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The Problem of Identity in Writing by Paul Auster

Master's Diploma Thesis

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2009

I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

Acknowledgement

I would like to give my special thanks to Jens Fredslund from the University of Aarhus, Denmark, whose seminars on the twentieth-century American fiction inspired me to write my thesis on Paul Auster.

Especially, I want to thank my supervisor Stephen Paul Hardy, Ph. D. for his help, support, valuable hints, and the loan of *The Invention of Solitude*.

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Introduction

The present Master's Diploma Thesis deals with various aspects of identity as they are depicted in three works written by a contemporary American author Paul Auster. He was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1947, started writing poetry and other minor pieces in 1970s, but he did not get the credit in the literary world until the publication of his first non-fiction *The Invention of Solitude* in 1982. Since 1980s he has continued writing novels that number fifteen volumes up to the present day and which deal predominantly with the search for identity and personal meaning.

The aim of the thesis is to analyze three Auster's works: *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *New York Trilogy* (1985) and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) with the focus on the issue of identity. The thesis will concentrate mainly on the protagonists and examine their behaviour, response to the environment either social or physical, their inner life, the process of their search for identity and of identity formation as well, and their relation to the antagonist who often represents their alter ego or double.

The thesis is indeed divided into two parts. The first part is rather theoretical and includes the first two chapters; whereas in the second part which presents the main body of the thesis, the most important aspects of identity will be analyzed for each work. The first chapter serves for setting the literary context of Auster's writing, and it briefly introduces other well-known writers who have strongly influenced Paul Auster's work, and their fiction that either appears as an intertextual reference in the analyzed works or is closely linked to the issue of identity and other postmodern motives present in Auster's writing. First, it comments on allegory and meeting of the imaginary and real in Nathaniel Hawthorne and on his tale *Wakefield* which is retold in Auster's *Ghosts*. The Wakefield motif actually reappears in all the analyzed novels, most markedly in

The Locked Room in which the protagonist seems to represent Wakefield's faithful double. Second, it stresses the influence of E.A. Poe's detective-fiction and mystery genre which is most clearly demonstrated in *The New York Trilogy*, sometimes marked anti-detective novel. It also sums up Poe's allegorical tale *William Wilson* which is closely linked to double identities of Auster's characters. And his *Man of the Crowd* points at an individual lost in the flock of anonymous human bodies, a postmodern condition present in Auster's work too. Third, it is Herman Melville who inspired Auster by psychological and existential struggles that take place within his characters. Fourth, it points at H.D. Thoreau's concept of walking and writing as parallel acts and his retreat from society to find understanding depicted in *Walden*. And last but not least, we mention a European representative, Samuel Beckett who was the initiator of the Theatre of the Absurd and precursor of postmodernist tendencies in literature. By his treatment of language he might initiate Auster's reflections on fallen language and its disintegrating power. In addition we concentrate on his trilogy with its constant ontological shift in both directions, also a recurrent topic in Auster's fiction.

The aim of the second chapter is to make a bridge between Paul Auster, his writing and the topic of identity. Auster actually tries to work out who he is by means of writing. Writing allows him to leave his body, in other words the outline of his real identity, and to take on his characters' identities in the fictional world in order to explore the possibilities of his inner self. Thus, his characters that never cease to look for the reason for being play a crucial role in his writing and detecting his identity. It is the uneasiness following from the uncertainty, instability, relativity, inaccessibility and elusiveness of identity that constantly compels his characters to self-reflect and search for self-understanding and the stable centre within themselves. But they are often doomed in their impossible effort to grasp the intangible self. In order to find the way

out of confusion, they take on themselves multiple identities, struggle with their alter ego and write. Most Auster's characters are involved in writing and thereby open the question of author's identity and the function of writing as an entrance into the self. Auster's characters thus resemble the writer himself and additionally share many autobiographical features with him. Auster then presents the model for his characters who impersonate his existential struggle, personal anxieties and doubts.

The third chapter is focused on the question of identity as it is depicted in *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster's first published non-fiction. It is divided into two parts, both dealing with the identity of father, but from two different perspectives. First, it is from Auster's perspective as son. Here, Auster tries to unearth his deceased father's identity that has always eluded him, and this initiates his doubts whether the other's identity is knowable at all. Moreover, he reveals the difficult nature of identity which shows to be unstable and fragmentary. Writing actually serves Auster to keep his father alive and to understand him better. He gradually discovers the impact of the environment on one's identity formation and the suffocating self buried within his father. The second perspective is also Auster's, but this time as father. He profits from writing and memories as a way to self-understanding. Auster's concept of identity in connection with writing is paralleled with John Locke's theory of 'tabula rasa'. Finally, Auster underlines the importance of a past in self-discovery and adopts the role of father that passed on him after his father's death.

Auster's most famous *New York Trilogy* is the subject of analysis in the fourth chapter. The aim is to present its protagonists, their existential struggle and the ways they cope with it. It is divided into three parts; each for a respective novel from the trilogy. It starts with the analysis of Quinn's identity in *City of Glass*. He is frustrated by his inability to define his purpose of being and in order to avoid obsessive questioning

of his failed existence, he takes refuge in multiple identities. The constant shifts in identities allow him to get rid of his burdened self. But, in the end, his amputated self is lost within the confusion of other identities and the reader witnesses his gradual disintegration into sheer textuality. The end also opens the question of author's identity which seems to be distributed among Quinn, anonymous narrator, Auster-character and real Paul Auster.

The problem of double identity surfaces in *Ghosts*, the second volume of the trilogy. Here, the protagonist Blue is withdrawn from his ordinary life and in his isolation he experiences a gradual relatedness to his object of observation, Black. Black appears to be Blue's double and Blue's progressive recognition of himself in Black proposes an analogy with Lacan's theory of 'mirror-stage'. Finally, Blue manages to assert his authority on his alter-ego, but by killing Black, he simultaneously closes the door leading inwards. Again, the search for identity is paralleled with writing; Blue represents the writer and Black the written, indeed the way to self-understanding.

The next analysis of *The Locked Room* concentrates on the issue of double and mistaken identity, and parasitism. It examines a peculiar relationship between two very close friends, the nameless narrator and Fanshawe. In their childhood and adolescence, they used to be like twin brothers and their identities seemed to be coupled. Nevertheless, they went separate ways and have not seen each other for years. After the narrator learns about Fanshawe's disappearance, he smoothly replaces him in his family and thus implicitly takes on his identity. First, he tries to reconstruct Fanshawe's identity through childhood memories, indeed simultaneously reconstructing his own. And then, he is compelled to search for disappeared Fanshawe, actually searching for himself. In the end, the narrator finds out he is lost forever, because Fanshawe occupies every part of his life and inner self. There is no more room for his own identity; he

literally became filled with Fanshawe. The final reconciliation of both selves happens through writing.

Auster's recent novel *Travels in the Scriptorium* presents the last novel which will be examined in the thesis. The aim is to explore identity in relation to memory and the problem of author's identity. We apply John Locke's concept of 'tabula rasa' to the protagonist Mr. Blank who has lost his memory and consequently is deprived of his identity. He tries to trace back his self through fragmentary recollections but without success. As the story develops, the reader discovers implicit hints at Mr. Blank actually impersonating the real Paul Auster. He is fictionalizing himself and simultaneously reverses the roles of author and character, for Mr. Blank as author finds himself under control of his/Auster's fictitious characters from previous novels. The writer is transformed into the written, but paradoxically it is the written that asserts authority over him. Hence the search for Mr. Blank's lost memory and self turns into the quest for the real author's identity.

In the conclusion, the separate analyses with respect to the problem of identity are compared and discussed together. The aim is to discover common features in individual protagonists of Auster's works and to analyze together the development of their search for identity.

1. Literary Influence on Auster's Writing

The beginning of Auster's career of a writer could be put in 1970s and he started publishing his own works in 1980s, a period strongly influenced by postmodernism. In search for his basic inspiration we can go as far as Friedrich Nietzsche who actually laid the groundwork for the existential movement of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the determining influences present his fellow countrymen: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and Henry David Thoreau. Paul Auster does not only refer to the names of the authors and their characters: William Wilson and Fanshawe, but his writing also adopts their distinctive styles, motives and philosophy. Besides his American literary predecessors, Auster's novels were also inspired by the European playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett, whom he actually met during his visit to Paris.

To begin with Nathaniel Hawthorne, he is often mentioned as Paul Auster's literary father who inspired him to a great extent. Above all, Hawthorne is praised as the master of allegorical and symbolic tales and romances. Although, Auster's rather postmodernist writing is far from resembling romance fiction full of allegory and symbolism, we can discover a typical Hawthornian allegorical romance in his short film-within-novel 'The Inner Life of Martin Frost' described in *The Book of Illusions*. But this is rather an exception, as Auster admits in the interview with Jill Owens that he does not feel inspired by "the ornate Hawthorne of the published work, but a more private and more direct Hawthorne" of *The American Notebooks* (powell.com), published posthumously and, alas, often neglected by the public.

Also, we should not omit Hawthorne's substantial work of short stories. In his sketches, Hawthorne liked to reflect on the confluence of the imaginary and the real world and "leaned toward the pantheistic notion that one man is the others, that one man

is all men" (Borges 52). This might present the source for Auster's metaphysical wanderings that often evolve into multiple or double identities of his characters. Moreover, Auster enjoys crossing the ontological boundaries; becoming himself a fictional character or letting his characters transcend the imaginary world of one book. Similarly, Auster gives life to Fanshawe, Hawthorne's character in his first novel of the same title, who appears in *The Locked Room*.

Another Auster's character Black recounts Hawthorne's short story *Wakefield* in *Ghosts*. It is about a happily-married man who decides to step out from his existing life one day, leaving his wife without any explanation and retreating into a small room close to his former house. This act of free will actually demonstrates his quest for identity. He struggles to define his self both at his wife's side and apart from her. He tries to unearth his identity through his absence. Therefore, he observes "how the little sphere of creatures and circumstances, in which he was a central object, will be affected by his removal" (Hawthorne 923). The Wakefield motif seems to be implicitly present in all three volumes of the *New York Trilogy* because Quinn, Blue, the narrator and most remarkably Fanshawe are all displaced and confined to solitude within which they look for the way back to their inner self.

Moreover, Wakefield crosses the ontological boundary by stepping over the threshold of his house and thus actually gives up his place of participant and takes on himself the role of observer from the outside or even author who simply by his retreat manipulates other people's lives. Again, a striking parallel is drawn between Wakefield and Fanshawe who steps out from his existing life and makes his closest friend replace him in his family without the slightest suspicion and then takes on the role of observer (*The Locked Room*).

Hawthorne might also inspire Auster by his method of writing, because he often secluded himself from society and created a certain "myth of self-isolation" around himself (Bell 415). His technique of the narrative voice: "[a] radical separation of the voice that speaks to us from the subjects about which it speaks" (Bell 415) is also worth mentioning. This narrative strategy actually culminates in Auster's memoir *The Book of Memory* in which Auster dissociates himself from his own actions by his choice of the third person narrative.

E. A. Poe, the American writer of the first half of the nineteenth century best known for his short stories of mystery, is considered the founder of the detective-fiction genre. Poe's mystery genre mixed with detective fiction actually gave frame to Auster's meditation on existential issues in *The New York Trilogy*. Auster might even find inspiration in Poe's allegorical tale *William Wilson* which is also present as an intertextual reference in *City of Glass*. It deals with the issue of doppelgangers that might be interpreted as an inner struggle of good and evil within a split personality. His protagonist is pursued by his double of the same name, age, similar appearance and manner who seems to be omnipotent and omnipresent, resembling in many respects Auster's Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*. William Wilson experiences mixed feelings of "animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear" (Poe 568) towards his namesake and impossible twin, and he also speaks about him as his rival. Analogically, the narrator undergoes opposite feelings of friendship and alienation, admiration and envy, hostility and anxiety towards his almost twin brother and mental pursuer Fanshawe who also becomes his rival, because they indeed share one wife (*The Locked Room*). There is another parallel in the way both Wilson's namesake and Fanshawe manipulate and supervise lives of the others.

Another Poe's tale that seems to be closely linked to Auster's writing is *The Man of the Crowd*. Here the nameless narrator first observes an anonymous mass of people in the street from a window, then he distinguishes groups and finally focuses on individuals. Nevertheless, it does not fully satisfy him until he spots a remarkable individual. He is thus compelled to enter the crowd and becomes a part of it. After an all-night pursuit of the unknown man and observation of the pattern of his behaviour, the narrator discovers that: "He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him" (Poe 481). Additionally, he is presented as a secret which "does not permit itself to be read" (Poe 475). We may actually draw a parallel between the man of the crowd and identity as it is treated in Auster's novels. Both the man and identity present an indecipherable and inaccessible entity that is constantly eluding the protagonist's grasp. Poe's narrator explores the assigned roles and the anatomy of the crowd, as well as Auster's character explores his own role within society and the nature of identity. They are both involved in search that displaces them, throws them into solitude within either social or urban wilderness and affects them. The man is absorbed by the crowd; simultaneously losing himself and becoming one with the mass. The clear-cut boundaries of the self are suddenly blurred and Hawthorne's pantheistic notion surfaces. Similarly, Auster's characters lose themselves within the search and often cross the outline of their self and become multiple; one with the others.

As Herman Melville is an attentive observer of human nature in all its strengths and weaknesses, he might influence Auster by the spiritual exploration of his characters. Similarly as "the Melvillean hero must struggle ahead through the fragmented world of experience and try to reunify it by knowledge or faith" (Milder 431), the Austerean protagonist is compeled to search for his identity in the fragmented world of memories

and experiences and to try to reconstruct his inner self by knowledge. And as Auster adds: "knowledge comes slowly, and when it comes, it is often at great personal expense" (*Ghosts* 9) which is valid for both. To mention Melville's short story *Bartleby the Scrivener*, it might be understood as an allegory of freedom and limitation. Bartleby actually represents the inaccessible self and the ultimate state of free will and the unnamed narrator is his opposite, constantly limited by his faith in predestination and fate. Analogically, Fanshawe acts in accordance with his free will and "prefers not to" stay with his family, however absurd it may seem, and constantly eludes the narrator's grasp, whereas the narrator accepts his fate predestined by Fanshawe.

In his work, H. D. Thoreau explores the connection between living and writing and "the intricate relations of self, place and text" (Garber 400). He seeks to locate the self and deals with "the world's effect on him and his on it" (Garber 403). He might even stimulate Auster in his understanding of "excursions and writing and reading as parallel acts" (Garber 403), for Auster also profits from walking and writing as parallel acts of insight in his novels. The most remarkable example is found in *City of Glass* when Quinn writes down the path of Stillman's perambulations which finally produces text. In his quest for the self's at-homeness, Thoreau gradually discovers that "the self is, in a very important way, its own home" (Garber 407). Parallelly, Auster's characters search for identity in the others and only then find out they have to look for it in themselves. Thoreau withdrew into the woods and isolated himself from the society to gain a more objective understanding of it; there, in his solitude, he wrote *Walden*. Also Auster's characters often find themselves isolated, detached from their being, taking on other people's identities to search for understanding of their own self. For the same reason, in *The Book of Memory*, Auster speaks of himself in the third person. In *Ghosts*,

reading *Walden* is presented as key to Blue's understanding of his situation, another intertextual hint to Auster's predecessor and model.

Auster's writing seems to parallel Samuel Beckett's work most from the above mentioned influences. Auster feels not only closer to Beckett due to the period when he was writing, but he also met him during his visit to Paris. Beckett's trilogy of novels of the early 1950s including *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, might be regarded as the most influential. Here, Beckett plays with protagonists' identities, explores them on multiple ontological levels in which one character claims the authorship of the other, and finally the whole ontological hierarchy is reversed and the projected world becomes projecting. In *Molloy*, Beckett deals with double identity similar to Auster's doubling of Black and Blue in *Ghosts* or of the narrator and Fanshawe in *The Locked Room*: "Moran both is and is not identical with Molloy - a blurring of identities that tends to destabilize the projected world" (McHale 12). In *Malone Dies*, "Malone retroactively alters the ontological status of Molloy's and Moran's world by claiming to have been its author" but in the end the whole ontology is reversed when the imaginary world of Malone's fictitious character is foregrounded (McHale 12). Likewise, Mr. Blank in the *Travels in the Scriptorium* is overpowered by his own invented characters who are indeed Auster's protagonists from his previous novels and who thus reverse the whole hierarchy of narrative categories and ontology. The whole ontological deconstruction of both fictional and real worlds culminates in *The Unnamable*, when the unnamed narrator claims "to have been the author of Malone's world, *and* of Malloy's, and indeed of all the worlds of Beckett's earlier fiction as well" (McHale 13). Analogically, the nameless narrator of *The Locked Room* asserts his authority of all three volumes of the *New York Trilogy*.

Auster's novels are also quite close to the genre of the Theatre of the Absurd represented by Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. He tells stories in which nothing really happens, his characters are stuck in his narration and are waiting for some sign or message to appear but all their efforts are equally futile. And then his obscure characters even drop off the pages without any explanation and the reader is left with a lot of unanswered questions and uncertainty of what really happened in the text.

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication. A similar tendency might be perceived in the difficulty of Auster's characters to articulate their identity and to find the appropriate words to express themselves. In *The Invention* Auster feels that "the story I am trying to tell is somehow incompatible with language," it actually resists language (32). Stillman Sr. in *City of Glass* is involved in a constant search for the prelapsarian language that would be able to express the current state of the affairs and would replace our insufficient fallen language. Also Blue discovers that "words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (*Ghosts* 26).

2. Writing by Paul Auster as Related to Identity

The aim of the present chapter is to hint at Paul Auster's way of writing in which he seems to take on himself his protagonists' identities and simultaneously endows his characters with his autobiographical features. Auster actually tries to explore his inner self by means of writing. He presents the model for his characters who impersonate his existential doubts and anxieties. This chapter also briefly introduces his protagonists who deal with various problems of identity. In general, it relates Auster and his work to the issue of identity.

In the interview with Michel Contat, Paul Auster reveals his method of writing. For him, writing fiction is like being an actor:

> In order to write the book, I have to inhabit that person [the protagonist]. That person is not me. He sometimes resembles me or shares certain of my attributes, but he is not me. Therefore, it's like being an actor. You take on another personality, another role. […] I'm living the life of the book through this imaginary being that I've become. (177)

He actually leaves his real identity in the real world, takes on the identity of his characters and experiences the life inside other people. Writing is for him a sort of escape into his imaginary world where he can explore not only other people's identities but also his own inner life. "I know that I do learn more about myself in the act of writing, of digging," Auster says in the interview with José Teodoro for *Stop Smiling*. Through writing, he is trying to unearth who he is. The quest for his identity is most visible in his first published book of prose *The Invention of Solitude*; however, by

means of images, metaphors and doublings he continues in his search in other novels too.

Paul Auster is author of a number of books from which I have chosen only three for the purposes of the thesis. What could be considered a salient feature of his works are his characters, specifically, the way his characters are obsessed with the quest for self-discovery and self-understanding. They lead an obscure life in an unstable and changing environment that has an impact on their personal identity. All of them are searching for their identity; some are completely lost within themselves (Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium*), some acquire double or even multiple identity (Quinn in *City of Glass*), some parasite on the other (the narrator in *The Locked Room*), some are either escaping their real identity (Nashe in *The Music of Chance*) or hiding from it (Hector Mann in *The Book of Illusions*), others present mistaken identities (Black, Blue, White in *Ghosts*), and still others are undergoing the process of identity formation (Marco Fogg in *Moon Palace*). Paul Auster's writing seems to be interwoven with the issues of identity; fragmented selves, split personalities, multiple, confused, and mistaken identities, hiding, escaping, merging and obscure characters, which the present thesis attempts to examine. His protagonists often find themselves on the brink of existential precipice, uncertain about the status of their own identity, balancing. They start the search for identity facing uncertain prospects and often reduce their life to an absolute minimum.

It is no exception that Paul Auster himself, in one form or another, enters his fiction, thereby crossing the ontological boundary between the real and fictional worlds. Sometimes the reader encounters Auster only in inconspicuous autobiographical hints; most of his protagonists are American males, either professional, or amateur writers, and they try to establish meaning in their lives and search for their identity through

writing. But he is also present in his writing under his real name, initials (A.) or anagram (Trause). Auster also likes to play with language and names, what is considered to be basic aspects of one's personal identity. The names of his protagonists often contain allegorical meaning that somewhat implies the character's identity. Just to mention a few examples, in *Travels* we read about Mr. Blank insinuating the man who lost his memory, in *Moon Palace* we encounter Marco Fogg whose name could be a metaphor of someone whose identity is hard to see through the heavy fog, or Herman Loesser read as Loser or Lesser in *The Book of Illusions* insinuating failure.

The influence of the environment on the protagonists' actions should not be missed in studying their identity, for the construction of identity is conditioned by social interaction and human interrelations. Auster's protagonists often find themselves separated from the outside world either mentally in their own mind (head, skull), or physically in a locked room (Mr. Blank in *Travels*), in a car and then a trailer (Nashe in *Music*), in a studio apartment (Blue in *Ghosts*), etc. In most cases the mental retreat is accompanied by physical isolation. In their solitudes the protagonists search for their identity and reason for being. Analogically, Paul Auster closes him in a small room in New York to retreat into his thoughts and to explore his private area.

The intangible concept of identity is also demonstrated in the elusive identification of the genre of Auster's writing, for it is quite difficult to classify his fiction. If we consider the genre as identity of a book, then Auster's books themselves have multiple and hidden identities, similarly as his characters. It does not fit into one category but rather overlaps more of them and breaks the traditional classification. As an illustration, we can take his *New York Trilogy*. After reading all three books we doubt the classical definition of trilogy, being 'a series of three books or plays written about the same situation or characters, forming a continuous story.' The continuous

story seems to be missing and it is only on closer examination that the reader starts to discover the deeply buried link between all three books. Actually, while talking about the trilogy, the narrator in the last volume says: "These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about" (294). Moreover, all three volumes exploit the genre of a detective novel but never fulfil its formal conventions. They superficially resemble the detective genre as they present us with the main protagonists who are involved in the process of detection; looking for clues and trying hard to solve the case. But the person of the detective is the only point where the traditional conception of detective novel converges with Auster's interpretation. The crime is unreal; either missing or just supposed to happen in near future, and the detective is unable to discover any clues leading to a final solution. Indeed, the clues are misleading or fictitious, the detective is lost in the wilderness of ambiguous signs and the reader is not lead towards the solution of the case but towards more confusion. What is more, all three volumes frustrate the reader's desire and the basic claim of a detective novel by remaining without a logical solution and open-ended. *The New York Trilogy* is considered more a mystery than detective genre, since it deals with unsolved cases, disappearances and textual puzzles. Rather, Auster uses the detective form to address existential issues and questions of identity.

2.1. Autobiographical Features in Auster's Writing

Paul Auster's life experience constitutes his personal identity which is quite often projected onto his protagonists. His identity crisis, struggles as a beginning writer, lost wife and son due to divorce, or the urban environment of New York are often reflected in his novels. Although, in the interview for *Stop Smiling*, Auster denies any personal desire for inserting his autobiographical material into his novels, for he has

enough space for autobiographical notes in his non-fiction. He admits it sometimes happens that his fictional characters prove fragments of his identity but always for the sake of the story.

Nevertheless, one cannot help but suspect that Auster's male narrators do act as mirror images of his own self. They present fictional reflection of the author's uncertainties, fears and anxieties. Auster actually shares many distinctive traits with his characters. Notably, his novels frequently feature American male writers for protagonists. He describes writing as a solitary occupation that can only be realized behind the closed door. Isolation, memories and rich intellectual life constitute the source of his writing and it opens the door into his inner self. Auster's first experience of living in a confined space of a chambre de bonne in Paris reappears in his work. Daniel Quinn is thus writing his detective novels alone in his flat (*City of Glass*), Blue is writing into his notebook in a studio apartment (*Ghosts*), Fanshawe is finally found behind the locked door (*The Locked Room*), Mr Blank is closed in an unknown room (*Travels in the Scriptorium*), Jim Nashe is imprisoned behind the walls of a mansion (*Music of Chance*), and David Zimmer has the room encoded in his name (*Moon Palace*).

If we go through Auster's biography, we can discover a link between almost every turning point in his life and some of his protagonists. Fanshawe (*Locked Room*) probably proves most strikingly Auster's identity up to the age of 30. They both were born in February 1947, both are writers, married, having one son and a sister suffering from nervous breakdowns, both had money problems in 1970s doing various odd jobs from a census-taker in Harlem through a seaman to a translator of French literature in Paris. Auster actually pieces together fragments of his life and puts them on the paper. His characters present his mirror images and Auster is their model. He has experienced

displacement in various forms: within his family as the youngest son, within society as a Jew in America, on his travels to Paris or Amsterdam as a stranger, after his father's death, and after divorce with his first wife. Following the divorce, he retreated into a small apartment in Varick Street in New York, living alone and isolated within the urban jungle. The search for his identity is implicitly present, first, in his search for an appropriate place in his family never gaining full respect, then in his search for a work place; he has changed many occupations before ending as a writer. Next, he tries to find himself in marriage that ends in divorce, and finally he succeeds in writing which actually helps him to penetrate under the surface of himself.

The attentive reader will not miss hints at Auster's writing strategies in *The Locked Room*. Besides writing in absolute solitude, Fanshawe speaks about the way he invents names of his protagonists (249), or about the pleasure in making up the story and in crossing the ontological boundaries. He likes to think that his creations "could affect this real world in a real way" (250). May be with the same thought in mind, Auster directed the film "Inner Life of Martin Frost" that first appeared on paper in his fiction and only then entered the real world cinemas.

3. The Question of Identity in *The Invention of Solitude*

The first Auster's non-fiction *The Invention of Solitude* is divided into two parts; *Portrait of an Invisible Man* and *Book of Memory*, both delineating the relationship between father and son and the ways the relationships with other people contribute to identity formation of an individual. The former was initiated by his father's death and the author searches here for his father's identity that eluded him since his childhood, while the latter is rather an excursion into Auster's own identity, especially at the moment when he becomes aware of his own fatherhood.

3.1. *Portrait of an Invisible Man*

Ironically, Auster starts the memoir with an absolute end, with death as the terminal station, a final stop in one's identity formation. In assembling small things, memories and details, he tries to re-create the lost identity of his father. He writes to conserve his father's memory; he wants to confirm his existence through writing. He is even compelled to write, because he fears his father would otherwise vanish without any proof of his existence. But the problem is that his father was always absent, a sort of an invisible man, while being still alive.

Auster speaks of his father as of a ghost, "he haunted an enormous house" (7), as of an unassailable fortress impossible to be seen through, icy inside without any emotional response to the surroundings. Nevertheless, the author tries to penetrate into his father's difficult identity and continues to look for the father figure in his life.
A question arises whether it is anyway possible to get to know the other. In this case, the issue is further complicated by the fact that Auster's father is already dead and he cannot approach him anymore. Auster actually questions the possibility of biography in

general. According to him, *Invention* is rather a meditation on "how and if anyone can talk about someone else: what you know about other people" (Contat). Moreover the identity is never black and white but rather multicoloured with various shades. He cannot say his father was good, or he was bad; he was both, and in different situations he presented himself even with opposing traits. Auster must admit: "At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all the others. Fragments" (61). He thus, for the first time, encounters the problem of identity; its unstable, elusive, and fragmentary nature that concerns both his father and him.

If we consider identity the centre of one's personality around which everything develops, than Auster's father is presented as somebody who lacks centre (9). His deceased father did not leave any traces after him, so if Auster strives to explore his mind, he depends on the huge empty house, a silent witness of his life. The house as "the metaphor of [his] father's life" gives evidence of the process of disintegration, both of the house and his personality (9). His father's isolation from the outside world is demonstrated by constantly drawn window shades (10). His father was a superficial man; he liked "staying on the surface of himself" (15) and refused any deep down exploration. He was unable to form any intimate relationship and thus failed as both husband and father. He was always hiding behind a mask. His tall tales and invented identities served him to keep himself concealed not only from the outside world but above all from his own self: "His refusal to look into himself was matched by an equally stubborn refusal to look at the world" (25). To avoid exposing himself to the others, he "talked about himself only obliquely – in the third person. […] He himself remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place

behind the curtain" (16). Auster actually tries to undraw the curtain and "penetrate this image of darkness" (33) through writing.

Each person has a double identity; the first is what you see and feel when you look inside yourself, while the second is what the others perceive when they look at you. Nevertheless, Auster's father seems to elude both of them. He invented his mask so that he does not have to see himself and see himself being seen by anyone else (17). He seemed to lead an ascetic life without any pleasures or needs reducing his being to an absolute minimum. If we consider language and name a constitutive part of identity, then the fact that he was uncomfortable both to speak and to sign himself (30) is another proof of the inner denial of his identity and the difficulty to articulate himself. He suffered from utter discomfort in his own skin (55). He is often presented as either absent, absent-minded or being in another place or world, simply somewhere else. He is the representation of an absolute individual absence and displacement, a total mental emptiness, always too withdrawn to respond to any emotional impulses appropriately. But where was he with his solitude? His father's behaviour produces a son's troubled sense of disconnection. He is unable to trace his family identity for his missing father.

The environment in which one grows up has always substantially participated in one's identity formation. Knowledge and understanding of the past are also central to the sense of identity. Actually, the isolated and hidden identity of Auster's father can be easily considered the consequence of his tumultuous childhood with a bitter experience; his mother shot his father when he was seven. He might internalize the feeling of the absent father to such an extent that he refused to adopt the role of father with regard to his son Paul. Moreover, the tragic event in the family history led the Austers to keep the family secret, to stick together, to move frequently and thus to retreat within themselves. But as a youngest son, his father did not receive much recognition. The Austers were at

its core Jewish and everything was sacrificed for the good of the family which was ruled by the matriarch embodied in the mother. Auster believes that his father thus "learned never to trust anyone. Not even himself. […] He learned never to want anything too much" (50). Work and money served him well as a protection and escape (52). Hence, he almost lost his Jewish identity; integrating into American life style, he became a perfect representative of American materialism. Paul Auster's father is actually void and unidentified - Mr Nobody who is deprived of being son, father, Jew, or husband, secluded from society. He seems he had died long before the real death came.

3.2. *The Book of Memory*

In *The Book of Memory*, Auster shifts from his identity of son to his role of father, as well as from the first person narrative to the third person narrative. Interestingly enough, Auster deconstructs the form of autobiography and conveys his deeply internal thoughts and autobiographical material through the protagonist named "A." Through his choice of voice he presents himself as an uninvolved person narrating the story of the other, while paradoxically being personally engaged in his narration. He describes his narrative technique as a "mirror text" where "he speaks of himself as another in order to tell the story of himself. He must make himself absent in order to find himself there. And so he says A., even as he means to say I" (154). He uses exactly the same way to distance himself from his writing that his father did to estrange himself from the surroundings while referring to himself in the third person.

Auster describes the process of writing as a source of self-discovery, and the memory and past as a part of one's identity. First, he finds writing difficult; he is unable to find the exact words, his inner voice, as demonstrated in the reappearing blank paper in front of A. Then he finds help in the past, in memories and commentaries on other

people and texts, and the blank paper starts to be filled with ink. The human mind is similarly characterized by the philosopher John Locke as a tabula rasa (a blank slate) which is covered with such writings in course of one's life. Moreover, Locke identified the self with memory and according to him, if one lost his memory, he also lost a part of his identity. The power of memory is already stressed in the title of the second part and is further nurtured throughout *The Book*. For Auster, memory is "the space in which a thing happens for the second time" (83), it is actually a blurred mirror image of his life. "Memory, therefore, not simply as the resurrection of one's private life, but an immersion in the past of others, which is to say: history–which one both participates in and is a witness to, is a part of and apart from" (139). Auster's comment on memory implicitly suggests a metaphor to his writing, because Auster often finds himself inside and outside his texts, creating thus his metafictional double. To sum up, the self is memory and memory is writing, either on a tabula rasa or a piece of paper according to both Locke and Auster, and that is why Auster is tracing his identity through writing.

The gradual development of his self-discovery follows from the text. First, he does not see much sense in his existence. A. finds himself on the brink of society and own being. Most of his time he is confined alone in a little room, isolated from the outside world, unable to locate himself "hovering like a ghost around his own presence, as if he were living somewhere to the side of himself - not really here, but not anywhere else either" (78). In his meditations he seems to be removed from his body and only wandering within his labyrinthine mind. Then, he realizes how the identity passes from generation to generation, how he as the son facing his father's death is becoming father of his own son. Thus he proves a connection between the past and present, the way the history continues to repeat.

In addition, he discovers his transcending identity which transcends his self and reaches that of the other through the act of translation. While translating books, he imagines he takes on himself the other writer's identity and solitude. For Auster, solitude, besides writing, is another means of self-understanding. Actually, writing for him goes hand in hand with solitude. The recurrent motif of room which opens the door to solitude and enables self-knowledge is present in almost all his reflections on writing.

Auster also deals with the question of double identity. As his father dies, he becomes aware of himself as his father's double and his son as the double of himself in boyhood. In fact, he sees himself in his son as if in a mirror. It could be considered a kind of a mirror stage, the first articulation of 'I', as interpreted by Lacan, but in this case of the adulthood. Auster apprehends himself and the other; indeed himself as other. He is no more a son but a father. Nevertheless, there appears a constant tension between the two identities within him. He experiences opposing feelings of happiness and sorrow, the self-recognition is accompanied by self-alienation, he actually realizes that when your father dies, you stop being a child. In his newly acquired role of a fatherless father he will never be able to become a little boy again.

He mentions strange coincidences which testify that in the world "everything is double, […] the same thing always happens twice" (83). In addition, he reflects on translation as a double of the original text being both the same and not the same. Further, he interprets a story by Sherhzad in which she concludes that "each thing leads a double life, at once in the world and in our minds, and that to deny either one of these lives is to kill the thing in both its lives at once" (153). Sherhzad's moral quite resembles a definition of identity as being double; one as perceived by the outside world and one as reflected within our minds (Joseph 9).

4. *The New York Trilogy*

4.1. *City of Glass*

City of Glass, the first volume of *The New York Trilogy*, treats identity under the cover of a whodunit which some critics call an anti-detective novel. One of them is Anne M. Holzapfel who provides the following remark on the treatment of identity in the first part of the trilogy: "the traditional detective novel's predominant quest-motif about the culprit's identity shifts towards the question about the fake detective's identity" (37). The person in focus is Quinn who takes on himself multiple identities. Quinn seems to be involved in a constant search for identity after a tragic event in his personal life. He repeatedly tries to find an answer to the question 'Who am I?' and 'Where is my place in the social hierarchy?' Is he still a husband and father when his wife and child died five years ago? What is the definition of a husband and father? Does the death have such a power to dissolve his marriage and fatherhood? He is frustrated by his inability to answer these questions and he looks for refuge in both his walks in anonymous urban setting and his invented selves which are brand-new for him and thus free from any burdens. He even proves several attributes of split identity.

The protagonist was born as Daniel Quinn and became a poet, playwright, essayist and translator. Then suddenly, he felt as if a part of him had died. He seems to lead a sort of a posthumous life that has an amoeba-like character. The purpose of his changing identity is to empty his interior being and remain only on the surface of his invented characters. When he writes his mystery novels, he transforms into William Wilson, not a mere pen name but a separate personality for him. Moreover, William Wilson presents an intertextual reference to Poe's short story of the same name which explores a motif of doppelgangers. "Quinn was no longer that part of him that could

write books, and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself" (9). He withdraws into his small apartment and hides from the outside world behind the mask of his pseudonym. In fact, he exploits his invented identity to avoid responsibility. He feels detached from Wilson, presenting him as an independent entity and refusing both authority of and responsibility for Wilson's books he wrote himself. On the contrary, he develops a favour for his fictional character, private-eye narrator, Max Work and internalizes his identity: "Work had become very close to Quinn […], a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude" (11-2), a sort of alter ego. Thus Quinn fictionalizes himself twice; through Poe's protagonist and his own fictitious character.

Actually, in the opening passage, Auster is developing a reflection on the mutual relationship between the writer, his pseudonym, and creation, and on the way both the author and reader merge into the characters. The genre of the detective novel is also quite close to the issue of merging identities. The detective tries to penetrate into the culprit's mind in order to solve the crime and the readers are often prone to identify with the detective so that they could participate in a discovery of the mystery. The reader often puts himself into the detective's place and is looking through his eyes. And yet, it is the author who is responsible for the way the detective proceeds from the analysis of clues to the final solution. To sum up, both the detective and the reader strive to attain the omniscient position of the author in order to solve the puzzle and in the traditional detective fiction the three separate identities eventually merge into one successful solver.

The problem of Quinn's identity is even more complex. Besides his triple selves, he takes on the identity of Paul Auster, an assumed detective, and gets involved in Stillman case. He finds comfort in this double identity for he gets rid of "the burden of

his own consciousness" (82) and is able to switch from uneasy Quinn to blank Auster. He goes as far as transforming himself mentally into Auster and he replaces his real identity of Quinn by an empty name and blankness inside, for "[t]o be Auster meant being a man with no interior, a man with no thoughts" (98). In confusion of his multiple identities, he even introduces himself to old Stillman by his real name that in fact becomes his pseudonym, because at this moment he acts out Paul Auster: "Since he was technically Paul Auster, that was the name he had to protect. Anything else, even the truth, would be an invention, a mask to hide behind and keep him safe" (117).

Nevertheless, the double identity blows up in his face when he encounters Auster-character face-to-face, for then Auster is no more defined as a vacuum but rather by the negation of Quinn; he has everything Quinn had lost – beautiful wife, child, home and a career as writer. During the second meeting with Stillman Sr., Quinn pretends to be Henry Dark; fictionalizing himself anew because it is a character in Stillman's book. By insisting on Dark's existence: "Well, perhaps I'm another Henry Dark. As opposed to the one who doesn't exist" (125), Quinn insinuates to the double identity of the real Auster-writer and fictitious Auster-character. For the third encounter Quinn finally takes on the name Peter Stillman to add to the spreading confusion of identities and names. Here, the identity is tripled, since Stillman Sr. and his son bear the same name.

While Quinn admits being Stillman's own son, he anticipates a next shift in his identity by the end of the novel. There, Quinn finds himself alone and naked in the darkness of the younger Stillman's room. He gradually loses track of time and space and seems to be on the way to discover the prelapsarian language in his solitude: "He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as a stone, or a lake, or a flower" (200). As Dimovitz states in

his essay: “Ostensibly, this scene implies that Quinn regresses and becomes identified with the younger Stillman’s infancy and early childhood.” The scene of the young Stillman being numb and naked, all alone locked up in the dark room for 9 years repeats in Quinn. Finally, Quinn is identified with the text itself: “He writes himself into sheer textuality, demonstrating how subjectivity is ultimately fractured, partial, and textual” (Dimovitz). He gradually gets weaker and weaker until he totally disappears from the story like the words and letters at the very end of the book.

The problem of identity that develops in *City of Glass* is also the question of the author’s identity. The author-characters seem to proliferate in the novel from the very beginning until the end where the reader finally encounters the narrator/implicit author of the whole story. Within the novel, there are several characters who are simultaneously authors and detectives, or more precisely, who are authors who take on the identity of detective.

Actually, Daniel Quinn is an author of detective stories mistaken for Paul Auster, who, in the novel, is an author mistaken for a detective. “In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable” (15) according to the narrator. Indeed, we perceive certain continuity between the activities of writing and investigating that is demonstrated in all author-characters. First, Quinn, originally writer, is hired as detective in Stillman case and while shadowing Stillman Sr. he is actually writing down the path they walk, thus transliterating the tracks into letters that ultimately produce words. Second, the narrator is not omniscient but is involved in the story as character and engaged in detective’s activity of piecing together the facts of Quinn’s case, which produces the actual text of *City of Glass*. Third, Auster-character writes an essay on the question of authorship of *Don Quixote*. In fact, he investigates the circumstances of the origin of Cervantes’s novel. Through analysis of various clues he doubts Cervantes’s

authorship and comes to the conclusion that it was dictated by Sancho Panza and written by the barber and the priest. He thus poses a crucial question of authorship; who is indeed the author: the one that writes the story, the one that dictates it, the one that performs it, or the one that translates it? Moreover, Auster-character claims it was Don Quixote who deceived all the others into writing a chronicle of his life for his posterity. There appears a certain analogy between questioning the authorship of *Don Quixote* and *The City of Glass*, for the latter might also be interpreted as a constant quest for the author's identity: is it Paul Auster whose name is on the cover, author-detective Quinn, the anonymous narrator or Auster-character? Actually, they all seem to alternately merge one into another.

First, there are similarities between the two Austers. Auster-character shares wife Siri, son Daniel and the profession of writer with the real Auster. Second, Quinn seems to represent a looking glass reflection of the real Auster in the early 1980's. Quinn started his career as a poet and wrote a detective novel *Suicide Squeeze* under the pseudonym William Wilson; Auster also started as a poet and in 1982 published his first fiction *Squeeze Play* under the pseudonym Paul Benjamin. Quinn lost his wife and son (through death) about five years before the novel's beginning, leaving him alone to retreat both into a small apartment in New York and within himself, culminating finally in an investigation of a father figure (Stillman senior) who disappears. Auster lost his wife and son (through divorce) about five years before the novel's publication, leaving him to withdraw into solitude of his little room at 6 Varick Street, New York, culminating finally in an investigation of his father who passed away (*The Invention of Solitude*).

In writing about blending facts and fiction in the trilogy, Anne M. Holzapfel states that "[t]hese parallels do not only demonstrate that Quinn is linked with the reality

of Auster, but that Auster partly fictionalizes himself" (48). Hence, it is not only Quinn who exploits fictional characters, but Paul Auster as well enjoys crossing the ontological boundary between the reality and fiction, between the author and his character. As far as the issue of authorship is concerned, we might also draw a parallel between Auster-character and Don Quixote who is presented as the actual author of the novel about his deeds. As Madeleine Sorapure suggests in her essay on *City of Glass* "The Detective and the Author":

> "Auster"'s elaborate reading of *Don Quixote* […] can , in this sense, be applied to *City of Glass* itself to suggest an equally elaborate scheme in which "Auster" is the true author of the work. In this scheme, "Auster" perhaps to test his theory of *Don Quixote*, invented Quinn and wrote Quinn's red notebook himself, and then brought it to the narrator, with fictitious background information, in order to have him write a novel. (84)

As if the whole circle is closed with Auster-character and real Paul Auster merging into one author of *City of Glass*. Accordingly, Auster performs a trickster who deceived both the reader and the narrator into believing his elaborate hoax.

4.2. *Ghosts*

The second part of the trilogy revolves around three characters named after three colours whose identities seem to be blending like colours on a palette. At the beginning, each of them seems to have a separate identity encased in its tube, but as the story develops their identities start to blend on the palette of the New York setting. Again, Auster builds a metaphysical story on the foundations of a detective novel to treat the

question of mistaken identities. The unstable setting in which every thing represents another makes the reader feel rather dizzy.

The austere plot develops around Blue, the private detective, who is hired by White to observe Black. Although we are given the exact place (New York, Brooklyn Heights) and time (February 3, 1947) at the very beginning, paradoxically these facts rather serve to demonstrate urban absence and timelessness. A certain stasis anticipating impasse follows from the introduction of the story: "The place is New York, the time is the present, and neither one will ever change" (7).

Blue enters the story as an independent entity, a private detective who has his own business and private life. Nevertheless, as he is confined in solitude due to the Black case, he loses track of time and touch with the outside world. Auster outlines a parallel between the writer and detective: "Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there" (66). The case seems to go on forever and Blue's wife-to-be finally leaves him. In his loneliness he is thrown back on himself and he turns inside him for self-reflection. Again, there appears the motif of solitude in a 'locked' room as a source of self-discovery and deep down exploration.

Still, Blues is not entirely alone but he experiences gradual relatedness to the object of his observation, Black. They have much in common; being of almost the same age, confined in a room most of the time seems to bring them closer together. Moreover, Blue tends to unconsciously mimic his object of observation, a sort of "chameleon effect" (Leary 163). When Blue sees Black eating, he feels hungry (12), he buys the same book Black is reading (32), Blue watches Black doing nothing except read and write actually doing the same, and because Blue is hired as Black's 'tail' he goes in his tracks everywhere, copying Black's trajectory.

The first hint at blending Black and Blue appears when Blue realizes 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" (20). The sudden isolation from the society, slowdown of his life and the focus on one and only person leads him to self-reflection. Blue seems to be undergoing the "mirror-stage" as described by Lacan. Even though Lacan applies his theory to infants, self-consciousness in adulthood is merely an extension of that early experience, although then we are looking inside ourselves. Analogically, Blue goes through the three successive stages of self-recognition in the mirror.

At first, he confuses his own reflection with Black. He watches him as totally distinct from his own existence. "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" (38). Then, in the second phase, Blue acquires the notion of the image and understands that the reflection is not a real being. He begins to doubt Black's existence (59) and progressively finds out that the Black case is a mere illusion and that he was tricked into thinking he plays the role of a detective in it. Finally, in the third stage, he realizes not only that the reflection is an image, but that the image is his own. (Sarup 9) He feels closer to and "so completely in harmony with Black, so naturally at one with the other man, that to anticipate what Black is going to do […], he need merely look into himself" (38), similarly, we can predict what our mirror reflection is going to do by looking into ourselves.

Moreover, when Blue meets Black for the second time, Black introduces himself as a private eye and describes his current job of watching a man who just sits in his room all day and writes (73). He is more than precise in all the details of Blue's job. Further, Blue becomes aware that "to enter Black, then, was the equivalent of entering

himself" (88) and when he speaks about Black as "the saddest creature in the world […], he understands that he's also talking about himself" (89).

From the very beginning, Blue would like to penetrate Black's mind, but is instead left inside his own mind with his own memories. In order to get closer to Black, he takes on other identities and disguises several times. In the end, Blue manages to virtually penetrate Black's mind through penetrating Black's room, "the sanctum of Black's solitude" (88).

In spite of this, there is yet another possible interpretation, that of crossing the ontological boundaries. Imagine Blue is the incarnation of the author. As the author, he tries to penetrate his protagonist's mind in order to be able to write the story properly. At the beginning, "everything is a blank" for him (11) like a blank sheet of paper in front of the writer and the blank character without past or future who has not yet been inserted into the story. But as the story develops the paper is covered with writing and Black's identity is becoming more complex.

Like a writer, Blue is sitting all day in his room, exploiting his solitude as a source of self-reflection and inspiration. For he is quite disappointed by his first 'report', he starts making up stories about Black. But neither one seems satisfying, he experiences a deceptive nature of language when "he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (26). He feels like a prisoner of the case, he encounters various writing problems realizing "he is only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others" (57). Then, he loses himself in writing and looks for a way out: "How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?" (58). The act of observing is actually the act of writing, through writing the author (observer) proves the protagonist (observed) is alive (75).

The final dialogue between Blue and Black (91-3) resembles a dialogue with the character inside the author's mind before finishing the whole story; Black depended on Blue, "the whole thing is played out" (92), and thus they both are departing the novel.

4.3. *The Locked Room*

The *Trilogy*'s concluding volume is less symbolic and more accessible than the previous two, for it successfully imitates real life people who are easier for the reader to identify with. It could be a mainstream romance about the narrator and Sophie, were it not for the recurrent image of Fanshawe who is present and absent at the same time as an elusive threat in the air. Hence, the metaphysical question and mystery of Fanshawe further complicates the whole story and shifts it onto a different level of a different genre. It is in *The Locked Room* that the existential issues and the problem of identity seem to be the most visible, interwoven with the fabric of the narration, similarly as the identity of the narrator is interwoven with that of Fanshawe. The entire story might be considered an allegory of self and identity as an elusive, provisional, inaccessible, and unpinpointable essence of human being.

The themes of absence and elusiveness of identity recur throughout the entire novel. It is a first person narrative where the "I" remains unnamed and out of focus, thus evading any possibility of deeper examination. The narrator literally eludes the reader as a void character. Then, there is the figure of Fanshawe who is gone from the very beginning but presenting the central puzzle of the whole plot. Fanshawe seems to be endowed with supernatural qualities as an almost unreal character or ideal other. Paradoxically, he is both absent and omnipresent; sensed to be always there through his books, son, letters, and narrator's childhood memories. Moreover, he is attributed omnipotence; he manages to manipulate other people's lives (his wife's, the narrator's,

or the detective's); leaving his wife, securing her with his stand-in, and reversing roles of the searcher and the searched in a playful trick. The narrator reconfirms Fanshawe's "power he held over" (209) his peers at school and the aura that has surrounded him since his school age. Fanshawe even continues to cast a spell on his readers through his books, albeit missing (230).

Progressively a peculiar link between the narrator and Fanshawe is revealed. They used to be closest friends, grew up together, and from the early age the narrator admired Fanshawe as his hero and tried to imitate him whenever possible; wearing the belt buckle on the same side, wearing the same shoes or reading the same book (209). In other words, it was not a balanced relationship but rather one of dependency. Indeed, the narrator performs the role of a Sancho Panza constantly accompanying Fanshawe on his adolescent search for his self: "Still, I continued to go along with him, a befuddled witness, sharing in the quest but not quite part of it, an adolescent Sancho astride my donkey, watching my friend do battle with him" (215).

After more than 10 years of separation, Fanshawe reappears in the narrator's life as a flashback which totally reverses his life. Suddenly his memories bring him back into the period of adolescence they spent together and the uncommon relationship begins to surface. Obviously, "Fanshawe's identity is coupled with that of the narrator. Thus, the search for the vanished friend is also a search for the narrator's identity" (Holzapfel 87).

Their lives started to converge since their early childhood when they were like the two merging fenceless backgrounds where they used to play and do everything together; "ideal conditions therefore, with nothing to stand between us" (213). They could not imagine the life without the other so that they even wanted to get married (213). The narrator's utter attachment to Fanshawe culminates when they lose virginity

with the same girl and he "could only think about one thing: that [his] dick was about to go into the same place that Fanshawe's was now" (216). It seems that the narrator's sexual desire is not for the girl but rather exploits her as a mediator for the intimate encounter with Fanshawe. Actually, it gives the story a slightly homoerotic subtext and the narrator is presented as an unanchored adolescent searching for his sexual identity.

Nevertheless, another sexual scene is described further in the novel when the narrator is already an adult and has an intercourse with Fanshawe's mother mourning her son's disappearance (266). One of possible interpretations might be again the narrator's craving to get closer to Fanshawe, in this case physically through his mother and her vagina through which Fanshawe once came into the world. However, the issue of the Oedipal complex comes forward too, since the narrator is presented as an impersonation of her son Fanshawe and he speaks about the sin, perversity and extravagance of the act (266).

The further the story develops, the more the identities of the narrator and Fanshawe merge. The possibility of mistaken identity is implicitly ushered as early as in the short story written by young Fanshawe at school based on "something like the confused identities of two sets of twins" (214). The narrator and Fanshawe always behaved like brothers or even twin brothers; "they were born less than a week apart" (213), made themselves blood brothers for life (199), and both of them looked so much alike that, Fanshawe's mother must admit: "You even look like him, you know. You always did, the two of you - like brothers, almost like twins. I remember how when you were both small I would sometimes confuse you from a distance. I couldn't tell which one of you was mine" (261). Moreover, they both became writers. As a matter of fact, only Fanshawe wrote novels in the proper sense of the word, while the narrator's job was to review, re-write or comment on the texts of others, indeed, producing fragments

of texts, “it was just a little short of hack work” (207). His incapacity to write a full story of his own somehow signals his fragmented and decentred self in need of guidance. He admits, “I did not have such a book inside me” (207); he seems to be voiceless, an empty vessel that waits to be filled.

Before Fanshawe mysteriously disappeared, he had instructed his wife to get in touch with the narrator and entrust him the power to decide on the fate of his manuscripts. It was probably for both his void identity and the striking resemblances that the narrator has managed to slip into Fanshawe’s multiple role identities with such an incredible ease; replacing him as a husband, father, son, and the man in charge of his work. He becomes Fanshawe’s spokesman, the medium through which Fanshawe communicates with others in his own absence. He thus internalizes Fanshawe’s identity and acquires his voice at the expense of his own identity, no matter how shapeless and void it seemed to be. The narrator perfectly replaces Fanshawe so that there is no demand for him any more. He actually fills in the gap produced by Fanshawe’s disappearance, but simultaneously disappears from his former identity and produces a gap of his own. The narrator realizes: “My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable. This was the tiny hole between self and not-self” (232). Here, the narrator discovers the elusive and unpinpointable character of identity. He actually oscillates between self and not-self, being and not-being, himself and Fanshawe.

The first step of the narrator towards Fanshawe’s identity is reading his books. Through the books he actually penetrates Fanshawe’s private self and enters his life. Again, the presence of the author in his texts is highlighted. Here, the author seems to be physically present in his manuscripts, as the narrator carries them in two suitcases that “were as heavy as a man” (208), as if Fanshawe were inside. Further, he supports

the idea: “There was no difference in my mind between giving the order to destroy Fanshawe’s work and killing him with my own hands” (222). By publishing Fanshawe’s works, the narrator actually resurrects Fanshawe who in return enters the narrator’s life for the second time through writing, by means of an anonymous letter. Hereafter, the narrator feels his alternate self is endangered by Fanshawe being alive and is thus compelled to the search for Fanshawe which he hides behind the pretext of writing Fanshawe’s biography.

From the very beginning, the narrator is fully aware of the project’s failure. The biography is going to be a work of fiction, because he cannot tell the whole truth, and it can never encompass the complexity of Fanshawe’s life. Again, the narrator has to deal with the inaccessibility of the self: “No matter how many facts are told, no matter how many details are given, the essential thing resists telling” (247). At this point, he discovers the cause of the failure of the search for both his and Fanshawe’s identity; it is the incapacity of the individual to access his own self and not even speaking about the access to the other. According to the narrator, we live in a constant deception that we can understand ourselves and hence the other:

> We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another - for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself. (247)

Actually, the locked room from the very title of the novel might represent the self. No matter how hard we try, as long as the locked room remains locked, we can never enter it. Notwithstanding, Auster seems to propose a key to the locked door. The way to the

self opens through writing for him. Analogically, Fanshawe writes the red notebook and the narrator writes the whole *New York Trilogy* to understand the motives of their individual behaviours and thus to trace the essence of their own being. Finally, the narrator undermines the importance of words and rather highlights the struggle: "The story is not in the words; it's in the struggle" (294).

Through gathering fragmented evidence of Fanshawe's existence, the narrator lives Fanshawe's life once again; he follows him like a belated shadow. He reads all his notebooks, meets his acquaintances, and goes in his tracks as far as to Europe. "For him, the search for the disappeared becomes a search for his own identity which is inseparably linked with that of his friend" (Holzapfel 85). In search for Fanshawe, the narrator becomes gradually filled with Fanshawe's indirect presence that almost drives him mad. He is unable to protect himself from Fanshawe's authority.

The search seems to be suddenly reversed; the searcher is pursued by the searched. The narrator cannot escape the thought of Fanshawe, the sense of his omnipresence, and he even mistakes a stranger for Fanshawe in a bar. Fanshawe has begun to take up so much space within him that he starts losing track of himself (293). Even his wife Sophie feels she is losing him: "I can't get through to you anymore" (285). He is so much occupied with Fanshawe that his wife literally cannot get through Fanshawe to the narrator's real identity. Moreover, she fears he will follow Fanshawe so far to disappear the way her former husband did, actually becoming a ghost: "I can see you vanishing before my eyes" (286).

Fanshawe's share in the narrator's self-awareness as a crucial aspect in his identity formation is explicitly stated by the narrator at the very beginning: "He [Fanshawe] is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am" (199), that is to say he would hardly know his identity and his

place in society. But is it really his own personal identity or does he only imitate and adopt that of Fanshawe? Several psychological studies have demonstrated that "people can be unaware that their behaviors shift in accordance with behaviors of others" coined "chameleon effect" by Chartrand and Bargh (1999), (qtd.in Leary 163). In this case, the narrator discovered a pattern of successful behaviour in Fanshawe that he internalizes. The question arises whether the narrator is a mere harmless chameleon that assimilates into the environment or a parasite which profits from his host. The latter seems to fit the narrator better for he benefits from Fanshawe's success which he starts to equate with his own (231) and he even thinks of writing one or two books under Fanshawe's name.

He reflects on the issues of authority, pseudonyms, and real and invented lives: "what, it means when a writer puts his name on a book, why some writers choose to hide behind a pseudonym, whether or not a writer has a real life anyway" (236). The narrator finds attractive the idea to invent a secret identity for himself. Is it not something he has already done? After the publication of Fanshawe's manuscripts, there appear rumours that Fanshawe is not the real author and "that I [the narrator] had invented him to perpetrate a hoax and had actually written the books myself" (236). Is the narrator misleading the reader and, in fact, hiding his real name and real life while writing under the pen name of Fanshawe? Did it even develop into schizophrenia? These assumptions are supported by the narrator's realization that "Fanshawe was exactly where [he] was, and he had been there since the beginning" (292). He has always imagined him behind "the door of a locked room" because he could not make the image of him, but now he finds out the room has always been "inside his skull" (293). Thus, the narrator imagines Fanshawe as a mere figment in his head: "He was a ghost I carried around inside me" (200).

Actually, the two of them have never met face to face in the novel, except for the narrator's memories from early childhood and adolescence. Since recalling of past memories takes place in mind, it further supports the idea Fanshawe has never left the narrator's head. Additionally, he himself admits "that even memories can be false" (210). In order to get rid of Fanshawe's pursuit, the narrator tries to dull his consciousness mostly through drinking. When he tries to comment on this difficult period retrospectively, he can just "encounter images of myself [himself] in various places, but only at a distance, as though I [the narrator] were watching someone else" (293). Thus, the only way for the narrator to escape Fanshawe's pursuit is to detach himself from his self, another proof of their inner interconnection.

The eagerly awaited encounter of the two men is played out only through a locked door at the very end of the novel, so that each of them remains at the other side of the door. What is more, Fanshawe does not allow the narrator to call him his name. When the name slips of the narrator's tongue, Fanshawe responds violently, "'Not Fanshawe!' he shouted. 'Not Fanshawe ever again!'" (306). Even his previous letters were unsigned. Fanshawe thus remains unseen and unnamed, with veiled identity, reduced to nothing else than his voice. The same dialogue could as well happen in the narrator's head within his split personality. But the most curious thing to bring the story to an end is the way they both reconcile with each other; that is through writing. Fanshawe wrote a red notebook for the narrator to make him understand his actions, while the narrator is writing *The Locked Room* in order to close the chapter in his life named Fanshawe. The magic of Auster's novels lies in the unsolved mystery, multilayered narration and multiplicity of interpretations. He leaves unanswered questions to wander in the reader's mind.

5. *Travels in the Scriptorium*

Published in 2006, *Travels in the Scriptorium* presents one of the recent novels by Auster. Again, the reader is dragged in a metaphysical game full of postmodern instability, fragmentation and uncertainty. The protagonist is an old man whose identity is hidden from both the reader and himself. Actually, "he searches for an answer to the question that haunts him. Who is he?" (1) The same question that pursues most of Auster's characters and even Auster himself. But is there a definite answer to this question? Is one's identity knowable at all?

The difficulty of the quest for identity, notably of naming what you consist of inside, is contrasted with the easiness of naming objects in our surrounding at the very beginning of the novel. Here, the protagonist is surrounded by labelled things: "On the bedside table, for example, the word is TABLE. On the lamp, the word is LAMP" (1). Nevertheless, further in the novel, the labels are switched: "The wall now reads CHAIR. The lamp now reads BATHROOM. The chair now reads DESK" (103). The act of switching the labels, indeed, suggests swapping the identities of the author and character, the roles strictly defined by convention suddenly merge and go in the opposite direction in *Travels*. Auster actually redefines the two narrative categories and explores what happens when the author is fictionalized and becomes the character. In brief, the main focus is on the relationship between identity and memory, on the merging identities of the writer and character, and on the identity of the true author.

To begin with identity and memory, again, we can mention John Locke's concept of human mind. According to him, human mind is a tabula rasa, a blank slate that is going to be written all over in the course of one's life, through the process of identity formation. Thus, there appears a certain analogy between writing on a blank

slate and conserving an individual's identity in his memory. As a matter of fact, we do not know anything about the protagonist, because he cannot remember anything. The nameless and memoryless old man is like a white page, he seems to be blank inside, and maybe for this reason the narrator decides to call him Mr. Blank, an implicit allusion to Locke's tabula rasa. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he identifies the self with memory and claims that identity is found in the extension of consciousness backward in time (qtd.in Leary 71). Applied to Mr. Blank, he has no memory; hence, he is missing his identity. He presents an emptiness enclosed in the body, a mere organism responding reflexively to environmental stimuli. However, we find Mr. Blank undergoing a sort of treatment. The aim of the treatment might be to recover his memory and thus decode his identity through piecing together a few photographs, flashbacks and a manuscript.

As the story moves along, the reader discovers a peculiar link between Mr. Blank and people from his past that enter his room either physically or on paper one by one. They are, indeed, auto-intertextual references to Auster's previous novels shifting the story to a multi-layered narration. Mr. Blank thus encounters Samuel Farr and Anna Blume from *In the Country of Last Things* who perform here his doctor and nurse, James P. Flood, Sophie and Fanshawe from *The Locked Room*, John Trause from *Oracle Night*, Marco Fogg from *Moon Palace*, Benjamin Sachs from *Leviathan*, and Daniel Quinn from *City of Glass* who turns up here as Mr. Blank's lawyer.

The figure of a lawyer implies a trial that is implicitly present from the very beginning; Mr. Blank's "heart is filled with an implacable sense of guilt. At the same time, he can't escape the feeling that he is the victim of a terrible injustice" (2). Mr. Blank is said to be the man in charge of sending out these people, his operatives, on missions, and they are just doing what he asked them to do. He is actually assigned the

role of a puppeteer, a godlike figure, the Author who intervenes in and manipulates other people's lives. But if we take into consideration that his operatives are Auster's fictional characters and the missions can be understood as Auster's novels, then the identity of Mr. Blank as the real author Paul Auster starts to uncover slightly. Is Paul Auster fictionalizing himself again? Did he become a written writer? Actually, we are witnesses of an opposite movement, when the characters from the books cross the ontological boundary of the text and become real in Mr. Blank's life.

However, there is a continued negation of the hierarchy between writer and written; the roles of the writer and his character seem to be reversed here. Mr. Blank is now the puppet that is manipulated by his invented protagonists and, hence, he becomes both the subject and object of the narration. Mr. Blank as the author is actually tried for his narrative crimes in front of the jury whose members are his fictional characters. Mr. Blank's apology, "I was only doing my job. If things turned out badly, the report still had to be written, and I can't be blamed for telling the truth, can I?" (125), in a way doubts the central role of the author as an originator.

Consequently, a Foucauldian question comes to mind: "What is an author?" The quest for the author's identity is thus reopened. Is he the one in charge of the creative process and thus responsible for it, or a mere witness and mediator not involved in any action? What was first; the plot or the writing? Here, the authorship is shifted towards the writing process or the written characters. The original writer finds himself writing a tale that actually develops against his intentions; the characters act otherwise than he expected, unforeseen events occur, and there is an implicit sense of threat that endangers even the author having made himself one of the personages.

Still, we are quite uncertain of the setting of the plot, since the poorly furnished, presumably locked room can also represent Mr. Blank's mind which is "elsewhere,

stranded among the figments in his head" (1). The "figment beings who marched through his head at earlier points in the narrative" (80) remind us of Auster's fictional characters who march through his room one by one. Mr. Blank talks about the spectres in his head as, "[m]y victims. All the people I've made suffer over the years. They're coming after me now to take their revenge." (81); the same as James P. Flood and others are visiting him in his room and filing charges against him. Moreover, the motif of the room represents another link between Paul Auster and Mr. Blank as his alter ego. Analogically, young Auster lived in a poorly furnished room in New York and had feelings of having been locked up (*The Invention of Solitude* 77-8). His solitude made him move inward and nurtured his creativity. Auster has once admitted that before putting his characters on paper, he encounters them in his head where they talk to him and to each other.

A further metaphysical question of the nature of fictional characters arises when Farr tells Mr. Blank: "I'm just as alive as you are" (78). Nevertheless, Mr. Blank doubts himself being alive: "Well, who's to say if I'm alive or not? […] Maybe I'm dead too" (78). His doubts are proved at the end of the novel when he reads about himself in the manuscript and realizes he crossed the boundary between the real and fictional worlds and became the "victim" of someone else's "report". But what would be the purpose of fictionalizing oneself if it means death? On the contrary, fictionalization means eternity. As one of the fictional characters claims, "we, the figments of another mind, will outlive the mind that made us, for once we are thrown into the world, we continue to exist forever, and our stories go on being told, even after we are dead" (129).

To conclude, Mr. Blank is drawn into the fiction as both punishment and reward and is thus reduced to a mere two-dimensional textuality, but simultaneously is granted immortality. "Mr. Blank is old and enfeebled, but as long as he remains in the room

with the shuttered window and the locked door, he can never die, never disappear, never be anything but the words I am writing on this page." (130) At this point, the room is transformed into a book and Mr. Blank into words. However, who is the person that asserts authority at the very end? The presence of a controlling author is felt from the beginning, because we know that Mr. Blank is watched by a camera installed in his room (1) and the story is narrated in the third person.

Nevertheless, the whole machinery is not revealed until the very last page of the novel where the first person narrator declares openly his authority: "In a short while, a woman will enter the room and feed him his dinner. I haven't yet decided who that woman will be, but if all goes well between now and then, I will send in Anna" (130). The manuscript that Mr. Blank reads about himself is entitled *Travels in the Scriptorium*, the same as the present novel by Paul Auster, but the difference is it is signed N.R. Fanshawe, Auster's fictional character from *The Locked Room*. The whole narrative of authorship thus ends with Fanshawe as author writing about Mr. Blank who, indeed, represents the real author Paul Auster who wrote *The Locked Room* where Fanshawe appears as a fictional character.

Conclusion

The separate analyses of the five major works by Paul Auster focusing on the problem of identity are to be compared and discussed together. We can discover a certain pattern in the identity search common to the central characters of all five books. They all suffer from displacement at multiple levels, retreat into solitude, and often get lost. Hence, they try to find the way out of the chaos and into their inner self, and look for the answers to their metaphysical questions through writing. They are involved in the process of writing as the act of insight. Additionally, all the works question the identity of the author and treat the reciprocal relationship between the author and his creation.

With the *New York Trilogy* in mind, Holzapfel claims: "All Auster's characters show multiple identities. They are either split personalities from the very beginning, or they undergo the process of splitting during the search. They are doubled in their antagonist" (109), actually they seem to be looking into the mirror. The same might apply to Paul Auster in the *Invention of Solitude* and Mr. Blank in *Travels in the Scriptorium*. Paul Auster in his non-fiction is actually doubled twice; in both his father and his son. Confronted with his father's death, Auster is split between the roles of the father and the son. In search for his identity he realizes his childhood died with his father and he thus replaces his father and simultaneously sees his own reflection in his son. Mr. Blank's identity is also doubled, but in a different way. He seems to lead a double life; inside and outside the room, in other words, inside and outside the book as both the author and the fictional character. Actually, all Auster's protagonists transcend the limits of their single identity and live another life. Auster tries to put himself into his father's shoes to understand his behaviour and then he does replace his father in his role.

Quinn changes his previous life for Paul Auster's, the private detective. Blue actually lives Black's life that presents his mirror image. The narrator relives Fanshawe's life and Mr. Blank is forced to experience his characters' fate of eternity in the text.

Regarding the displacement, all Auster's characters are indeed removed from their ordinary reality, and thus from their former identity. In this case, Holzapfel speaks about "the 'Wakefield' motif" based on Hawthorne's story *Wakefield* in which the protagonist "distances himself from his old life and gives up his old place within his family forever" (105).

To begin with Auster, his displacement concerns his Jewish identity, his role within the family and the profession of a writer. First, he feels uprooted, for his Jewish ancestors were forced to leave Europe for America where they have progressively lost their family traditions in the process of assimilation into the American culture and society. Then, he is deprived of his role of son within his family, as his father dies, and is displaced into the role of father. Finally, as a writer he removes himself from his real life into the fictional world of his books.

Quinn also undergoes displacement. He leaves his assigned role of writer and gives up his existing life, and adjusts to the role of detective with no past and inner life. Quinn actually identified himself with a private eye to such an extent that he felt "as if his whole being had been exiled to his eyes" (*City* 88). Moreover, he is moved out from his former apartment by his landlord without even knowing it. His displacement is thus ultimate: "It [the apartment] was gone, he was gone, everything was gone" (*City* 191). In Quinn's case, the ontological shift could also be recognized, because he abandons his identity of Daniel Quinn and identifies himself with his fictional character, the private eye Max Work. Similarly, Blue is removed from his private life; leaves his Mrs Blue-to-be and settles in a new apartment when he is hired in the Black case. Subsequently, he

loses privacy because he gets completely engaged in the case at the expense of his private self; in addition, he finds himself under constant surveillance. Next, both Fanshawe and the narrator are shifted elsewhere from their original place; Fanshawe, as the most accurate copy of Wakefield, inexplicably disappears from his old life leaving his wife and son behind, and gives up his old place within his family in favour of the narrator who thus has to quit his former life to replace Fanshawe. Finally, Mr. Blank is literally pulled out of his real life of writer and inserted into the imaginary world of his books, or in other words distanced from his self as author and made a fictional character.

In the quest for their identity, Auster's characters retreat into solitude in order to piece together the fragments of the antagonist's identity, realizing only later that they are indeed reconstructing their own self. But the quest always changes both the searcher and the searched; it is contaminating and affects the protagonists. The elusive and fluid character of identity is reflected in the indeterminate meaning of the search and its open-endedness.

Auster in *Portrait of an Invisible Man* is closed in his father's house gathering evidence of his father's elusive self and then, in *The Book of Memory*, he moves into a small room in New York to unearth his own identity by means of his memories and commentaries on other people and texts. He finally realizes that through fragments he can only build up a fragmented self, be it his father's or his own. Moreover, 'Auster before the search' will never be the same as 'Auster after the search', because part of him dies in the course of the search, as an outcome he has to cope with his new identity. Auster also ponders upon the mere possibility to understand and penetrate one's own self, not to say the other's identity. Analogically, the protagonists of the *New York Trilogy* actually lose their own identity through the search. They cut off contacts with

the outside world and become totally absorbed and confined alone in their case. They track their antagonist everywhere, examine every detail of his behaviour, and try to penetrate under his skin in order to be able to either guess his next step or, in case of Fanshawe, discover his hiding place. Nevertheless, as a result of the search, they actually distance themselves from their own self and isolate themselves from their surroundings. They fail in their quest because their own identity is split, multiple, blurred and inaccessible. As a matter of fact, Auster's protagonists only demonstrate his theory that you cannot penetrate the other self, if you do not know yourself first. Also Mr. Blank finds himself isolated in a room trying to rebuild his identity through fragmentary memories and conversations with others. But instead of bringing more insight, the search throws Mr. Blank into more confusion. He sets for a journey to discover unexplored dimensions of his mind and inner self without actually realizing he will never get back to the exact spot where his search began.

It is in their displacements and solitudes that the protagonists experience feelings of being lost; either in the urban setting, or in the case they are investigating, or in their own thoughts within the labyrinthine mind. Consequently, these feelings either lead to insight or disillusionment. In *Portrait* Auster gets lost in his task he had set for himself. He loses track of the purpose of his writing. He no longer knows where he is going, if such a point even exists and what he will do when he gets there. On the contrary, when A. loses his way in the unfamiliar streets of Amsterdam, he realizes "that his steps, by taking him nowhere, were taking him nowhere but into himself. He was wandering inside himself, and he was lost" and then the moment of illumination comes and he feels "as if on the brink of some previously hidden knowledge" (*Invention* 87). It is exactly at this point that he seems to get closer to his true self.

Analogically, Quinn is lost in the urban jungle of New York, in his search for clues in Stillman case, and among his multiple identities trying to be four people simultaneously. But his utter disorientation ends in disaster; he surrenders and he gradually slips from the text. However, Blue is left to his mental wanderings because he is confined to his observation point with limited information. He is inventing various identities for Black and White getting lost in their multiplicity, but progressively discovering his own role in the game.

The narrator from *The Locked Room* is lost in his life. He is unable to find the stable centre and when he finds it in Fanshawe at last, he is absent. In addition, the narrator is lost between the two identities: his and Fanshawe's, he oscillates between his self and not-self. As far as Mr. Blank is concerned, he is lost in the novel from the very beginning. He actually represents a displaced author who is incapable to adjust to the fictional world of his characters. He is also lost within himself unable to recall his past and thus unable to understand the present.

In search for identity, the protagonists are actually looking for the way out of confusion and darkness. Here writing serves them as a way to understanding; they have to write it in order to make sense of their life. They are writing down all their findings with hope to catch the essence of the elusive identity and to find answers to their metaphysical questions. Writing helps Auster to keep his dead father alive, but he is also exposed to an almost unbearable torture, for "writing has kept this wound open" (*Invention* 32). He stresses here supernatural power of writing to resurrect dead and to hurt. A parallel to Fanshawe might be remarked, as he is brought back to life through the publication of his manuscripts. Furthermore, Mr. Blank is drawn into the book in order to live forever.

In the interview with Contat, Auster explains the difference between a manuscript and a book for him: "I think of a manuscript as a very private material. It's still attached to you, it belongs to you. The book, on the other hand, is a public object" (163). The writer always puts a part of himself into his writing, a part of his identity. And Auster's books are full of examples of the private writing: notebooks, manuscripts, reports, and letters. All his protagonists are indeed author figures: Auster writes his father's biography to cope with his death, Quinn tries to track down his reason for being by writing in his red notebook, Blue writes the reports about Black which are actually about his own self, Fanshawe escapes into his manuscripts to deal with his difficult self, the narrator wants to write Fanshawe's biography in order to close Fanshawe's life and start his own without the burden of his presence, and Mr. Blank tries to finish a fragment of a manuscript in order to restore his memory. Writing has actually therapeutic effects on the writing subject. It is presented as a sort of treatment and an access into the depths of the self.

In such a proliferation of author figures, the question about the true author's identity arises again, accompanied by the reflection on the mutual relationship between the author and his protagonists as subjects to his creation. In fact, the relationship between father and son corresponds to that of author and his creation. A part of the father's identity transcends into his son. But by writing his father's life, the relationship is reversed and Auster son becomes the author of his father as protagonist. In fact, he reflects part of his own identity into his father in reverse. There is an analogy between Auster's father and Mr. Blank whose role of author is also reversed by the products of his creation, his fictional characters.

The identities of Blue and Black are blurred to such extent that the roles of author-character, observer-observed, or writer-written seem to alternate in both of them.

First, Blue writes the reports about his observations of Black, but gradually he realizes Black is writing about him and indeed controlling his life. Finally, Blue takes hold of his life and identity and regains his authority by killing Black. Similarly, the narrator realizes he is a mere Fanshawe's puppet and his identity is in danger if Fanshawe continues to assert authority on him. He desires to kill him, but he cannot find him. In their final encounter, Fanshawe still leads the strings when he defies the narrator's domination and commits suicide. Writing *The New York Trilogy* and thus fictionalizing his usurper is the narrator's last attempt to get Fanshawe under his control.

It is the author figure of Paul Auster in his dual role as both the author standing above his characters and a character participating in his own fiction who actually interconnects all his works and protagonists. His presence is perceived either explicitly or implicitly both inside and outside the text. While exploring his inner self through writing, he also examines the role of writing in his search for identity. In his fiction, Auster often considers writing, detecting, observing and self-reflecting as identical acts. He actually discovers his identity in the writing itself. He creates a fictitious reality for himself in which he begins to live. The book presents his mirror image in which he observes himself from various perspectives and gradually starts to recognize his idenity. The fact that fiction is sometimes becoming more real than reality for him is fully demonstrated when the ontological structure is reversed in Mr. Blank's encounter with his characters.

The topic of identity pervades Auster's writing and his protagonists never cease to search for a missing coherence within themselves and to raise metaphysical questions: Who am I? Where am I? What is the purpose of me being here? How do I fit into this world? Is there someone above who controls my life? All discussed aspects lead to the same conclusion - identity is fragmented, impenetrable, and elusive. It is

further supported by metafictional and fictional doublings, mirror images, and open-endedness. The aspects of identity are coupled with the aspects of language and text that are presented as impossible to bring to a satisfying end: the protagonists fail in their search for identity, the language fails to communicate the presence, and the text fails to bring to a solution. The search for identity as well as writing is portrayed as open, ongoing and unfinished.

Czech Résumé

Tato magisterská práce se zabývá různými formami identity, jak jsou vykresleny v díle současného amerického spisovatele Paula Austera. Paul Auster se narodil v roce 1947 v Newarku, New Jersey, v 70. letech začal psát poezii a menší tvorbu, avšak bez většího úspěchu. Teprve po vydání jeho první prozaické knihy *Vynález samoty* v roce 1982 se mu otevřely dveře do literárního světa. Následovala řada úspěšných románů, z nichž jsem si kromě jeho prvotiny pro tuto práci vybrala *Newyorskou trilogii* (1985) a *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007). Paul Auster bývá často považován za postmoderního autora, ačkoliv sám jakoukoli kategorizaci odmítá a raději odkazuje do minulosti na své slavné předchůdce, kteří ho v mnoha směrech ovlivnili. Jsou to především američtí spisovatelé 19. století jako Nathaniel Hawthorne, E.A. Poe či Herman Melville, a Evropský představitel absurdního dramatu Samuel Beckett. Zdá se, že téma identity je v Austerově díle nevyčerpatelné a jeho postavy nikdy nepřestanou pátrat po tom, kým skutečně jsou, proč tady jsou a jak zapadají do tohoto světa.

Auster se netají tím, že do svých fiktivních postav promítá četné autobiografické prvky a vlastně i jeho skutečný život se točí kolem hledání vlastní identity. Odpověď na otázku, co to vlastně znamená být Paul Auster, se snaží najít skrze svou literární tvorbu. V první části *Vynálezu samoty* se vyrovnává se smrtí otce a snaží se odkrýt, kým vlastně jeho otec byl. V podstatě otevírá otázku poznatelnosti identity druhého člověka a vše uzavírá tvrzením, že nejprve musíme poznat sami sebe, abychom mohli porozumět druhým. V druhé části se potom zaměřuje na hledání vlastní identity pátráním ve vzpomínkách a psaním. Postupně odhaluje svou dvojí identitu: smrtí otce přestává být synem a stává se jeho dvojníkem - otcem vlastního dítěte, a zároveň ve svém synovi vidí sám sebe v chlapeckých letech. *Newyorská trilogie* se naopak zabývá rozdvojenými

osobnostmi či dokonce několikanásobnou identitou. Literární představitelé ze všech tří dílů v podstatě procházejí analogickým vývojem a ve své snaze odhalit identitu druhého zjišťují, že jsou ztraceni sami v sobě. Daniel Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe i vypravěč jsou různými způsoby vytrženi ze svého původního života, stahují se do ústranní a ve své samotě se snaží najít sami sebe. V jejich pátrání po vlastní identitě a snaze o pochopení podstaty bytí jim do značné míry pomáhá psaní stejně jako skutečnému autorovi Paulu Austerovi. Quinn je ve svém pátrání neúspěšný a nakonec zmizí beze stopy, jako by se jeho identita roztříštila mezi všechny postavy, za které se kdy vydával, a zároveň se ztratil v textu. Blue naopak odhalí v Blackovi svého dvojníka, v podstatě odraz v zrcadle, a svou ukradenou identitu získá zpět. Vypravěč ze *Zamčeného pokoje* se se svým druhým já Fanshawem nikdy nesetká tváří v tvář, a tak zůstává otevřená možnost, že vlastně nikdy skutečně neexistoval mimo vypravěčovu mysl. V posledním analyzovaném románu *Travels in the Scriptorium* se Auster zabývá identitou ve vztahu k paměti a vzpomínkám. Hlavní představitel, pan Blank trpí ztrátou paměti, a tudíž i identity, kterou se snaží obnovit skrze útržkovité informace z vlastní minulosti. Tato kniha je dějištěm setkání mnohých Austerových postav z předešlých románů včetně *Newyorské trilogie* a čtenář nakonec zjistí, že pod panem Blankem se skrývá sám Auster. Pátrání po identitě pana Blanka se tak náhle změní v Austerovo pátrání po vlastní identitě a zároveň v hledání autorovy identity v díle.

Na závěr jsou srovnávány způsoby, jakými je vykreslen problém identity ve všech pěti rozebíraných Austerových dílech. Po podrobnějším prozkoumání lze říci, že představitelé všech pěti knih mají mnoho společného ve svém pátrání po tom, kdo vlastně jsou. Poté co do jejich života vstoupí nenadálá událost, která je vytrhne ze známého prostředí, se cítí opuštění a ztracení. Z bezvýchodné situace se často snaží uniknout tím, že se vydávají za někoho jiného. Ve své samotě a neustálém střídání

identit se snaží najít cestu sami k sobě a často se oddávají psaní, jakožto způsobu proniknutí do podstaty věcí. Nakonec se všechna díla zabývají také otázkou autorovy identity, pseudonymy a vzájemným vztahem mezi autorem a jeho fiktivními postavami.

English Résumé

The present Master's Diploma Thesis deals with various aspects of identity as they are depicted in writing by a contemporary American writer Paul Auster. Paul Auster was born in 1947 in Newark, New Jersey. In 1970s he started writing poetry and minor pieces, yet without success. It was only after the publication of his first non-fiction *The Invention of Solitude* in 1982 that he gained acclaim in the literary world. A number of renowned novels followed from which I have chosen, apart from his first work of non-fiction, *The New York Trilogy* (1985) and *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007). Paul Auster is often considered a postmodern writer, although he himself defies any categorization and prefers to ascribe the literary influence to his famous predecessors. They include above all nineteenth-century American writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, E.A. Poe or Herman Melville, and a European representative of the Theatre of the Absurd Samuel Beckett. The topic of identity seems to pervade Auster's writing and his protagonists never cease to search for the answers to questions who they really are, what is the purpose of their being here and how do they fit into this world.

Auster does not hide that he projects plenty of autobiographical features onto his fictitious characters and indeed his real life is also very much about the search for his own identity. He tries to find the answer to his question: 'What does it actually mean to be Paul Auster?' by means of his literary creation. In the first part of *The Invention of Solitude*, he is coping with his father's death and is trying to unearth his identity which has been eluding him all his life. He indeed opens a question whether the identity of the other is knowable at all and concludes that first we have to know ourselves in order to be able to understand others. Then, in the second part, he focuses on the quest for his

own identity through memories and writing. Gradually, he discovers his double identity; due to his father's death he loses his role of son and becomes his father's double – father of his own child, and simultaneously he sees a reflection of his boyhood in his son. On the contrary, *The New York Trilogy* treats split personalities or even multiple identities. The literary characters of all three volumes seem to undergo an analogical development and, in the search for identity of the other, they find out they are lost within themselves. Daniel Quinn, Blue, Fanshawe and the narrator are in various ways displaced from their former life, they retreat into isolation and within their solitude, they try to find their own self. They search for their own identity and struggle to understand the essence of being through writing, similarly as the real author Paul Auster. Quinn fails in his search and finally disappears without any trace, as if his identity were broken into fragments among all the persons he impersonated and he merged into the text. In contrast, Blue discovers in Black his double, a mirror image, and gets his stolen identity back. The narrator of *The Locked Room* never meets his alter ego Fanshawe face to face, and thus the possibility that he never existed outside the narrator's mind remains open. In the last novel to be analyzed here, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, Auster deals with identity in relation to memory and recollections. The protagonist Mr. Blank lost his memory, and hence his identity which he tries to reconstruct through fragmented recollections. The book is a meeting place of a number of Auster's protagonists from other novels including *The New York Trilogy*, and the reader soon finds out that, under Mr. Blank's skin, there is hidden Auster himself. The search for Mr. Blank's identity thus shifts into Auster's quest for his own identity and the quest for author's identity within the work as well.

In the conclusion, we compare the ways of depicting the problem of identity in all five analyzed works by Auster. After a closer examination, we may say that the

protagonists in all five books have a lot in common in their searches for identity. First, a sudden accident interrupts their lives and they are displaced from familiar environment, and consequently they feel abandoned and lost. They try to find the way out of the impasse by pretending to be someone else. Within their solitudes and alternating identities, they try to find the way to their selves and they often devote themselves to writing as an act of insight. Finally, all the works deal with the question of author's identity, pseudonyms and mutual relationship between the author and his fictitious characters.

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