a kind of self-murder, in which one becomes dead to the world, lost to friends and family, and known by other names if known at all" (262). Springer offers a similar argument and explains that Auster's deconstruction of the conventions of detective fiction is aimed at utilizing from the "unified identity" the traditional detective has (98). The unified self of the detective is put in contrast to the fluid, fragmented identities of the Auster protagonists. In addition, in Auster's novel, language loses meaning, there is no certainty and no coherence among events. In a parodic way, thus, Auster seems to use the traditional truth-seeking of the detective to foreground the impossibility of truth in a postmodern world. It is possible to say that Auster subverts the epistemological genre *par excellence*, in McHale's word, and in a parodic way, uses the detective story for an ontological grounding of possibilities of knowledge, truth, and identity.

According to Springer,

City of glass" "play[s] with the conventions of the detective fiction...The reader's expectations, which are awoken by the use of certain conventions (expectation of a mystery to be solved later, the existence of a victim and a villain, of criminal deeds and clues which will lead to the conviction of the guilty party), are systematically disappointed. (107)

In this playing with conventions, clues do not lead to a solution but to a complication of the story. Springer refers to Stefano Tali's theory of 'anti-detective novel' in <u>The Doomed Detective</u> (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984). According to Tani, the detective in the 'anti-detective novel' ""risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution:" what takes place is not a confrontation "between a detective and a murderer, but between... the detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart" (Tani 76)" (Springer 107). Among novels that Tani define as anti-detective novels are Italo Calvino's <u>If on a Winter's Night a Traveller</u>, Thomas Pynchon's <u>The Crying of Lot 49,</u> Jorge Luis Borges' "Death and the Compass".

Tani's definition applies to Quinn whose identity, which is already in crisis, dissolves entirely when Quinn becomes a detective.

Borrowing Tani's definition of anti-detective, Springer writes, "the genre conventions of the detective novel, which promise an ordered and understandable world, turn in <u>City of Glass</u> into those of the 'anti-detective novel' in which disorder and the existential void of the protagonist become manifest." (107). In addition, <u>City of Glass</u> perfectly, as Brian McHale argues postmodernist fiction to, manifests ontological dominant. "From the epistemological level of finding clues and solving mysteries the text moves to the ontological level of questioning the identity of the detective (and even the "identity" of the work itself)" (Springer 107).

Springer also points to "a parodic reflection on the conventions of detective fiction" (109) in <u>Ghosts</u>. Firstly, the identity of the detective is subverted. In "Ghosts", the detective protagonist, Blue, is a weak character unlike one in a classical detective story. He sits at the detective agency, waits for clients to come with cases: "Blue goes to his office everyday, waiting something to happen" (<u>NYT</u> 137). In addition, besides this passivity, according to Springer, Blue is also portrayed as a detective without a personal style and intuitive skill for the job. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that "Brown broke him in, Brown taught him the ropes, and when Brown grew old, Blue took over" (137). Springer writes, "Blue has taken over his detective role from his mentor, [Brown], and thus been shaped by other people" (Springer 109). Springer also notes that Blue's inadequacy as a detective is revealed when White comes with a case. The narrator comments after White leaves the agency:

> That is how it begins, then. The young Blue and a man named White, who is obviously not the man he appears to be. It doesn't matter, Blue says to himself after White has left. I'm sure he has his reasons. And besides, it's not my problem. The only thing I have to worry about is doing my job. (<u>NYT</u> 138)

In this way, by failing to notice the strangeness in White, "Blue fails to 'do his job' here as a detective, i.e., to work as a reader and interpreter of signs"

(Springer 109). After noting Blue's incompetency as a detective, Springer concludes that Blue has an identity problem. In classic detective story, the detective has an established identity and he can thus find truths in a coherent world. Springer writes, "Blue is shown to be a person without an established identity. Despite the identification with the detective role (or because it is unfitting for him) he lacks orientation and therefore adopts the views and follows the demands of others" (109). Thus, Auster subverts the identity of the detective in Ghosts.

Another subversion of classic detective story occurs on the level of the elements of the story. The elements of a villain, a victim, a crime, a mystery with solutions are subverted in Ghosts. First of all, there is no victim. And the villain Blue is sent to spy on, whose name is Black, is at work writing and reading constantly in his apartment. There is no crime, no victim, and Black hardly looks like a criminal regarding his life routine. Yet, Blue, sticking to his identity as a detective, continues to believe in the existence of an enigma to be solved. Yet, Blue's case refuses to include traditional elements of a detective story. "This is where a move from the epistemological to the ontological level takes place: what matters is not dates, facts, and clues, but the identities of the watching man and the watched one" (Springer 110). Blue locks himself in a room and spies on Black who also locks himself in a room. The narrator of Ghosts explains that "in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself" (NYT 146). The lack of the progress the detective is expected to make, however, is not because of Blue's constant sitting in the room as he also follows Black on the street. "Blue keeps looking for some pattern to emerge, for some clue to drop in his path that will lead him to Black's secret" (59). Like Quinn, he turns to writing, to his reports, to make sense of the case yet fails again like Quinn. Both Blue and Quinn believe that, following the classic detective quest, there is "a mystery beneath the surface of perceived reality" (Shiloh 61). Still, instead of solutions, the detectives find absence of progress. Shiloh notes how this absence of progress, this motionlessness is a subversion of the classical detective story: "A mystery story involves activity, physical or intellectual: the detective follows clues, unearths concealed evidence, and

mentally reconstructs the sequence of events that has led to the crime" (58). In the process, the detective "may work from his room or actively pursue the suspect, but he must make progress, in time, or else there is no detective plot" (Shiloh 59). Indeed, there is no detective plot, and it cannot be undermined that White does not present a crime and thus there is literally nothing to be made progress of.

The last remark on Ghosts as a parody of detective fiction concerns the "concept of a twofold model of reading and writing in the classic detective novel" (Springer 120) as argued by Peter Hühn. In this model, there is villain who is depicted to be writing something. His/her writings are taken to be the formation of the crime. When there is such a villain, the role of the detective is to read and decipher the writings of the villain. This schema can be matched with Ghosts. As Springer notes, "Black as a writer represents the villain who 'writes' the criminal act while Blue as the detective has to read or 'decode' the 'text' of his opponent" (120). Springer adds, "Hühn's metaphor of the crime as text and the story of decoding as another text is illustrated in "Ghosts" as the actual writing of Black (as potential villain and as a writer) and that of Blue (as the writer of reports)" (120). On the surface, these are conventional acts of a detective story. Yet, Auster employs them in a parodic way. Black's writings fail to constitute the crime. Blue cannot solve the crime although he manages to read the writings of the villain as the writings of Black turn out to be a collection of Blue's weekly reports.

This parodying of the criminal as writer and detective as 'reader' convention can be supported by another argument Stefano Tani offers for such a situation. Tani refers to "metafictional anti-detective" and maintains that it fits Ghosts perfectly. Tani writes that in this category, "detection is present in the relation between the writer who deviously writes ('hides') his own text and the reader who wants to make sense out of it" (Tani 43 quoted in Springer 120). Black' secrecy as the writer and the evident lack of meaning, lack of revelation of crime and Blue's futile attempts at finding clues through Black's writings subvert the concept offered by Hühn. Auster subverts another convention of the detective genre and exploits it to problematize the existence of knowledge and its variations of existence. Such a parodic usage enables

Auster to foreground the ontological level he points at in the relation between the villain (Black) and the detective (Blue), between the villain and the victim (again Blue), and between the possibility of the solution to an enigma and the impossibility of knowledge.

The third novel of The New York Trilogy, Locked Room, presents other parodic inversions of the elements of classic detective story. The name of the novel itself alludes to a convention of the detective genre: the problem of the locked room. Poe introduces the puzzle of the locked room in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and it later becomes a typical characteristic of the detective genre. Shiloh observes, "the locked room is not just one of the conventions of detective fiction. It is a metaphor for the genre itself, for its closed world, in which the chaotic, mysterious aspects of existence can always be explained away by reason" (37). The nameless narrator of The Locked Room tries to solve the 'crime' in a room: "for several weeks I sat in my room making lists, correlating people with places, places with times, times with people, drawing maps and calendars, looking up addresses, writing letters. I was hunting for leads, and anything that held even the slightest promise I tired to pursue" (NYT 271). Faithful to the convention of the locked room, Auster presents the nameless narrator in action, trying to put pieces together in order to reach the reasoning required for the solution of the enigma. The nameless narrator adds, "I was a detective, after all, and my job was to hunt for clues. Faced with a million bits of random information, led down a million paths of false inquiry, I had to find the one path that would take me where I wanted to go (283)

Auster uses and abuses the convention of the locked room in order to question the assumption that enigmas can be solves, truth can be attained, and reasoning is the key for both instances. In this way, through parodying the detective genre, he writes a metaphysical detective story, or a postmodern detective story whose dominant is ontological. In addition, Auster presents the real mystery to be the mystery of self. The protagonists of The New York Trilogy think they go on epistemological quests and they hope to solve a mystery. Yet, Auster shows that "the mystery has nothing to do with crime: it has everything to do with the nature of the self and the existence of

the Other" (Shiloh 39) and this matter is dealt with in the section on identity. Therefore, Auster subverts the locked room feature of the detective story to show how reason fails to solve mysteries and there are answers that are not attainable whose existence is in fact doubtful.

Next part offers studies of the defeated quests of detectives of The New York Trilogy and focuses on the identity crises the characters go through as a result of their rather distorted self-perceptions as detectives. No matter how much they try to be detectives, their identities come and go between their detective selves; other selves; their doubles; the Other. Thus, Auster's parodic usage of the detective story foregrounds the fluidities of the detective-protagonists' identities.

3.4. The Problematization of Identity: Detecting Clues for Self, the Double, and the Other

3.4.1. City of Glass: Detecting Clues for Self

In City of Glass, the protagonist, Daniel Quinn is portrayed to have many identity problems. Like many Auster characters, he suffers from loss of close people at the beginning of the novel. Having lost his wife and son discards his identity as a father and husband. He goes on endless walks on the streets of New York to fill the emptiness he feels. Quinn seeks refuge in these walks which make him "[l]ost, not only in the city, but within himself as well" (NYT 4). The narrator explains, "[e]ach time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind" (4). According to Shiloh, Quinn is "motivated by the wish to lose himself" and he is on an "inverted quest, whose purpose is losing rather than finding" himself (45). Quinn's desire to lose himself is a result of his having lost his family. However, he cannot solve his identity crisis by trying to forget himself and his life during these walks. He finds a better solution in writing where he creates alternative identities for himself.

First, it should be noted that Daniel Quinn is portrayed as a writer and he has a strong resemblance to Paul Auster. We learn that Quinn, "had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations" (4) before his wife and son died. Quinn's creative output is identical with Auster who wrote poetry, essays and translated heavily before writing novels. Yet, Auster experiences a divorce and not death. Nonetheless, after the loss, Quinn writes detective novels like Auster, who, except his first book of prose The Invention of Solitude which is part-novel part-autobiography, writes a detective novel, The New York Trilogy.

Quinn's identity as writer goes under a radical change after this loss. Firstly, he begins to write detective stories under a pseudonym: William Wilson. This name is borrowed form Edgar Allan Poe's doppelgänger story "William Wilson". In this story, the character William Wilson suffers from a split in his identity. Therefore, the fact that Quinn uses William Wilson immediately signals the split of identity he is going through. Quinn's words support this idea. He asserts that he is aware of their difference, that of his identity and his pseudonym's identity but Quinn refuses responsibility of what he publishes under his pseudonym. The narrator explains that Quinn

> did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart. William Wilson, after all, was an invention, and even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life. Quinn treated him with deference, at times even admiration, but he never went so far as to believe that he and William Wilson were the same man. It was for this reason that he did not emerge from behind the mask of his pseudonym. (NYT 4-5)

This identification, albeit troubled, with William Wilson is not the only alternative Quinn creates for himself. There is another identity Quinn builds, in a literal sense, for himself. In detective novels, there is naturally a private-eye who in Quinn's detective stories happens to be Max Work. Max Work is a product of Quinn's imagination and Quinn identifies with his fictional detective. Yet, Quinn identifies with Max Work and the alarming fluidity of his identity becomes visible. Firstly, he identifies with his pseudonym, William Wilson, secondly with the fictional character he creates, Max Work, and finally with "Paul Auster" the

detective. The narrator of <u>City of Glass</u> explains the relation among Quinn's identities, selves:

> Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude. (<u>NYT</u> 6)

This quote shows that Quinn's identity crisis leads him to create what he needs in order to identify with it. He transfers his identity to William Wilson and Max Work and he, as Quinn, stays in the background. Through Wilson, his official self can become as a passive as a "dummy", and Wilson is the source that gives him the power to write since Quinn sees Wilson as a "ventriloquist". His identity reminds Quinn of everything he has lost and the pseudonym is the only way he can start afresh in writing. On the other hand, Max Work becomes the active agent that carries out every duty and secures Quinn from a load of work he should handle in the fictional world. Quinn imagines that Max Work cares about him by doing the detective work in the novels and in this caring way, Work becomes the brother, or his other half.

Yet, it is not clear where Quinn places himself among his other identities. If we listen to the narrator, Quinn "had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real" (9). In addition, when we look at how Max Work helps Quinn, we can explain how Work is the other 'half' of Quinn. Max Work can be seen as a complete substitution for everything Quinn is not. The narrator explains:

> If Quinn had allowed himself to vanish, to withdraw into the confines of a strange and hermetic life, Work continued to live in the world of others, and the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in that world became. Whereas Quinn tended to feel out of place in his own skin, Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself. The very things that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator. It was not precisely that Quinn wanted to be Work, or even be like him, but it reassured him to pretend to be Work as he was writing his books, to know

that he had it in him to be Work if he ever chose to be, even if only in his mind. (9)

Then, Quinn's identity is already a drawback for him if he is to write detective novels. He definitely needs a go-getter, calm, confident personality as Max Work's. Since he cannot have it, he 'creates' the identity. Shiloh too talks about this matter and writes, "Max Work has become Quinn's alter ego, his projection of his ideal self, confident, at ease in his skin" (47). In addition, the extent that he accepts Wilson and Work to be fictional "identities" is important. A related instance occurs when Quinn accepts the case of the Stillmans and agrees to be their private-eye. While working on the case, he wonders "what Max Work might have been thinking, had he been there" (14) and reveals that his identity problem extends to a blurring of fiction and reality.

In addition, when Quinn follows Stillman senior on the streets, he calms himself by reminding himself of his identity during the tail-job: Quinn

> tell[s] himself that he was no longer Daniel Quinn. He was Paul Auster now, and with each step he took he tried to fit more comfortably into the strictures of that transformation. Auster was no more than a name to him, a husk without content. To be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts. And if there were no thoughts available to him, if his own inner life had been made inaccessible, then there was no place for him to retreat to. As Auster he could not summon up any memories or fears, any dreams or joys, for all these things, as they pertained to Auster, were blank to him. (61)

So, Quinn's self-transformation to "Paul Auster" is another manifestation of his need to forget himself, leave himself behind. Shiloh writes that his identifications are manifestations of his "quest for self-annihilation" which reaches its peak at the end of the novel (53). Shiloh calls the end of the novel "an anatomy of disintegration" because after Stillman disappears and the meeting with Auster takes its toll on him, Quinn refuses to give up the case. Quinn arranges a place in front of the Stillmans' house and begins his stakeout that will deprive him of food, sleep and home (53). Obsessed about his surveillance and his detective assignment, Quinn "undergoes a slow, deliberate process of self-deprivation, of reducing his existence to the barest possible level" (Shiloh 53). He minimizes his essential needs and his body begins to collapse. "In a way, he turns himself inside out, transforming his body into

a metaphor of his inner being" (Shiloh 53). Quinn is aware of the state he is in: "He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him. There was nothing left" (NYT 126).

Quinn starts his detective quest in order to lose himself and forget the burden of being himself because of his loss of family. In the end, his identifications with his pseudonym, his protagonist, and "Paul Auster" fade away one by one, and he annihilated himself completely. The fluidity of Quinn's identity manifests itself in almost every phase of his life after he loses his family and like Marco Fogg in Moon Palace, loss initiates an identity crisis that leads to self-annihilation.

3.4.2. Ghosts: Stakeouts of Doubles

Ghosts is dominated by stasis: progress in time; unfolding of events, crime, and solution are missing; they are held in constant stability. Shiloh observes, "the detective plot of Ghosts is a-temporal...suspended in an eternal present...[which] is motionless" (59). There is only the detective and the so-called suspect, and their eventual substitution of each other. At the beginning of he novel, White comes to the detective agency Blue works at and wants his "case" to be taken care of. There is no complexity in his case. In fact, there is no case at all. White explains what he wants in the simplest manner: he "wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary" (NTY 137). However, White does not explain why Black should be followed. All White wants is "a weekly report...sent to such and such a postbox number, typed out in duplicate pages so long and so wide". He informs Blue, "A check will be sent each week to [him] in the mail. White then explains where Black lives, what he looks like and so on" (137). The "crime" is missing from the case. Blue assumes that it is about an affair and assumes that White is a jealous husband. However, the mystery of the case is Black, a solitary man who retreats to his room and writes. For the reader, the mystery becomes Blue sitting in a room and writing about Black and Black sitting in a room writing something unknown and Blue's utter oblivion to the awkwardness of this situation.

Springer explains that Auster introduces many similarities between Blue and Black and creates an "ontological confusion by making Black and Blue appear as *doppelängers*" (114). He offers three phases in the maintenance of the *doppelgänger* motif. The first phase consists of numerous details that support their doubling. Blue frequently mirrors the actions of Black: he eats and writes after Black does, follows the tracks Black walks when he spies on him on the street, goes to the same shops and restaurants Black goes, reads the book Black reads, breaks up from his fiancée when Black breaks from his girlfriend. "This initial phase of direct mirroring is followed by a second *doppelgänger* phase in which the correspondences have been internalized" (Springer 115). The narrator of the novel writes,

> In this early period, Blue's state of mind can best be described as one of ambivalence and conflict. There are moments when he feels so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do, to know when he will stay in his room and when he will go out, he need merely look into himself....On the other hand, not all moments are like these. There are times when he feels totally removed from Black, cut off from him in a way that is so stark and absolute that he begins to lose the sense of who he is. Loneliness envelops him, shuts him in, and with it comes a terror worse than anything he has ever known. (<u>NYT</u> 158)

Early in his investigation, Blue ceases to be both himself and a detective and identifies with Black regardless of the fact that he is supposed to be the villain and despite the lack of reasons to identify with him. This mirroring stops through the end of the novel when Blue breaks into Black's apartment when he is away. Out of excitement and an unreasonable fear, Blue faints as soon as he breaks into the dark room of Black. When he recovers, he steals the papers Black has been writing and rushes home. Reading the papers he stole from Black shocks him: the papers are nothing but the weekly reports of the case he had been sending to White, the man who hired him for the case and sent him after Black. After this event, Blue enters a period of crisis. First, he spends several days without shaving, changing clothes and stays still in his room. Then, he begins to deny the existence of Black:

> For several days, Blue does not bother to look out the window. He has enclosed himself so thoroughly in his own thoughts that Black no longer seems to be there. The drama is Blue's alone, and if Black is in some sense the cause of it, it's as though he has already played his part, spoken his lines, and made his exit from the stage. For Blue at this point can no longer accept Black's existence, and therefore he denies it. Having penetrated Black's room and stood there alone, having been, so to speak, in the sanctum of Black's

solitude, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Blue does not know it. (NYT 192)

For Springer, this final phase portrays Black as a ghost that haunts Blue who is responsible for imagining Black and giving him existence. (116). As a result, Blue's role as a detective fails once more because the clues he was looking for through Black's actions were no more than his own actions. The fluidity of identities of Blue and Black forms an ontological horizon where the subversion of the epistemological detective story serves to pose questions about the possibility of identity and of attaining truth.

Towards the end of the novel, the case is dissolved. Blue concludes that he needs to talks to Black, to get a chance to see what is on his mind in order to understand what he does in the room and what he writes. He decides to talk to Black in disguise. In the impersonation of a beggar, Blue approaches Black and gets a coin from him. On the second day, Black initiates a conversation with Blue after giving him a coin. Black explains Blue that he looks very much like Walt Whitman and Blue remarks, "Every man has his double somewhere" (NYT 174). Black has a friendly and informative attitude to Blue. The topic of Black's lecture extends to Thoreau and then Black makes an ironic comment about writers and reveals his awareness of Blue's identity; what he does; and what his purpose is in meeting Black in disguise. Black explains, "We always talk about trying to get inside a writer to understand his work better. But when you get right down to it, there's not much to find in there" (177). With these words, Black warns Blue that meeting him will not be an epiphany for Blue; Blue cannot understand him.

Black's ironical remarks, however, do not end. After Thoreau, Black talks about Hawthorne who, upon graduation from college, "shut himself up in his room, and didn't come out for twelve years" (177). He adds, "[W]riting is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there" (178). This time, Black is warning Blue about

the facts of what they both do: write in a room in solitude, and thus, compromise their lives. After this long conversation, Blue is puzzled: "the encounter did not quite have the desired effect, and all in all he feels rather shaken by it" (179). Black seems to have reached his goal. The narrator explains, "For even though the talk had nothing to do with the case, Blue cannot help feeling that Black was actually referring to it all along- talking in riddles, so to speak, as though trying to tell Blue something, but not daring to say it loud" (179). Blue concludes that Black "knows everything" (180).

Blue decides to confront Black once more and this time he does not use a disguise. In his casual clothes, Blue follows Black to a hotel, sits next to him at the hotel lobby, and orders the same drink with Black. The drink is called "Black and White on the rocks" (NYT 181). Blue assumes the drink a "secret message" as he has been suspecting that Black and White had a conspiracy about him. He introduces himself to Black as a life insurance salesman from Wisconsin. "Play dumb, Blue explains himself, for he knows that it would make no sense to reveal who he is, even though he knows that Black knows. It's got to be hide and seek, he says, hide and seek to the end" (181). Black responds again in a friendly manner and explains that he is a private detective. Managing to hide his shock, Blue pretends to be excited about meeting a detective and talks about how thrilling it must be being a detective; "cracking cases, living by your wits, seducing women, pumping bad guys full of lead" (182). These words can be interpreted independent from the instant Blue utters them and taken to be his general expectancy from detective work. As if aware of Blue's misconception, "That's all make-believe, says Black. Real detective work can be pretty dull" (182). He illustrates his claim with an example: "Take the case I'm working on now. I've been at it for more than a year already, and nothing could be more boring...My job is to watch someone...and send in a report about him every week...He just sits in his room all day and writes" (182). Black's case is identical with Blue's case and this information is too much to digest at once. Blue asks why Black is not watching his suspect and Black gives an answer which is, to the reader, a repetition of Blue's remarks early in the novel. Black explains,

> I don't even have to bother anymore. I've been watching him for so long now that I know him better than I know myself. All I have to do is think about

him, and I know where he is, I know everything. It's come to the point that I can watch him with my closed eyes. (183)

Blue had made similar remarks about how close he felt to Black and how he only needed to imagine him to know his present activity, and these remarks were quoted above in the section. Starting with these words of Black, Blue's identity problem gains depth. Blue asks Black, "Does he know you're watching him or not?" and Black answers, "Of course he knows. That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know, or else nothing makes sense" (183). He adds, "He needs my eye looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive" (184). According to Sartre, the gaze of the Other is central to the unity of one's identity and Shiloh notes that Black epitomizes this fact with his last comment (61). The major task in this detective case is to look, and as is revealed at the end, both the detective and the assumed-suspect have been looking at each other since the beginning. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre emphasizes the function of the look. As Shiloh summarizes, "the Other is the one whom I see- but also the one who sees me. His look is indispensable to my existence: it acknowledges me, and at the same time forces me to constitute myself through human interaction" (61). Then, the case has never been about a crime: Blue's quest has been all along the "mystery of the self, of human existence...about the self and its relation with the Other" (Shiloh 61-2).

Besides the role of the look of the Other as a unifying force in the formation of identity, Sartre also notes a negative effect of the Other. The recognition of the Other changes the subject's perception of himself as the only center of the universe and he is forced to rearrange the objects around the axis of the Other (Shiloh 62). Sartre writes,

> Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for me; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting. (qtd. in Shiloh 62).

According to Shiloh, Blue suffers from the disorientation Sartre describes. She writes, "The appearance of Black within his field of vision changes Blue's

perception of external reality" (63). Black enters Blue's world in a passive way, since he is looked at, but Blue experiences Black as an active part of his life. Shiloh adds, "Black's irruption into his space effects a regrouping of all the objects that people his universe, modifying the structure of Blue's perceived world, and its components" (63). For example, Blue becomes aware of tiny things that he did not recognize previously: how light enters from the window, what path it follows, the sounds of his heart beating and his breathing, the vaguely noticeable blinking of the eye. There occurs a shift in his perspective: "He suddenly becomes aware of the sheer existence of things, and at the same time has a revelation of his corporeality, realizing that through his body, he, too, partakes of the thing-ness of the world of phenomena" (Shiloh 63).

Blue also feels restrained by the look of the Other. Shiloh writes, "The Other's look posits me as an object, pins me down, deprives me of my autonomy as a subject" (65). The narrator explains, "It seems perfectly possible to him that he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black. In that case, then he has never been free" (NYT 170). It should also be maintained that the look of the Other comes along with the doubleness of Blue and Black as they both watch other, sit in a room and write. As the narrator reasons, "it is Black who occupies the position of Blue has assumed all along to be his, and Blue who takes the role of Black" (171). Blue and Black are both doubles of each other and cast the gaze of the other upon each other. Since Blue tries to understand his double and fails to understand, he also fails to understand himself. "Understanding oneself is the inverse side of understanding the other- and both endeavors are doomed to failure" (Shiloh 67). At the end of the novel, when Blue enters Black's room to steal the manuscript, he understands that he has failed:

> Having penetrated Black's room and stood there alone, having been, so to speak, in the sanctum of Black's solitude, he cannot respond to the darkness of that moment except by replacing it with a solitude of his own. To enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else. But this is precisely where Black is, even though Black does not know it. (NYT 192)

In their final meeting, Black explains that he will kill both himself and Blue: "It's going to be the two of us together, just like always". Blue does not take that

threat seriously and demands to know what Black had been writing all the time. Previously, Blue had broken into his apartment to steal the story Black was writing, but Black had directed him to steal the collection of Blue's weekly reports that White was supposed to receive. Blue explains Black "You're supposed to tell me the story. Isn't that how it's supposed to end? You tell me the story, and then we say goodbye" (196). Black makes a crucial comment about what he had been writing: "You know it already, Blue. Don't you understand that? You know the story by heart" (196). The reader, too, has an idea what the story might be about looking at the final acts in the novel. Blue kills Black, takes the story Black wrote, goes to his place, begins reading the story, and expects the police to find him soon. He finishes the story by morning, "Black was right, he says to himself. I knew it all by heart" (197). The novel closes with these words: "Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing" (198).

The end of the novel, as well as the plot in general, bears a resemblance to a story by Hawthorne which Black explains Blue on their second meeting when Blue is in disguise as a beggar. The story of Hawthorne Black explains Blue is the story of a man called Wakefield who is said to have absented himself from his wife. One day, Wakefield leaves home telling that he is going on a journey, but in fact, he sets up a stakeout and watches his house for twenty years without making an appearance. He is declared dead and his memory is erased. Then, one day, he misses his home, wants to be there. The story ends when the opens the door and enters his home. Hawthorne refuses to tell what happens after Wakefield crosses the threshold of his house and returns to his former life/identity. Similarly, Auster defines the final moment of the novel to be when Blue leaves his room and supposedly returns to his former life/identity and explains nothing further. Both Wakefield and Blue seem be on a quest of self: Wakefield watches his wife and what becomes of her in his absence, thus, he tries to determine his identity as a husband. Blue spies on his *doppelgänger*, Black but failing to understand him marks the failure of his understanding himself. Blue's killing of Black is similar to Poe's William Wilson's killing of his *doppelgänger* in order to survive.

In conclusion, <u>Ghosts</u> presents a detective-like quest to the mysteries of identity that has no solutions. Blue goes after knowledge that does not exist and the mystery of self remains an unsolvable mystery. Through a subversion of the detective stakeout motif, Auster questions the possibility of survival under the constant gaze of the Other and the double's role in understanding one's identity.

3.4.3. The Locked Room: Claiming the Identity of the Other

In the third novel of <u>The New York Trilogy,</u> there is again a problem of identity. For Springer, there is again the *doppelgänger* motif which he claims "is even more distinct here than in the trilogy's other texts" (121) because the doubleness of the narrator-protagonist and Fanshawe, his friend, is established at the very beginning of the novel. The narrator remains nameless and the novel opens with the heavy identification of the narrator with Fanshawe: "It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am" (<u>NYT</u> 201). Here, the narrator reveals that he has constructed his identity through identifying with Fanshawe. He goes on to tell their history: "We met before we could talk, babies crawling through the grass in diapers, and by the time we were seven we had pricked our fingers with pins and made ourselves blood brothers for life" (121). According to Springer, "The fact that their relationship has originated in a preverbal phase means that it is based on a more fundamental level than that of verbal communication and the writing of texts (both later become writers)" (Springer 121). The narrator goes on to tell that this childhood friendship defines a period in his life: "Whenever I think of my childhood now, I see Fanshawe. He was the one who was with me, the one who shared my thoughts, the one I saw whenever I looked up from myself" (<u>NYT</u> 121).

However, it is soon learned that this childhood friendship extends to the narrator's dangerously excessive identification with Fanshawe and his persistent imitation of him since early childhood. The narrator explains how Fanshawe's influence "extended even to very small things" (<u>NYT</u> 211) when they were very young. "If Fanshawe wore his belt buckle on the side of his pants, then I would move

my belt into the same position. If Fanshawe came to the playground wearing black sneakers, then I would ask for black sneakers the next time my mother took me to the shoe store" (NYT 211). For the narrator, his imitation of Fanshawe was a result of Fanshawe's irresistible power and charm:

> here was something so attractive about him that you always wanted him beside you, as if you could live within his sphere and be touched by what he was. He was there for you, and yet at the same time he was inaccessible. You felt there was a secret core in him that could never be penetrated, a mysterious centre of hiddenness. (212)

The narrator reveals that the impossibility of accessing Fanshawe is what makes him more attractive, adorable, and mysterious. He adds, "To imitate him was somehow to participate in that mystery, but it was also to understand that you could never really know him" (212). Such a naïve explanation of why he imitated Fanshawe fails to conceal the narrator's wish to be him. As we learn soon, Fanshawe possesses what others do not: a unitary identity. The narrator imitates Fanshawe hoping to have a stable identity like him. The narrator explains: "He formed himself very quickly, was already a sharply defined presence by the time we started school. Fanshawe was visible, whereas the rest of us were creatures without shape, in the throes of constant tumult, floundering blindly from one moment to the next" (NYT 212). On the other hand, Fanshawe "was already himself when he grew up" (212). According to Springer, the narrator's imitation and his self-definition through his friendship with Fanshawe is the reason that "the narrator remains nameless: he is defined as Fanshawe's friend and imitator, a faithful follower" (122). He copies Fanshawe and never develops his own separate identity.

Springer notes, "He is no more than a fake Fanshawe" (122) and this fact distinguishes "he Locked Room from Ghosts on the basis of the presentation of the *doppelgänger* motif. He notes that in Ghosts, the *doppelgänger* is "described as the 'real' character who feels haunted by a less clear, indistinct and ghostly mysterious character (who usually represents a suppressed side of the protagonist's split personality)" (122). However, "the nameless narrator in The Locked Room is himself the *doppelgänger*, the copy of the much stronger Fanshawe" (Springer 122). Shiloh contributes to this matter. She writes that the doubleness of Blue and Black is

different from the doubleness of the narrator of <u>The Locked</u> Room and Fanshawe. She writes,

> As a psychic mechanism, the double is the product of projection. It is formed when the ego splits itself and projects various parts of itself onto external objects; very often, these are the negative parts that the ego does not wish to acknowledge. This is the sense in which Blue and Black are each other's doubles: Blue sees in Black the solitude and despair that he does not wish to claim as his own. The relationship between the narrator and Fanshawe is of a different nature. It precedes language: they met each other as babies, before they could talk. Without Fanshawe, the narrator would not know who he is...Fanshawe is thus established as the narrator's primary object of identification. (88)

Following this argument, the fact that Blue fails to understand Black makes perfect sense since he projected parts of his identity that he could not understand to Black. Similarly, the fact that the nameless narrator wishes to be Fanshawe makes perfect sense, too: Fanshawe is his role model, the one who he wants to be. For a double, *doppelgänger* to be established, Shiloh conditions the projection of negative aspects to the double. Considering the fact that the narrator finds every possible positive thing in Fanshawe makes Fanshawe "his ideal self-representation" (89). Shiloh, unlike Springer, refuses to call the narrator and Fanshawe doubles in the sense that Blue and Black are. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that since the narrator wants to be a copy of Fanshawe, he wishes to be Fanshawe's double, replica, in the literal sense.

The turning point for the narrator is when Fanshawe's wife, Sophie, contacts the narrator and informs that Fanshawe is missing and demands his help. It has been years since the narrator and Fanshawe had lost touch. Now, all of a sudden, Fanshawe is reported missing, probably dead, and the narrator is the first to contact. Here, we should note what Auster says about the name Fanshawe in the interview with Joseph Mallia: "In <u>The Locked Room,</u> by the way, the name *Fanshawe* is a direct reference to Hawthorne. Fanshawe was the title of Hawthorne's first novel. He wrote it when he was very young and not long after it was published, he turned against it in revulsion and tried to destroy every copy he could get his hands on" (TRN 111). Springer comments on the theme of disappearance Auster attaches to the name Fanshawe by this allusion to Hawthorne's novel that disappeared (123).

The absence, the disappearance of Fanshawe is a great opportunity for the narrator of <u>The Locked Room</u>. Now, in the absence of Fanshawe, he can become him completely, without imitation and feeling inferior to, or intimidated by him. Also, when the news that Fanshawe is missing comes, the narrator admits having felt intimidated by Fanshawe:

> [I]n my struggle to remember things as they really were, I see now that I also held back from Fanshawe, that a part of me always resisted him. Especially as we grew older, I do not think I was ever entirely comfortable in his presence. If envy is too strong a word for what I am trying to say, then I would call it a suspicion, a secret feeling that Fanshawe was somehow better than I was. (<u>NYT</u> 211)

The disappearance of Fanshawe constitutes a shift for the narrator "from copying to independence when the original, the more developed, more complex and more successful character is no longer available for comparison" (Springer 122). In the absence of Fanshawe, the narrator can replace Fanshawe easily. Indeed, he tries to replace him. First, he falls in love with Fanshawe's wife, Sophie. His love for Sophie becomes an epiphany for the narrator. "By belonging to Sophie, I began to feel as though I belonged to everyone else. My true place in the world, it turned out, was someone beyond myself" (<u>NYT</u> 234). With these words, the narrator exposes his identity crisis. His feeling of locating his self finally through union with a woman is shadowed by that woman's being the wife of Fanshawe. Until the day Fanshawe disappears, the narrator tries to establish his identity through an imitation of Fanshawe. So, he denies the fact that is obvious to the reader, that he was looking for his place in the world by pretending to be Fanshawe. In this scenario, therefore, the disappearance of Fanshawe gives the narrator the chance to become himself by replacing Fanshawe. Without the imitation factor, without the feeling of looking beyond himself, the narrator naturally feels he is Fanshawe in his absence. The fact that the narrator conceives Fanshawe with a unitary identity enables him to feel he has that unitary identity when Fanshawe is gone. It is because of these reasons that loving Sophie becomes an epiphany for the narrator. It marks the beginning of his attempt to replace, feel like, and finally, to live like Fanshawe.

Another point where the narrator begins to replace Fanshawe is when he, on request of Sophie, tries to get Fanshawe's writings published. Firstly, the narrator cannot bring himself to read his work. The nameless narrator is himself a writer and he lacks self-confidence. He explains, "I had begun with great hopes, thinking that I would become a novelist, thinking that I would eventually be able to write something that would touch people and make a difference in their lives. But time went on, and little by little I realized that this was not going to happen" (209). The narrator is not ready for a comparison of literary talents, as he already accepts his failure. On the other hand, Fanshawe is the wonder-kid, the genius who was expected to "grow up to be President" (230) and he naturally feels intimidated by Fanshawe's skills. The narrator explains his hesitation to read his work:

> If I did not want Fanshawe's work to be bad, I discovered, I also did not want it to be good. This is a difficult feeling for me to explain. Old rivalries no doubt had something to do with it, a desire not to humbled by Fanshawe's brilliance- but there was also a feeling of being trapped. (224)

Eventually, he manages to read Fanshawe's work, and then takes the manuscript of Fanshawe's "Neverland", "his big novel...major work" (231) to a publisher. After three weeks, the deal is set: "Neverland" will be published, and the narrator persuades a magazine to publish an article he will write on "Neverland". At this point, he begins to take the reputation and success of Fanshawe's work seriously. Himself a writer who has not reached success yet, the narrator gets a chance to take over the career of Fanshawe he admires and reach the success he has dreamt of. For the article he writes on "Neverland", the narrator explains: "It turned out to be a long, rather exotic piece, and at the time I felt it was one of the best things I had ever written" (233). Later, he even reveals the process of his substitution of Fanshawe: "it was probably necessary for me to equate Fanshawe's success with my own. I had stumbled onto a cause, a thing that justified me and made me feel important, and the more fully I disappeared into my ambitions for Fanshawe, the more sharply I came into focus for myself" (233). The endeavor of getting Fanshawe's works published turns into an enterprise for self-creation. As Shiloh observes, the narrator's quest for Fanshawe's identity is a twofold usurpation: he wants to replace Fanshawe in his artistic output and in his personal life. "He gradually takes over Fanshawe's various roles- the writer, the lover, the father" (83). Therefore, the narrator's quest is to take

over Fanshawe's identity in all fields and he gives up his own identity without hesitation.

Once Fanshawe's novel is published, it becomes a bestseller. Then comes the rumour that there is no Fanshawe, that his book, "Neverland" is a literary hoax. The narrator explains, "The rumour was that I had invented him to perpetrate a hoax and had actually written the books myself" (238). He adds,

> I didn't know whether to feel insulted or flattered by this talk...did people really think I was capable of writing a book as good as "Neverland"? I realized that once all of Fanshawe's manuscripts had been published, it would be perfectly possible for me to write another book or two under his name - to do the work myself and yet pass it off as his...It struck me that writing under another name might be something I would enjoy- to invent a secret identity for myself. (238)

With these thoughts, the narrator exposes his identity crisis. Lacking any concerns about the rumour, the narrator focuses on the positive outcome of the rumour: he is thought to be Fanshawe. This is a huge difference. Until then, it has always been him to make the effort to become Fanshawe. Now, he is not making any effort and his identity is turning into the identity of Fanshawe on its own. Awakened to the fact that he *can* exist as Fanshawe, he considers doing what the rumour says. His inclination to actually perform the literary hoax and his idea of "a secret identity" for himself signal that he will take every chance in order to become Fanshawe. He seems to be so blinded by his ambition of becoming, replacing Fanshawe that he shows no signs of ethical concerns and neither does he seem to consider the future results of these possibilities.

Nonetheless, before the narrator finds the chance to complete his evolution into Fanshawe, the absent Fanshawe sends a letter to the narrator. Fanshawe thanks the narrator for what he has done and warns him not to say anything to Sophie. Fanshawe writes, "Make her divorce me, and then marry her as soon as you can. I trust you to do that- and I give you my blessing. The child needs a father, and you are the only one I can count on" (239). It is possible to ask if Fanshawe is giving the free ticket for which the narrator has waited all his life. Does it mean that Fanshawe is

aware of the narrator's willingness to take over his life? These questions can be answered in the affirmative.

In this letter, Fanshawe settles other matters and makes a wish that reveals his knowledge of the narrator's identity crisis. He is almost cruel when he says, "You are free of me now...You are my friend, and my one hope is that you will always be who you are" (240). It is not likely for Fanshawe to be ignorant that the narrator has in fact never managed to stop wanting to be anybody other than Fanshawe. The narrator is a person trying to be someone else, and as far as the circumstances are concerned, it is for the best that the narrator stays the same and keeps his identity as it is. Put differently, Fanshawe hopes that the narrator continues to try to be Fanshawe and replaces him totally, as he declares his exit from his life. In this way, Fanshawe hopes to hand his life over to the person who dreams of it. As long as the narrator sticks to his obsession of being Fanshawe, Fanshawe can remain at peace and not worry about what he has left behind. Of course, a second level of identity crisis that appears here is about Fanshawe's ideas is when he reveals his idea that identity can be handed over, passed on like an item of transaction. In other words, fluidity of identities is a given.

In the process of taking over Fanshawe's identity, however, some complications occur. Shiloh explains these complications through her reference to Fanshawe being the narrator's ideal self-representation. Shiloh writes,

> According to Freud and to Lacan, the irreducible distance that separates the subject from his ideal self-representation produces in the subject a radically oscillating response toward that representation. The subject simultaneously loves and hates its ideal self-image, loving it for the vision of itself it offers, and hating it for the impossibility to attain this vision. (91)

The narrator's inconsistent feelings towards Fanshawe can be exemplified by the narrator's sexual encounter with Fanshawe's mother. In this act, according to Shiloh, the narrator manifests both his love and his hatred for Fanshawe, who is his ideal self-representation. First of all, the timing of the act is striking: the narrator is married to Sophie, is the official father of Fanshawe's son, and he seems to have completed his transformation to Fanshawe. He is working on Fanshawe's biography

and visits Fanshawe's mother under the pretext of obtaining biographical material, but he has sex with his mother. Shiloh comments that in this way, the narrator realizes Fanshawe's "innermost fantasy" and fulfills "his Oedipal desire" (92) by having sex with the mother. From this angle, the narrator's identification with Fanshawe is taken one step further as well as his love for him is manifested. Yet, there is a second dimension to the act. After the narrator leaves Fanshawe's mother's house, he is overwhelmed by anger: "I was using her to attack Fanshawe...I wanted to kill Fanshawe. I wanted Fanshawe to be dead, and I was going to do it. I was going to track him down and kill him" (268). As Shiloh explains, the narrator now feels hatred towards Fanshawe as he suddenly sees him as the father figure. In the Freudian scenario of the Oedipal fantasy, "the male subject desires to possess the mother and supersede his rival, the father" (Shiloh 939). The narrator sees Fanshawe as the rival, the father, and wants to kill him. This points at a disintegration of identity. According to Freud, Shiloh explains, the child gives up the idea of killing the father and abandons his fantasy. Such a resolution of the Oedipal complex is necessary for the subject to establish an integrated identity. The narrator, in fulfilling the Oedipal fantasy, suffers from dissolution of identity which was built around becoming Fanshawe who now represents the rival he wishes to destroy.

The narrator decides to find Fanshawe at all costs and begins "to hunt for clues" (NYT 283) that will lead him to Fanshawe. He goes to Paris because Fanshawe had lived there for a while but he finds nothing. During his stay in Paris, the narrator feels he is losing control of his life. He returns home and concludes that he should stop looking for him. He realizes that by writing his biography, he kept him alive and always around him. He explains, "After all these months of trying to find him, I felt as though I was the one who had been found. Instead of looking for Fanshawe, I had actually been running away from him" (292). He seems to realize that while trying to replace Fanshawe, he relied on his existence rather than disappearance. What is more, he acknowledges that his quest for Fanshawe had been an illusion he had created himself. The narrator explains that he has associated Fanshawe with the image of the door of a locked room. He imagined "Fanshawe alone in that room, condemned to a mythical solitude" (292). After admitting himself

that he has been on a futile errand looking for him, the narrator explains, "This room, I now discovered, was located inside my skull" (293). Convincing himself that the image of Fanshawe has all along been his own mind, a product of his imagination.

The nameless narrator's wish to be Fanshawe can also be explained by Lacan's theory of the subject's entry into the symbolic order. In Lacan's formulation, when the subject enters the symbolic order and divides itself from the image it sees in the mirror, it develops a desire for the Other. "The subject seeks both the love or recognition of the Other (a desire to be desired by the Other) and to possess the Other (a desire for the Other)" (Brooker 58). The desire for the Other is thus in fact the desire to become the Other, "to find that the Other is not different but a self-reflection and hence the same" (Brooker 58). This explanation matches with the narrator's wish to become Fanshawe. Fanshawe represents the unified self the narrator believes himself to lack. In Lacan's theory, "the Other is the image of a unified and co-ordinated self the child sees and also, by extension, other children with whom it is in a relation of recognition, rivalry, and competition" (Brooker 156).

The identification of a character with the Other is common in literature. For instance, René Girard refers to Gustave Flaubert's heroine Emma Bovary as a character who desires the romantic heroines of the second-rate books she reads. He mentions Jules de Gaultier's essay called "Bovarysm" and writes that Gaultier "observe[s] that in order to reach their goal, which is to "see themselves as they are not", Flaubert's heroes find a "model" for themselves and "imitate from the person they have decided to be, all that can be imitated, everything exterior, appearance, gesture, intonation, and dress" (Girard 5). Girard then reminds that characters imitate not only the "external aspects" (5) of the models but also "the desires of the models they have freely chosen" (5).

In The Locked Room, the nameless narrator's desire to imitate Fanshawe extends to having the personality of Fanshawe and the imitation of the desires of Fanshawe, like fulfilling his Oedipal fantasy, having Sophie. He borrows the desires of Fanshawe while he copies him. The narrator desires what the Other desires and

this leads to his imitation of him and "[i]mitative desire is always a desire to be Another" (Girard 83). The narrator personalizes the success "Neverland" will have. Having always seen Fanshawe as a rival and confessed Fanshawe's superiority in writing, the nameless narrator's wish for the success of Fanshawe's book is significant. According to Girard, when there is rivalry, the imitation of the Other becomes less important as the imitating subject focuses on the object of desire, which is, in this case, the success of "Neverland" upon publication. Girard writes, "it is on this object and it alone that the mediator confers his prestige, by possessing or wanting it" (13-4). The narrator of The Locked Room writes an article to secure the success of "Neverland" and begins to see Fanshawe's success as his own: he focuses on the object, "Neverland" and its success. After Paris, the narrator gives up his quest for locating Fanshawe. Then, he admits that Fanshawe has always been in his head like an imaginary figure.

After this event, as Shiloh notes, his fragmentation begins. He believes that he keeps Fanshawe alive, he gives him a new status in his own mind. Such a conclusion is, however, not helpful for the narrator. He is still avoiding the fact that imitating Fanshawe has always meant everything for him. According to Girard, it is common for a character to avoid "to recognize that one has always copied Others in order to seem original in their eyes and in one's own" (38). By avoiding this fact, the narrator sticks to his illusion of having an autonomous self and denies that he is almost Fanshawe. Feeling left alone with "himself", the narrator goes through a breakdown. "The wish to be absorbed into the substance of the Other implies an insuperable revulsion for one's own substance" (Girard 54) and the narrator drowns in this revulsion for a while.

In addition, by the time the narrator decides to locate him, he is almost transformed into Fanshawe: he has his wife, son, money, literary success. Yet, he still feels disturbed even if he seems to possess what he has always wanted: Fanshawe's identity. In order to explain his motivation to go after Fanshawe, to locate him, it can be suggested that the desire of the narrator shifts away from Fanshawe's identity and desires because he feels he has obtained them. Girard's

explanation illuminates the narrator's situation. According to Girard, "The desiring subject, when he takes possession of the object, finds that he is grasping a void...He possesses the object but that object loses its value in the very act of being possessed" (164-5). Thus, the nameless narrator loses his interest in having Fanshawe's desires and identity and decides to see, find, and confront Fanshawe in person: his desire is contacting Fanshawe in flesh and blood is a manifestation of the need to detsroy the void he dragged himself into. Again, in Girard's explanation, the end of the Self that approaches to the Other is death, fragmentation, and disintegration of the subject (279). "The desire to unify oneself disperses" (Girard 279) the moment the unity with the Other occurs. This is what happens to the narrator of The Locked Room: the becomes Fanshawe and finds death-like void, nothingness in his new identity. However, he does not commit suicide as Girard argues to happen mostly when such a situation arises. He escapes "the ultimate meaning of desire" which is "death" (Girard 290). Rather, the narrator goes through a complete breakdown that lasts one night, and then he pulls himself together, returns home, never utters a word of Fanshawe, and continues to live his life.

In conclusion, in this novel, there is "the construction of identity in response to an Other" (Moses 19). For Lacan, "lack and desire are at the core of the human condition" (Shiloh 114) and the nameless protagonist's identity is based on his desire for Fanshawe's identity and his constant lack of fulfilling that desire. Auster seems to present a detective-like quest at the fervor of the identity crisis the nameless narrator goes through because in the nature of the detective there is a quest which looks for the unknown. However, the narrator goes after Fanshawe when he is almost Fanshawe. At that time, the identity of Fanshawe might be expected to have stopped being a mystery, an object of desire for the narrator as he owns it. But, since the narrator searches for Fanshawe, the target of the quest comes to be portrayed as still an unknown element in the life of the narrator. This, in sum, seems to be one of the most important details about identity Auster presents: whether your own or somebody else's, identity remains a mystery.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERTEXTUALITY, SPATIALITY, AND IDENTITY IN <u>TRAVELS IN</u>

<u>THE SCRIPTORIUM</u>: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXAMPLE OF

HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

4.1. <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> and Historiographic Metafiction

Auster's last novel to date covers an uncanny day in the life of an old man. The old man wakes up in a room. There is almost nothing he recognizes apart from his amnesia and the "implacable sense of guilt" (<u>Travels</u> 2) filling his heart. He has no knowledge of his identity; his past; the poorly furnished room; the reason for or purpose of his presence in that room; or the owner of the camera and the microphone documenting him every split second. With an allusion to this grand perplexity, Auster calls the old man Mr. Blank.

The eerie opening evolves into a confusing maze of surprises. Mr. Blank concludes that he is locked in the room. Then, he notices a manuscript and some photographs on the desk. The manuscript is an unfinished report written by a prisoner. The captivity stories of the prisoner and Mr.Blank constitute a Chinese-box structure in the novel. As for identities of the unidentified people in the photographs, Auster offers a surprising revelation. The people in the photographs visit Mr. Blank's one by one throughout the novel. They are not brand-new characters for an Auster reader: they are protagonists from Auster's earlier fiction. These characters accuse Mr. Blank of his past actions, for sending them off on horrible missions, for torturing them, disrupting their happy lives.

The fact that these visitors in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> are almost identical with characters from various previous novels of Auster leads the reader to ask such questions: What is Auster's purpose in collecting many of his previous protagonists in one novel? Is Auster calling himself Mr. Blank and writing about writing, authorship, and *his* authorship?; Is Auster questioning his identity as a writer?

In order to answer these and other possible questions, this chapter considers <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> as an autobiographical example of historiographic metafiction which presents two approaches to identity. Firstly, the gathering of

characters from other fictional worlds within the fictional world of this novel points at the intertextually fluid identities of fictional characters. The identity of a character in the novel it originates is not stable, not final. In the new circumstances of <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, characters that re-appear appear to have evolved, changed. Nevertheless, they also preserve their essential characteristics, which enables their being categorized as *transworld identities* as Umberto Eco suggest. Thus, Auster reconstructs his characters' identities in different fictional worlds and allows them to adopt new identities.

Secondly, the identity of the author is a fluid identity, too. The author's identity as the creator of fictional worlds, which is seen in many Auster's novels, turns into his identification with the room he writes in. The author's identification with his room points at his immersion in his act of writing which is defined by his surroundings. Therefore, the identity of the writer merges with the identity of the room he inhabits and the identity of the book is connected to this merging. In the example of <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, however, different from Auster's previous novels, the identity of the writer and his identification with the room he writes is problematized. As an autobiographical example of historiographic metafiction, <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> presents Auster's re-contextualization of his own literary past. Yet, his return to his past works presents the writer with a problem: although he is in the room, he has no connection with the book because there is no more "the book" but "the work". Maurice Blanchot's arguments on the distinction of "the book" and "the work" match with the writer's new identity in the room of "the work" in order to discuss how the fluidity of the writer's identity gains another dimension in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> through its use of historiographic metafiction as an autobiographical narrative.

The purpose of analyzing <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> as an autobiographical example of historiographic metafiction is to demonstrate that the novel is autobiographical in the sense that the historical events and personages Auster lays claim are autobiographical elements, like events and characters from novels Auster

has published. In other words, what is meant by Auster's autobiographical elements is that they are the actual constituents of Auster's personal literary history.

In Travels in the Scriptorium, there is a de-naturalization and problematization of the same elements that historiographic metafiction, according to Hutcheon, de-naturalizes and problematizes: narrative form; intertextuality; strategies of representation; relation between historical fact and experiential event. These problematizations are results of postmodernism's confrontation of the paradoxal relationships of fictive and historical representation; the particular and the general; the present and the past (Poetics106). Thus, Travels in the Scriptorium can be seen as a complex attempt to re-write the past in a postmodern fashion: the inconclusiveness of the past leads to a re/trans-contextualization of its textual traces. Yet, Auster further problematizes his own past: the previous fictive worlds of his novels; his relation to these worlds, both in the past and the present.

Significantly, the extent of Auster's problematization of his past corresponds to historiographic metafiction's particular problematization of reference through its challenge to the nature of real and fictive referents. The blurring of the boundaries of fictionality and reality gains another dimension in Auster's novel: he offers a double-problematization of reference by treating his fictive characters from past as if habitants of his real past—his past which is rendered fictive in its present representation. The question is: do the re-appearing characters constitute real referents or imaginary referents?

To put it differently, Auster treats the fictional characters he created as "real" inhabitants of his real-world life by re-contextualizing them in Travels in the Scriptorium. Then, he fictionalizes his real-world status as a writer absorbed by the memory of his literary past and its elements: Auster becomes Mr. Blank, the amnesiac protagonist of Travels in the Scriptorium. Because he is "blank", he remembers nothing from his past. Because his characters have intertextually fluid identities, they try their chances at settling accounts with their creator in this new meeting. This matter can be analyzed within the possibilities of referentiality

historiographic metafiction offers. Following Brian McHale's argument on intertextuality, the novel can be said "to picture literature as a field or, better, a network whose nodes are the actual texts of literature" (56-7) and following Linda Hutcheon's argument, the novel can bee taken as a problematization of past—however, an autobiographical one—and its re-presentation. Therefore, the novel will be analyzed with three perspectives that match the operation of historiographic metafiction, problematizing the representation past, problematizing the nature of references and referents, the ensuing transworld identity, and the operation of intertextuality.

Linda Hutcheon devises the term historiographic metafiction in order to explain the operation of postmodernism in literature. Hutcheon explains historiographic metafiction as a "novel genre" that produces "novels that are both intensely self-reflexive and paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Poetics 5). Among examples of historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon counts John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman, Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime, William Kennedy's Legs, John Berger's G., and Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words, and Robert Coover's The Public Burning.

According to Hutcheon, postmodernism questions conventions and in order to do that, it incorporates what it questions into its own structure. Hence, this questioning does not entail a denial or destruction of these conventions. As Hutcheon explains, these conventions are "de-naturalized", that is, postmodernism concurrently, thus paradoxically, inscribes and subverts them (Poetics 47). Auster's de-naturalization of his literary past, then, means how he uses facts from his past in order to subvert their statuses as facts. The most important conventions historiographic metafiction de-naturalizes and problematizes are "such as those of narrative form, of intertextuality, of strategies of representation, of the role of language, of the relation between historical fact and experiential event" (xii). These problematizations are results of postmodernism's confrontation of the paradoxal

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relationships of fictive and historical representation; the particular and the general; the present and the past (106).

For historiographic metafiction, the past exists through its textual traces, any historical account will bear marks of trans-contextualization or transformation. Therefore, when these textual traces are used in history-writing or fiction-writing, they are incorporated into a new environment. The purpose of historiographic metafiction is then, "to rewrite the past in a new context" (118) in order to prove the results of intertextuality. In Auster's model of rewriting the past, intertextuality foregrounds the particular problems of the identities of the author and the characters. Truth in historiographic metafiction is not employed for accuracy or to claim that fiction may as well present truths. This point helps Auster question the factuality of his autobiographical information. Hutcheon writes, "historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction" because "there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just other's truths" (109). Hutcheon explains: "there is no directly and naturally accessible past 'real' for us: we can only know -and construct- the past through its traces, its representations" (Politics 95). This takes us to the paradox in historiographic metafiction: it "teas[es] us with the existence of the past as real" and in this way proves that "there is no direct access to that real which would be unmediated by the structures of our various discourses about it" (Poetics 146).

Therefore, historiographic metafiction, which deliberately creates a paradox by consciously revealing its fictive status while constructing new events from past events (Politics 63), is the literary outcome of the postmodern de-naturalization of history. In this way, past and present, fiction and reality merge into each other and postmodernist fiction exposes the "fact-making and meaning-granting processes" (74) of conventional narrative by questioning the reliability of the objectivity of the meaning-giving agent. While attracting attention to the question of the objectivity of truth in history writing, Hutcheon also problematizes the conventions of narrative and subjectivity. Hutcheon writes that postmodern narrative "asks its readers to question the process by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves

and to become aware of the means by which we make sense and construct order out of experience in our particular culture" (51). Actually, the coining of the two terms in historiographic metafiction gives us a similar message. The taken for granted accuracy of historiography's representation is put under question with metafictional self-reflexivity. Both historiography and metafiction are, as narrative forms, incapable of providing objectivity and an awareness of this lack of objectivity need to be maintained.

In conclusion, Linda Hutcheon devises the term historiographic metafiction in order to explain the particular operation of postmodernist fiction. Postmodernism's contradictory "use and abuse" of conventions such as of representation of and intertextual use of historical traces, of subjectivity in narration, and of universal values of modernism are the very important in defining historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction's challenge to absolute truth and certainty, and its questioning and problematization of history-writing and fiction-writing are informed with Hutcheon's postmodernist motto of "use and abuse". The most important function of historiographic metafiction might be its attempt at revealing the discursiveness of history and "the intertextuality of all writing" (Poetics 225), and thus questioning the taken for granted fictiveness of fiction and the accuracy of historiography and historical novel.

4.1.1. Representation of the Past and the Self

It is believed that writings that employ historical elements represent truths, facts. Fiction, on the contrary, is believed to represent imaginary facts and false stories. Travels in the Scriptorium contests both beliefs like other examples of historiographic metafiction and seems to treat historical facts like fictional constructions by re-contextualizing them. However, interestingly, in Travels in the Scriptorium, the historical facts that are re-contextualized and fictionalized are themselves fictional products because Auster takes his publicly known novels and the characters of these novels as historical facts and plays with their status of historical facts in the fictional world of Travels in the Scriptorium. Some characters

from previous novels that re-appear in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> with their respective personalities are Anna Blume and Samuel Farr from <u>In the Country of Last Things</u>;, "David Zimmer from <u>The Book of Illusions</u>, Peter Stillman Jr., Peter Stillman Sr. and Daniel Quinn from <u>City of Glass</u>, Fanshawe and his wife Sophie from <u>The Locked Room</u>. They are all referred to as "former operatives" (<u>Travels</u> 57) who Mr. Blank is said to have sent on various missions.

At this point, Hutcheon's claim that we know that the past existed because of "its textual traces" (<u>Politics</u> 75) constitutes a nice explanation for the past Auster re-contextualizes since his previous novels—the historical facts—are indeed textual pieces. Similar to Hutcheon's argument that historiographic metafiction questions how those textual traces are presented in later periods, Auster looks at the possibility of re-presenting what is already presented. In Auster's representing of previous fictional worlds, characters preserve certain aspects but they seem to have changed, gained autonomy and thus are different from their former selves. In other words, they have intertextually fluid identities that change from one text to another. Some characters like Anna Blume and Sophie are kind to Mr. Blank and they act forgivingly for the unmentioned mistakes Mr.Blank committed on their part. However, some are hostile. Mr. Blank is informed by Quinn, who introduces himself as his first operative who is now Mr. Blank's lawyer, that the old man is charged with various crimes: "from criminal indifference to sexual molestation. From conspiracy to commit fraud to negligent homicide. From defamation of character to first-degree murder" (<u>Travels</u> 135).

In presenting his former characters with new traits, Auster points at the fact that the fictional worlds of his previous novels and the elements they have are not fixed: they can change. As Hutcheon writes, "historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction" because "there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just other's truths" (<u>Poetics</u> 109). Then, the changes the characters in Auster's last novel go through do not mean that their identities in the previous novel are true and their re-contextualized identities are false. Rather, the characters

have many "true" traits. For example, at the end of <u>City of Glass</u>, the protagonist, Quinn, disappears. In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, he appears and explains what he did after the novel's end. Through Quinn's newly revealed adventures that regard his presence in <u>City of Glass</u>, Auster seems to refuse absolute truth a novel might provide and shows how different truths might be constructed about a character in different novels. In fact, Quinn, who went through the worst identity crisis among all of Auster's heroes, is a lawyer in this last novel. In addition, by inserting elements of his previous works into a new world, Auster seems to be trying to "alienate the reader from the realist illusion of a coherent and closed fictive world" (218) and shows that none of the worlds of his previous novels have been closed.

The fact that Auster plays with the truths he presented in his previous books results in his questioning of the reliability as well as the identity of the author. As the author, he is the agent that grants the events with meaning and characters with life and identity. However, when in one of his books he contradicts his own authority by presenting characters that gain autonomy and confront their creators in a new novel, Auster problematizes his identity as author. In historiographic metafiction, this problematization is translated as the objectivity of the author and Auster's own treatment of his history in this way is another manifestation of the objectivity claim of historiographic metafiction. Hutcheon attracts attention to this matter by referring to historiographic metafiction's problematizing of the conventions of narrative and subjectivity.

Hutcheon writes that postmodern narrative "asks its readers to question the process by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense and construct order out of experience in our particular culture" (<u>Politics</u> 51). In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, then, Auster asks both himself and the readers that question. Actually, the coining of the two terms in historiographic metafiction gives us a similar message. The taken for granted accuracy of historiography's representation is put under question with metafictional self-reflexivity. Both historiography and metafiction are, as narrative forms,

incapable of providing objectivity and an awareness of this lack of objectivity need to be maintained.

Travels in the Scriptorium is also an inquiry into the ontological status of the author. For McHale, the identity of the author is a part of ontological foregrounding of postmodernist fiction whose dominant is ontological. He writes, "Whenever some element of ontological structure or some ontological boundary is foregrounded, the author's role and activity is inevitably foregrounded along with it" (199). According to McHale, the appearance of the author in his fictional world, or his casual and sudden remarks regarding the fictionality of that world is called *frame-braking*. He exemplifies frame-breaking with John Fowles's "The French Lieutenant's Woman". McHale mentions that half way through the novel, Fowles writes, "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind" (qtd. in McHale 197). In this way, McHale argues, the author not only destroys the reality of the fictional world but also sets up an illusory reality for the author to be shattered later. Because, for McHale, "to reveal the author's position within the ontological structure is only to introduce the author *into the fiction* . . . as a fictional character" (197). Thus, such meta-fictional frame-breakings through the appearance of the author in the fictional world makes the author another fictional character. McHale writes, "the artist represented in the act of creation or destruction is himself inevitably a fiction" (30). The appearance of the author within his fiction further changes the status of the art. McHale adds, "the art work itself comes to be presented *as* an artwork" (30). Then, with Mr. Blank, Auster inserts himself into the novel as the author, fictionalizes himself, and indicates the novel to be an artifact.

The ontological status of the characters in Travels in the Scriptorium is also intriguing. It open ups a debate about the status of past, its validity in the present. In this novel, all the characters are aware of their fictive statuses and resent the lives their author designed for them in their previous fictional worlds. There is a significant reversal: the author is unaware of his authorship whereas every other character in the novel is. On the other hand, the characters are well aware that they are fictional and such awareness results in a change in the ontological level the

characters are supposed occupy. Furthermore, when they challenge their destiny and the author's deeds, they also question the ontological hierarchy of fiction by asserting their superiority and autonomy.

In Travels in the Scriptorium, the characters defy, imprison, charge their author, nullify his authority. McHale refers to this situation and writes, "Characters often serve as agents or "carriers" of metalepsis, disturbers of the ontological hierarchy of levels through their awareness of the recursive structures in which they find themselves" (121). The characters' awareness of their fictionality in Travels in the Scriptorium results in a confrontation of characters with the author rather than an author's confrontation with his characters in a world where he is also a character. Mr. Blank is judged, controlled, and oppressed. He has no authority as an author. He is in his fictive characters' hands. Their awareness liberates them; lets them come to terms with past, with their creator. They disturb the hierarchy, the superiority of the author in the fictional world. They are aware that their fictive statuses were not as they desired, and they challenge the author for making their lives so. When the author reunites with his characters from previous books, they are not the same characters anymore, they have changed, asserted their own free wills. In fact, they have mastered their own worlds after the author left them. They apparently continued to live after the author ended that fictive world, and they fixed what they did not fancy and resented the author heavily. Also, in a away, Auster proves that illusory reality of the fictional worlds is in fact not illusory after all. The fictional world is real. It is never closed. As in Blanchot's argument, the work is autonomous, and the author is separated from it. The characters refute the fact that the characters an author creates are alive only on the author's mind, they exist in the books that author writes. On the contrary, they do exist outside the mind of the author. They can even hold him captive, as free agents.

Therefore, the greatest impact of re-resenting past is observed in the changing identities of the characters. No value holds the status of fact and past can be re-presented in completely new contexts: what was something in the past is presented may not be the same in the present world. The characters are portrayed to have

continued their lives, whether fictitious, and, with a surprising reversal, confront their author for his past mistakes.

4.1.2. Intertextuality, Referentiality, and "Transworld Identity"

Historical writing is accepted to refer to real things whereas fictional writing is accepted to refer imaginary things. According to Linda Hutcheon, referentiality is a result of intertextuality and she notes that historiographic metafiction shows that both assumptions are somehow faulty. For Hutcheon, both history and fiction actually refer at the first level to other texts. Therefore, whether inter-textual, intra-textual, or extra-textual, the reference will always be made to other texts that are in fact textualized, subjectified versions of historical events. This fact problematizes the entire notion of real or imaginary referents. In Travels of the Scriptorium, intertextuality is at the core of the novel's structure since the characters in the novel are all borrowed from other texts. Since these borrowings are treated, as argued here, to be autobiographical facts of Auster, thus historical facts, there is an ambiguity as to whether to the references are made to real or imaginary referents. Because, the borrowings are in fact from fictional constructions: they are elements of Auster's previous novels. In this way, Auster, too, problematizes whether the references are real or imaginary.

In order to explain the operation of referentiality, Linda Huthceon suggests that "postmodernist fiction . . . works to problematize the entire activity of reference" (Poetics 152) and in this problematization, it employs five different strategies: intra-textual reference, self-reference, intertextual reference, textualized extra-textual reference, and "hermeneutic" reference.

Intra-textual reference concerns the paradoxical identity postmodernism gives to characters and explains the identity a sign will have only within the text-without its relation to the reality. Hutcheon draws a distinction between historiographic metafiction's theory of intra-textual reference and that of fiction. For Hutcheon, "fictional language refers first and foremost to the universe of reality of fiction,

independent of how closely or distantly it be modeled on the empirical world of experience" (Poetics 154-55). For instance, according to this theory, the presentation of a real person in a historical writing is different from the same person's presentation in a work of fiction because fiction departs from reality cannot refer to the real without changing it.

In other words, what fiction refers to has to be fictive, whether it is based completely on a real character or not, and the real in fiction cannot maintain its reality. According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction challenges this theory of historical fiction in a paradoxical way by using historically real characters and changing them. Thus, it contests the notion that "historical discourse has direct access to the real and does not deviate from or transform brute reality, as does fiction" (155). Through intra-textual reference, historiographic metafiction deletes the boundary between the real and fictive in both history-writing and fiction-writing which are "discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (93). In Travels in the Scriptorium, Auster seems to be employing this strategy. As mentioned earlier, his referents have a double status: autobiographical, real, referents which are in fact fictional constructions, thus imaginary. Auster does not try to eradicate the ambiguity behind his referents, he simply uses them in a new context. So, he might be fictionalizing reality as much as emphasizing the real life status of seemingly imaginary referents.

The second type of reference historiographic metafiction uses is self-reference. In metafiction, self-reference, also known as auto-representation, which shows that the work is aware of its status as fictional artifact, reveals this awareness by referring to itself as a fictional work. Hutcheon gives an example of metafictional self-reference from Timothy Findley's novel Famous Last Words. In this novel, the protagonist's name is Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. The protagonist's name refers to Ezra Pound's poem which is named after the fictive persona of the poem. The emphasis is on the fictitiousness of the novel. According to Hutcheon, "this auto-representation or self-reference suggests that language cannot hook directly onto reality, but is primarily hooked onto itself" (155). Thus, the work is occupied with

itself as a fictional construction and shares this knowledge with the reader. It is not possible to argue that <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> is overtly self-reflective. There is the necessity of having a knowledge of the previous novels of Auster. Otherwise, the protagonists from previous novel will be new to the reader. In this sense, the self-referentiality of <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> is overt, and depends on the reader's prior knowledge of Auster characters that re-appear in this novel. This matter is supported with the fifth strategy of representation Hutcheon talks about.

Hutcheon explains the third kind of reference again from Findley's novel. The usage of the name of Hugh Selwyn Mauberly is also an example of intertextual reference which happens when a text employs another text as its intertext, in this particular type of reference "on the level of word or of structure" (155). Names of characters, their habits, temperaments may be borrowed from other texts. What is more important for Hutcheon is when historical accounts are used as intertexts. Hutcheon writes, "among these intertexts, however, are those of historiography: those "texts"—both specific and general—by which we know that the German concentration camps existed, that Edward abdicated the British throne for Wallis Simpson, and so on" (155).

In order to explain the distinguishing reference historiographic metafiction makes to such intertexts, Hutcheon introduces the fourth kind of reference: textualized extra-textual reference. Hutcheon says that it is different from intertextual reference because of its "emphasis" (155). In textualized extra-textual reference, historiography, or the text of a historical writing, is used "as presentation of fact, as the textualized tracing of event . . . This is not the kind of reference that attempts to derive authority from documentary data; instead it offers extratextual documents as traces of the past" (156)

At this point, the intertextual position of historiography is different from other examples. In historiographic metafiction, as well as an acknowledgement of fictive construction of the primary text, there is also a challenge to the validity of the historical document's presentation of history. When that document is inserted as it is

into the fictional world of the primary text, an alternative fact comes out of its traces of past. Then, the "emphasis" of textualized extra-textual reference is on the possibility of the possible transformation of traces of past in new contexts, whether used by historians in historiography or by novelists in historiographic metafiction.

Hutcheon refers to Robert Coover's novel <u>The Public Burning</u> as an example of the textualized extra-textual reference. In the novel, there is accurate historical data about the Rosenberg case and the period, however, the outcome is not historically valid. Hutcheon notes, "the documentary sources as well as the narrative form of history come under as serious scrutiny in this kind of fiction as they do in the philosophy of history today" (56). Thus, historiographic metafiction shows that such a change of historical data is not a result of the work's being fiction, but rather that the data will change as soon as it is textualized.

The final type of reference regards the reader. Hutcheon calls it "hermeneutic" reference because, she writes,

> we cannot ignore the role of the hermeneutic process of reading: historiographic metafiction does not just refer in textual (that is, product) ways (intra-, inter-, auto-, extra-). The postmodernist text's self-conscious return to performative process and to the entirety of the enunciative act demands that the reader, the *you*, not be left out, even in dealing with the question of reference. (156)

Hutcheon's reference to "enunciation" serves as a key word in understanding her notion of the hermeneutic reference. The enunciation of a text relates to how it is encoded, or written with a certain contextualization of different texts, and how it is decoded, understood and treated by the readers. In the encoding process, the four kinds of references are used in a textual level. For the process of decoding, the interpretation of the reader of all the textual references is required. Therefore, Hutcheon suggests a communicative, social ground between the reader and the writer. Writing ceases to be the private act of the writer; the interaction of the reader with the fictive world of the text is as important as the interaction of various texts within the text. Auster's need of the reader's awareness of his previous novels is very strong in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>. The characters of the novel are re-appearing characters. Mr. Blank is a personification of real-life Auster. Without knowing these

facts, or recognizing them in the text, the novel can be read in a different way than it was intended to be.

To investigate the matter of referentiality in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, Umberto Eco's term *transworld identity* can also be used. Umberto Eco offers the concept of *transworld identity* to explain the phenomenon of "transmigration of characters from one fictional universe to another" (McHale 57). On the intertextual level, *transworld identity* may be used in such a way that it may result in a violation of the ontological boundary between the real world and the fictional world. According to McHale, postmodernist fiction employs *transworld identity* for such a violation. The incongruity between fictional characters and real-world figures that migrate between real worlds and fictional worlds creates the desired ontological trangression. However, in historical novels, *transworld identities* of real-world figures match their real-world status and "projected worlds conform to accepted real-world norms" (McHale 17).

It is important to note that not every migrating character is a *transworld identity.* McHale writes that Eco conditions an asymmetry where the fictional figure differs from the real-world figure "only in accidental properties, not in essentials" (McHale 35), for the migrating figures to be considered *transworld identities*. When there is a carry-over of identities stripped of essential properties, Eco suggests this to be *homonymy*. In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, the essential properties of the characters are preserved. The differences are due to their growth and change after the novels have ended. Thus, it cannot be asserted that the characters re-appearing in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> have lost their essential characteristic. That is, rather than *homonymy,* there are *transworld identities* in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>. The characters in this novel have acquired new characteristics which were not suggested to the reader in the novel they first appeared and the change observed in the characters' lives is not necessarily changes in their essential characteristics.

In addition, this situation shows that these characters, in Eco's terms, have their own *subworlds*. McHale explains, "[c]haracters *inside* fictional worlds are also

capable of sustaining propositional attitudes and projecting possible worlds" (McHale 34). In Travels in the Scriptorium, the characters project their own subworlds; they have built their own lives after the ending of their novels. According to McHale, the subworlds "approach not only complicates fiction's internal ontological structure, it also weakens its external boundary frame" (McHale 34). The result of this weakening is the easy transgression of fictional boundaries. Therefore, the *transworld identities* in Travels in the Scriptorium sustain both a real-life status and perform a migration between two different fictional worlds carrying their subworlds.

Anna Blume from "In the Country of Last Things" is a transworld character. She migrates to the world of Travels in the Scriptorium. In the novel where she appears first, she goes to a dystopic country in search of his brother. Not only does she fail in her quest but she also suffers deeply in a dystopic country of destruction and destitution. When Mr. Blank sees Anna's photograph, he feels warmth. He wonders if she is her daughter, or wife, or someone very dear to him. In fact, Anna Blume is the oldest, possibly dearest to Auster, among all of Auster's characters. In the interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Auster explains that he lived with Anna speaking in his head from 1970 until he wrote the book 1985 (TRN 147). In Travels in the Scriptorium, Anna, who is an old woman now, is the one who takes care of the old man. All the other characters are more or less distant and hostile to Mr. Blank.

When Mr. Blank sees Anna for the first time in person, he explains her: "I've done something terrible to you. I don't know what it is, but something terrible...unspeakable...beyond forgiveness. And here you are, taking care of me like a saint" (Travels 24). Anna explains Mr. Blank that she does not hold him responsible for the mission he sent her on in "a dangerous place, a desperate place, a place of destruction and death" (24). Two things can be said about Anna's transworld identity. Firstly, her personality is, or her essential characteristics seem to be preserved. She is the one who is most forgiving and loving to Mr. Blank. In the interview mentioned above, Auster describes Anna as a "true heroine" and adds,

"Even in the midst of the most brutal realities, the most terrible social conditions, she struggles to remain a human being, to keep her humanity intact. I can't imagine anything more noble and courageous than that" (TRN 149). Mr. Blank's conception of Anna is similar to these views of Auster. In Travels in the Scriptorium, Anna is the humanitarian, forgiving, merciful, loving character. Secondly, she has her subworld. As she informs Mr. Blank of what happened after "In the Country of Last Things", she explains that she fell in love many times, and then married David Zimmer -another transworld identity- and lost her husband to a heart attack. Now, she has the job of taking care of the old man and she seems settled with her life.

It can also be argued that *transworld identity* is used in a parodic manner in Travels in the Scriptorium. Auster uses *transworld identity* in order to violate the ontological boundary not only within the real and fictional worlds but also among fictional worlds. The space Auster creates in Travels in the Scriptorium is a zone, an intertextual space that foregrounds the ontologically seamless boundary of worlds. Different worlds are placed in close encounters as most of the characters are from separate novels. This fact calls to mind the polyphony of worlds McHale talks about. He writes, "postmodernist fiction, by heightening the polyphonic structure and sharpening the dialogue in various ways, foregrounds the ontological dimension of the confrontation among discourses, thus achieving a polyphony of worlds" (McHale 166). The polyphony in Travels in the Scriptorium is due not only to the intertextual usage of various novels and its elements but also due to the subworlds each character brings along to the zone of the text. For McHale, postmodernist writing asks such ontological questions: "What happens when different worlds are placed in confrontation? What happens when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a world in a text? How is a projected world structured?" (McHale 11). Travels in the Scriptorium seems to repeat McHale's questions and the answers it points out at concern the intertextually fluid identities and powerless authors and superior, omniscient characters.

McHale explains the zone of postmodernist fiction with a discussion of "heterotopia" which describes a "radically discontinuous and inconsistent"

juxtaposition of "worlds of incompatible structure" (McHale 44). Thus, the heterotropic zone of postmodernist fiction can be seen as "a plurality of words" (McHale 52) that is best explained with intertextuality. In an intertextual space, two or more texts, genres, periods, schools interact with each other. McHale writes that in postmodernist fiction such interactions form "disparate, incompatible spaces" albeit with a common point: they "occupy the same kind of space" and belong to "the projected space of the fictional universe" (McHale 56). To illustrate the best way to foreground the ontology of intertextual space, McHale writes that postmodernist fiction borrows characters from other texts and integrates them into its own text.

In conclusion, there is a heterotropic zone in Travels in the Scriptorium. In this zone, there is ambiguity as to the real or imaginary status of referents. In addition, there are confrontations among different fictional worlds, the subworlds of the members of these worlds, and the real world. In this way, the novel problematizes not only the presentation of past and historical facts-however autobiographical- but also creates an ontological boundary crossing. This transgression firstly removes the authority of the author and privileges the characters. Secondly, the transgression results in transworld identities that question the change the change migrating characters are supposed to undergo. Travels in the Scriptorium, thus, enacts the three problematizations specific to historiographic metafiction, that of representation of past; referentiality, and intertextuality and through these, presents inter-textually fluid identities of the characters. In addition, the novel opens up another debate concerning the identity of the author and Auster once again applies to his literary past to problematize the identification of the writer with the room of the book which has become a regular theme of his writing since his early works.

4.2. Metamorphosing Identities

Auster's preoccupation with the room as the place of writing can be observed in many novels of Auster. For Auster, the writer establishes his identity primarily with his activity of writing in a room, which usually takes place in solitude. Brian McHale argues that in postmodernist fiction, authors usually reflect "their

performance as writers- namely, the act of writing itself" (198) and as a result of this presentation appears "the postmodernist *topos* of the writer at his desk" (198). This makes the author another fictional character in that fictional world where he sits at a desk and writes. In other words, when an author introduces his act of writing to his writing, this is only a fictional reconstruction. McHale adds, "And this reconstruction of the act of writing depends upon what has been written- on the text we read. In this sense, the writing itself is 'more real' than the act of writing that presumably gave rise to it" (198). Therefore, the author's presentation of his own act of writing the text we are reading is not real but fictional.

The first part of this section discusses Auster's traditional portrayal of the author in the act of writing in a room and the merging of the writer's identity with the room in which he writes. The second part discuses how, with Travels in the Scriptorium, Auster defines a new form of solitude the writer experiences. This novel offers the room of "the work", the scriptorium[12]. According to Blanchot, in the room of "the work" there is nothing but solitude: a solitude that the writer experience when "the work" dismisses, rejects its writer. This solitude differs greatly from the creative, almost transcendental solitude Auster destines the writer to experience in his previous works. The new form of solitude nullifies the writer's creativity, renders him ineffectual.

4.2.1. The Metaphor of the 'Scriptorium': Writing and Isolation

In Auster's works, Auster himself appears as a character who is a writer while his protagonists appear as writers in the act of writing at a desk in an isolated room. For Auster, the experience of writing is usually associated with being in a room. Thus, he establishes "an equation between "the room" and "the book" (qtd. in Bloom 8). Starting with his first work of prose, The Invention of Solitude", the author

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[12] Rooms designed for writing, especially in monasteries.

equates the room and the presence of the writer in the room with literary creation. After his father dies, Auster, disturbed by the relationship he had with his father, tries to close the gap his father's absence created in his identity through writing about him. He locks himself into his apartment, retreats into the room in order to write about his father and hopes to give him an identity. Pascal Bruckner reads The Invention of Solitude" "as a celebration of rooms and closed spaces" (qtd.in Bloom 44). According to Bruckner, Auster "makes the room a kind of mental uterus, a site of a second birth. In this encluster the subject gives birth, in essence, to himself" (44). According to Shiloh, the locked room of writing is "the sanctum of inwardness, is the site of the creative act" (23).

The room and the experience of locking oneself into the room makes Auster realize the empty room as a site where the innermost self of a person is located. Shiloh writes that Auster uses the image of the locked room as "a metonymy of the self" (21). As Auster explains in the "Invention of Solitude":

> He cannot call it home, but for the past nine months it is all he has had. A few dozen books, a mattress on the floor, a table, three chairs, a hot plate, and a corroded cold water sink . . . [I]n the void between the moment he opens the door and the moment he begins to conquer emptiness, his mind flails in a wordless panic. It is as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole. (IoS 77)

The emptiness of his studycorresponds to the absence in which he finds himself. The act of writing slowly dissolves this emptiness: "As he writes, he feels that he is moving inward" (IoS 139). Therefore, in The Invention of Solitude, writing in the room helps him discover, or establish, not only his father's identity. It also helps Auster discover his own identity. His need to erase the absence of his father is also an attempt to define himself through him. Therefore, the room becomes a place where the author discovers his self in the physical and spiritual solitude of the room and the creative act of writing is the only means of satisfying his hunger. Auster writes that while he is writing in the room, "the world has shrunk to the size of this room for him" (IoS 79). He is not able to leave the room, completely immersed in his writing. In the novel, Auster's quest for his father turns into a

mystery of the self and in the process of his quest for establishing both his father's and his own identities takes place in a locked room.

Other instances Auster presents the association of a room and writing occur throughout the three novels of The New York Trilogy where the protagonists write in isolation immersed in identity problems. For example, in "Ghosts", the second novel of The New York Trilogy, two main characters are depicted to write in the solitude of their rooms. Blue, the detective who spies on Black, writes weekly reports of the case he is investigating in the solitude of his apartment. Black, the assumed suspect, stays alone in his apartment most of the time and does nothing other than reading and writing. Paul Auster comments on "Ghosts" in an interview with Joseph Mallia and offers an explanation for the act of acting in this novel: "In Ghosts, the spirit of Thoreau is dominant . . . The idea of living a solitary life, of living with a kind of monastic intensity- and all the dangers that entails. Walden Pond in the heart of the city" (TRN 110). Springer makes his comments on Auster's remark with a quote from Nathaniel Hawthorne who writes, "In a forest, solitude would be life; in the city, it is death" (111).

Briefly, in Walden, Thoreau gives an account of the two years he spent in Walden Pond where he lived in isolation and harmony with nature. Thoreau stresses the importance of being alone and offers this as the key for finding answers about life. For him, being alone is the ideal state for writing. In Ghosts, the detective protagonist, Blue buys Walden because he sees Black, the criminal he is following, buying it. Springer writes that Black, who is an admirer of Walden, has a solitary life and he "seems to compare his own stay in his apartment with that of Thoreau in his hut near Walden Pond" (110). Then, Springer points at a contradiction:

> Black's living alone in "Ghosts" is carried out in a reversal of Thoreau's ideas, as [Auster's] idea of 'Walden Pond in the heart of the city' already contains the contradiction in itself. In this city environment, the artistically fruitful lakeside solitude turns into self-imposed isolation; while Thoreau is close to his natural environment (the forest, the lake, the birds) and comments upon the activities of people from his position on the margins of society, Black isolates himself in his apartment and does not enter any exchange. (111)

According to this quote of Springer, it can be argued that Black's adoption of Thoreau's creative solitude fails since the nature of solitude in a desolate apartment in the city does not provide the opportunity of finding answers to life.

There are other instances that writers are depicted to be writing in the solitude of their rooms. In The Locked Room, the character Fanshawe writes his life story in a loked room. In Mr. Vertigo, the protagonist writes his autobiography in a house where he lives alone. In Leviathan, Benjamin Sachs abandons his family, disappears, and writes in his hiding place. In In the Country of Last Things, the protagonist's husband locks himself into his room and writes volumes of books with little interruption. In all these examples, the room becomes "a place where life and writing meet in an unstable, creative and sometimes a dangerous encounter" (qtd. in Bloom 7). The room provides the writer the peace of mind from the social world's worries and in the room of the book, Auster's characters who are writers enjoy the possibilities of creativity and self-expression the room provides. Thus,while the solitude of the writer in the room, or house, may be associated with Thoreau's views of the ideal example of literary creative solitude in these examples, Travels in the Scriptorium marks a change on the relationships of the room, solitude and writing.

4.2.2. "The Book" vs. "The Work" and the Identity of the Writer

In contrast to the other examples of the equation of the room with writing in Auster's writing, in Travels in the Scriptorium, the room causes the total separation of the writer from his writings. Maurice Blanchot's literary essays "The Essential Solitude" and "The Space of Literature" may guide the analysis of Auster's imprisonment in his scriptorium in Travels in the Scriptorium.

Auster's conception of the room in Travels in the Scriptorium corresponds to Blanchot's theme of literary solitude in his essay "The Essential Solitude". Blanchot elaborates on the concept of being alone and draws a distinction between worldly solitude -man's physical state of being alone, and literary solitude-the artist's state of "self communion" (Blanchot SH 403). In a comparison of these two, Blanchot finds a more essential solitude in literary solitude, that is, the solitude of the work.

According to Blanchot, behind literary solitude lies the difference between "the book" and "the work". He notes that when the writer is in the process of writing, he is writing "the book". "The book" is simply a combination of meaningless words and it is not a work yet. For "the book" to become "the work", it has to cut all its ties with the writer. But while this happens, Blanchot explains, "The writer finds himself in this more and more comical condition-of having to write, of having no means of writing it and of being forced by an extreme necessity to keep writing it" (qtd. in Bruns p 20-21).

Following this argument, it can be asserted that in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, the author is in the room of "the work". In the room of "the work", the writer has no identity, no power because the work tries to separate itself from the writer. The main reason for this separation is due to the writer's treatment of "the work" as still "the book". He tries to enter the zones of his past novels' fictional worlds. This attempt is met by discontent on the side of the characters. Hence, it is revealed that, as an autobiographical example of historiographic metafiction, Auster's re-presentation of his literary works, includes re-presentation of his own identity, too.

On the difference between "the book" and "the work", Blanchot writes, "the book" is written by the writer; it belongs to the time of writing. When the writer is writing it, "the book" is a "mute accumulation of sterile words" (403). As such, it creates void, and writer thinks "the book" is not finished, so he writes non-stop in the room, trying to finish it. Blanchot refers to this attempt as "illusory labor" (403), because the writer never knows if it is finished: "he book" becomes "the work" by separating itself from the writer. Whereas "the book" is almost one with the writer, "the work" does not permit the author come near it. In the novel, Auster is trying to find the place of the writer within the solitude of "the work", experiencing the rejection Blanchot anticipates "the work" will exercise on its writer. This novel demonstrates the consequences of an author's attempt at trying to reunite with his previous creations. Yet, once the writer finishes "the book", according to Blanchot, "the work" comes into being and it exerts its solitude by dismissing the writer. Blanchot writes, "The person who is writing the work is thrust to one side, the person

who has written the work is dismissed" (Blanchot 401). Then, Auster is the dismissed writer because in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, he tries to reunite with the work in a futile attempt. The autonomy of the characters, or their hierarchically superior ontological status with regard to the writer is a manifestation of the solitude of "the work". Therefore, the writer has no means of entering the creative zone and uniting with "the work". Neither can he have a place in his own fictional constructions even if he refers to them in the manner of historiographic metafiction. Once a writer treats his own literary past as *past* and attempts at re-presenting it; entering it; interviewing the characters in it, he will be entering the zone of the solitude of "the work".

As far as the author's awareness of the solitude of the work is concerned, his position seems weaker. He does not know that he is in the zone of the solitude of the work or that he is dismissed. Blanchot says, "The person who is dismissed does not know this. This ignorance saves him, diverts him, allows him to go on" (401). Then, Auster's attempt to keep in touch with his previous books is because of this ignorance. But, the attempt proves futile, he falls victim to the solitude of "the work". Blanchot says that a writer already risks this by writing "the book", which will not be that book much long after it is written. Yet, as Mr.Blank's situation shows the fact that the author fails to let go of his previous creation and takes them as a new matter, makes him a prisoner, or-outsider in the realm of "the work".

The metaphor of Mr. Blank's amnesia can be explained by looking at Blanchot's explanation for the result of the author's revisitation of "his work": Blanchot says that "a writer never reads his work" because "for him it's unreadable, a secret, and he cannot remain face to face with it" (403). In addition, Blanchot notes that when a writer tries to read his work, the work "excludes, with the authority of indifference, the person who has written it, and now wants to recapture it by reading it" (404). Furthermore, Blanchot writes, "No one who has written the work can live near it, dwell near it" (404). Nevertheless, in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, the opposite is happening. Auster tries to do the impossible task of being face to face with his work. He experiences total isolation among all his creations. Thus, he has no

memory regarding his creations. Although he sees pictures of the characters, he cannot recognize them. He is defenseless, a prisoner in that world. The pills, the possible conspiracy, threats against his life, his passivity all mark Mr. Blank's and Auster's solitude in "the work". In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, we see that an author, by coincidence or on will, who meets "the work" is reduced to "nothing". His identity is invalid. He is an alien when he is near the work. Lack of authority equals lack of memory and power: Mr. Blank is imprisoned and has amnesia.

Thus, the metaphor of the room in <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u> is different from that of other novels of Auster. In his previous novels, the room is the place for artistic creativity. There is always the act of writing in the room and the writer's idenity merges with the identity of the room. In this case, however, the room, the scriptorium, the place to write, is like a prison cell; it renders the writer an inert, workless, idle, a helpless, hopeless person, an ex-author. In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, the room is not the place for the act of writing: for the author does not possess the taken-for-granted entrance permit into the space of "the book"; in this novel, the room marks the solitude of "the work" which is also the solitude the writer risks by writing. The room, the scriptorium, signifies the lack of authority of the author in the face of "the work".

Once in the solitude of "the work", the awe-stricken author fails to understand the situation and make sense of his isolation. According to Blanchot, then, the author feels a need to write the same the thing. Blanchot writes, "The impossibility of reading is the discovery that now, in the space opened by creation, there is no more room for creation- and no other possibility for the writer than to keep on writing the same work" (404). Therefore, the author belongs to the time of the writing of the book, even after writing it. The work of art does not allow interventions after creation. In this way, we can make sense of the vague memories Mr. Blank has of the characters in the novel and these instances act as autobiographical verifications. For example, Auster-Mr.Blank finds Anna vaguely familiar; he does remember her, but he does not remember writing "In the Country of Last Things". Auster belongs to the

time of meditating the book, yet is separated from the work. Therefore, Anna is the prior-to-writing Anna.

"The work" erases the presence of the writer in it. This erasing, omitting is, according to Blanchot, is "the open violence of the work" (403). Then, in Travels in the Scriptorium, Auster is faced with this violence of "the work". Although the space of the work is not closed, it is blocked to the writer. This can be seen as Auster's problematizing of the role of the author, as creator and owner of a fictional world who is rendered powerless. Mr. Blank's amnesia can be seen as an allusion to his entering the solitude of "the work". So, when the author re-enters the world, in this case, deriving from Blanchot's argument, this is something beyond transworld identity, this is rather the authority of the text as an autonomous "being", resisting the authority of the writer.

Auster's Travels in the Scriptorium dramatizes paradoxical identities of the author as real-life author and the paper-author. Although evidence suggests he is the maker of that fictional world, he is treated as an intruder into that world and the paper-author lacks the superiority of the author. In Travels in the Scriptorium we find these paradoxes McHale indicates: "Who is the master or mistress of whom? Which is ontological superior, which inferior? Which stands above the fictional world, which within it? Which is inscribed, which the inscriber?" (McHale 215). As it turns out, as far as the room of the work in Travels in the Scriptorium is considered, the answers favor the owners of fictional world and nullify the identity of the author. On the other hand, in the room of the book of previous novels, the author is the creator and is the superior, the owner, master of the fictional world.

CONCLUSION

This thesis privileged selected examples from Auster's early works, such as his autobiographical accounts and critical essays, in order to indicate the sustained importance of certain themes in some of the major novels of Auster. These early works not only illuminate the recurring themes in Auster's novels but also help define crucial tendencies and patterns in the author's life and in his writing. This discussion leads us to an understanding of the fluid identities that appear at the core of Auster's life and poetics in both a synchronic and a diachronic manner.

Through a survey of Western thinking about identity, from Enlightenment to postmodernism, the change in the concept of the formation, and the knowledge, of identity was observed. Principles of reason, unity, and stability that comprised the Enlightenment doctrine gradually gave way to the fragmented, plural, unstable identities of the postmodern era. Postmodern identity's lack of unity, stability and essence was discussed to illuminate the general condition of the subject in Auster's time. The synchronically and diachronically fluid identities Auster showcases are thus examples of, for instance, selves that lack unity in the dissolving of metanarratives in Lyotard's argument. Such selves inevitably seek to recognize themselves and others within local, ad hoc, tactical bricolages rather than forging themselves into a meaningful world-historical, seemingly natural, grand ideological design.

Auster, in his semi-autobiographical novel, The Invention of Solitude, portrays a son who still believes in the father figure's role in providing the son with a unitary identity. Yet, in the postmodern world, the father cannot offer schemas to fit into; there are no unifying theories left, not even the barest oedipal elements are allowed in without devastating ironization. In addition, the father is also struck by the postmodern uncertainty and he also lacks a stable identity. The autobiographical protagonist acknowledges this fact after realizing the selflessness he sees both in himself and his father, and in the second part of the novel, turns to this past, this time not to find his father, but to find the writers who have influenced him, to find his friends whom he spent time with. His aim is to re-construct his identity with as many

accidental and incidental identifications as possible, to construct himself an identity in the form of the decentered, rootless rhizomatic structure Deleuze and Guattari propose.

The discussion on Auster's identity on a personal level must be cognizant of Auster's apparent transfer of aspects of his life into his novels as literary material. His own troubled relationship with his father not only provides the subject matter of The Invention of Solitude but also of Moon Palace. In MoonPalace, Marco Fogg appears as yet another figure burdened by what might be called fatherlessness. The identity crisis triggered by the loss of the father marks the beginning of a painfully prolonged identity crisis. Fogg seems to be a typically postmodern self in his constant search of identity, in his constant identification with father-surrogates, and his constantly changing point of view about the world. As seemingly revealed in Auster's early works, Auster seems to be the prototype of such figures; it must be said, however, that there are reasons for such a case of anchorlessness apart from the loss of the father.

As discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter one, Auster's affiliation with French poetry and European writing in general shows that his literary identity cannot be assumed to be unitary, an essentially one-sided construction. This fluid literary identity Auster establishes at the beginning of his career continues until present. Within the possibility of embracing different influences and coming and going among them, Auster showcases himself as an example of a writer with multiple self-identifications because he can seem to be a French poet writing Celan-like, self-deconstructing poetry, as Finkelstein suggests, or Jabes-like, exilic-messianic language poetry while talking about the impossibility of writing about the Holocaust, or a Camus-like existentialist in portraying the anguish of being in the example of Jim Nashe in The Music of Chance. He can display his various literary identities all at once without making them homogeneous. He can be a mainstream American writer in The Brooklyn Follies, appear as a committed postmodernist in Travels in the Scriptorium, become a detective of lost identities in The New York Trilogy, perform his highbrow literary activity in the comprehensive Beckett edition, or edit true

stories of ordinary people in <u>I Thought My Father was God</u>. The concept of identity Auster demonstrates in his works is thus a refined mix of the elements that have constructed his synchronically, heterogeneously, non-exclusively co-existing identities. Perhaps it is for this reason that Auster manages to tell the problems such postmodern selves go through in a very gripping way. In other words, it is due to his awareness of the postmodern plurality of identities he embodies that he can point to the crises of postmodern identities so successfully. In his novel <u>The New York Trilogy</u>, his protagonists fail to understand that they do not have and cannot have single, essential identities. In order to remind his readers to be aware of the dangers lurking for identities in the postmodern era, Auster portrays his protagonists—Quinn in <u>City of Glass</u>, Blue in <u>Ghosts</u>, and the nameless narrator in <u>The Locked Room</u>—as surrounded by both a plethora of plausible identities and the problems complicating each and every one of those possibilities. Auster sends each protagonist on a quest of his own identity under the cover of finding another person's identity. In the process, nothing is found. Yet this nothing is filled with precisely the elaborate process of trial and error. The protagonists, unconscious of the mission Auster sends them on, not only fail to find who they are, they also lose all the initial sense, all the prejudices, they may have had, if any, about themselves.

The conventions of parody Auster employs in <u>The New York Trilogy</u> enable him to subvert the conventions of the classical detective story. In pushing to the background the epistemological questions of the genre, and by re-writing the detective story with an ontological dominant, he firstly confuses his protagonists who take the validity of epistemological questions for granted in both life and literature. They helplessly wonder what knowledge awaits to be discovered, who holds the secret they are looking for, when their roles in the world will be revealed. Then, the detective-protagonists realize that such knowledge might eventually not exist; further, the world they are in might not really be the one they think they are in. When they become aware of the ontological dimensions, they are already on the edge, and they have nothing to hold on to. The question is, "will they pretend that their refuted world still holds?" It is indicative of the kind of writer Auster is that he does not allow himself or his characters to have delusional reasonings. Perhaps, had it not been for

the existentialism that Auster held on to when he felt bitterly dissatisfied with the American social and political climate of the1950s and 1960s, he might not have developed the awareness of the necessity of, or the possibility of, finding new approaches to understand life, one's position in it, and the contribution of this to making the world less unbearable.

Thus, it can be argued that Auster is offering us the very paradox of postmodernism, and warning us about the danger it entails: one needs to be aware of the different possibilities, pluralities the world presents because, otherwise, oblivion to this fact will result in the destruction of authenticity, of reality, of the truth in the face of uncertainty, whereas awareness of plurality will be liberating. The most dangerous side of postmodernism, thus, appears as the inescapable plurality of the real, the true, and of identity.

The identity issues Auster raises in Travels in the Scriptorium are actually existential problems re-written without a re-assuring theoretical framework of ultimate answers. In the novel, which is an autobiographical example of historiographic metafiction, Auster seems to present a radical and unique case of the fluid identities of the author and the protagonists. Auster treats his previous novels and the protagonists of these novels as constituents of his own literary history. By treating them as real, as historical facts, he re-contextualizes them in this novel and follows the principle of historiographic metafiction. Thus, these novels and their protagonists become elements of Auster's autobiography. In this way, he calls for a debate of his own identity as a writer who he has always managed to pass smoothly from one literary identity to another. The present identity of the writer, however, in the persona of Mr. Blank, looks contradictory regarding Auster's previous portrayals of the author. He is the antithesis of the synchronically and diachronically fluid, extraordinarily empowered, identity Auster has been presenting until this novel. Here, the author looks lost and disempowered. The omniscient author seems to enter the fictional world, and to lose all his powers once in that world. Who is the real Paul Auster when he becomes Mr. Blank: old, amnesiac, a rather miserable version of the supposedly real Auster? Through the metaphor of the fictionally debilitating

'scriptorium', Auster destroys, disrupts the balanced identification of the writer with the room of the book, and leaves him stripped of identity. Auster also seems to open a debate on the question of the real-life identities of fictional characters. In <u>Travels in the Scriptorium</u>, it is revealed that Auster has given them authentic lives and that the characters have continued to live after their fictional worlds closed. When these characters of different fictional worlds meet in new fictional worlds, they choose their own identities and the author has no authority on them. The notion of *transworld identity*, thus, becomes re-defined by the characters' conscious decisions for the characteristics they will have in different fictional worlds. The novel thus offers us new approaches on fluid identities, both for the fictional characters and the author.

If we look at Auster's poetics in light of the discussions carried out in this thesis, we reach two larger frameworks that require attention. Firstly, Auster's importance in American writing becomes noticeable. Secondly, Auster's importance in contemporary literary theory and contemporary critical theory becomes considerable. Auster is heavily influenced by European literature, philosophy, and art as well as the European Jewish past. Auster combines these non-American influences with his American influences. The combination of American and non-American influences abound in so-called ethnic-American writing. However, in such ethnic works, different influences are presented as choices that are selectively taken up in the formation of identity. In such writings, choices are frequently delimited cultural factors.

For instance, Roth does not seem capable of imagining a happy and successful transcendence of the supposedly deeply ingrained separation of the categories Jewish and American, so that, for Roth, an American Jew seems doomed to endless pain as he relentlessly and cruelly must dissect himself or be exposed to dissection by others, in terms of his ethnicity or religion. This seems to show that, for Roth, no matter whom we pretend to be or to become, certain primary identities have an unchangeable, non-negotiable solidity. Such identitarian, fatalistic essentialism is precisely what Auster's work seems to reject. With indifference and lack of discrimination, Auster combines American and non-American themes without feeling

compelled to define them analytically, actually without even being able to identify them exclusively. He seems totally uninterested in calculating how Jewish or how American anyone is.

As far his American identity is concerned, he is deeply attached to Brooklyn where he lives. Heacknowledges Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Emerson as his masters. In Moon Palace, characters go to the open and vast American West in their quests for self. Neither Auster, as seen in his autobiographical accounts, nor his characters suffer from lack of identification with America and they do not seem to be troubled about being or not being Americans. In Auster, identity troubles are always the result of universally common existential crises that are essentially metaphysical, not ethnic or religious as such. However, when, for instance, Auster criticizes the materialism and conformism of America in the 1960s, he leaves America, and heads to France. While doing so, his motivation is not a sense of his failure to be an American. It can be said he leaves America because of his disappointment with America's lack of commitment to the values it was founded on. In any case, neither does Auster's abandoning of America after college mean his abandoning of his American identity nor does his going to Europe mean that he needs to affirm his Jewish identity, or some such thing. American, European and Jewish approaches are preserved and employed by Auster without any evidence of anxiety.

Therefore, the inter-cultural mix in Auster's writing shows that he preserves the heterogeneity of the several approaches he combines. In other words, he manages to negotiate the heterogeneity of his American and non-American sources with a high degree of sophistication and virtuosity. In his problematization of the interaction with the Other, he appears to be a writer of easy poise.

Thus, as far as American writing is concerned, Auster seems to make an important contribution to the identity of the American writer and seems to constitute a significant example of a uniquely happy case of negotiating American and non-American elements in his life andwriting, while managing to keep them heterogeneous, to let them to speak for themselves. As far as Auster's importance in

contemporary literary theory and contemporary critical theory is concerned, Auster's super-imposed, double-coded usage of existentialist and postmodernist themes is significant. Generally speaking, both existentialism and postmodernism are criticized for certain shortcomings they are believed to suffer from. For instance, postmodernism is seen as a flippant, frivolous forgetting of the factual contexts of the past and the content of things in favor of their form, and it is criticized for these irresponsibilities and falsifications. Existentialism is criticized for being an outdated and overly dramatic mode of thinking as well as being nihilistic and pessimistic. Auster does not use existentialism and postmodernism in these generally accepted and criticized senses. In Auster, the existentialist themes, values do not seem outmoded, heavy, or pessimistic. Similarly, postmodernism in Auster does not seem to be a misrepresentation of, or an irresponsible escape from, life. If there is a sense in which Auster sees writing as a game, then it must be added that he sees it as a game of life and death. In Auster's writing, postmodernism becomes a serious, thoughtful way of thinking about life and death. Auster's contribution to contemporary literary theory and contemporary critical theory is the unique manner in which he updates existential themes and applies them to contemporary human experience.

When we look at his narration, his characterization, and his style, it can be observed that Auster combines existentialist themes such as death, nothingness, anguish of being, and desire for authentic identities, authentic lives with postmodern themes such as fragmentation, plurality, and instability of identities, uncertaintyof events in a very sophisticated manner. Put differently, he uses postmodernism to offer a current version of existentialist themes and in his use, existentialist themes do not seem to be as heavy-handedly ironic, as self-dramatizingly fateful, as lacking in sense of humor and playfulness as they appear to be in Camus or Sartre. Auster treats existentialist themes in a lighthearted, urbane, refined manner. He carries them to today's world and locates them in the center of contemporary experience with a liberal suavity, and with linguistic and intellectual sophistication. In this sense, Auster shows that the vital questions about life and death, which the nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe have been plagued with, are still with us under the cover of

postmodernity. He makes us see and feel the older, deeper problems that preoccupied the previous centuries. However, since he is not heavy-handed, we are given the intellectual and emotional leisure to face them properly for our time and for the future. Auster teaches us to be profound in the postmodern world.

In sum, both of the larger frameworks we have pointed to about Auster constitute cases to be studied extensively. Firstly, it seems important to acknowledge how he contributes to American writing by allowing the intrusion of the existence and the view of the Other while keeping the heterogeneity of American and non-American themes, and preserving and cultivating a fundamental tension in American writing without resorting to any resolution whatsoever. Secondly, it is it crucial to note how Auster neither foregoes the nineteenth and twentieth century nor gives up contemporary narration, characterization, and style in the mode of postmodernism. In a genuine way, he combines both American and non-American, and old and new modes of thinking in his works. We understand that he is not someone who is going to take up new influences without thinking about them anew, without making them his own. It might be argued that, without appearing so, he actually writes like a historian of the future in the sense that he wants to keep us as serious about the future as previous generations had been about the past. In his novels, Auster seems to warn us about possible future disasters, genocides, abuses and misuses in individual and social life, and particularly in the politics of identity. He seems to invite us to being ethical, thoughtful, and concerned about the future, not so much because he fears that we might repeat the past, but rather because he suspects that we will find new ways to delude ourselves in the future.

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