Degree Project

Level: Bachelor's

Performing Paul Auster's Authorship

Authorship and Authority as Cultural Performance in the *New York Trilogy*

Author: Jordan Lewis Mathes
Supervisor: Dr. Billy Gray
Examiner: Dr. Carmen Zamorano Llena
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"Today I will begin by copying the first sentences of a famous novel, to see if the charge of energy contained in that start is communicated to my hand, which, once it has revived the right push should run on its own"

-If on a Winter Night a Traveler, Italo Calvino

"Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson."

-William Wilson, Edgar Allen Poe

Introduction

In what is perhaps one of Jorge Luis Borges' most well-known short stories, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"*,* the narrator opens his dizzyingly complex review of the author with almost ironic candor, "The visible œvre left by this novelist can be easily and briefly enumerated" ("Pierre Menard" 47). What follows is far from a simple enumeration of text or author, as the story famously tells of the imaginary French writer Pierre Menard and his attempt to rewrite the Quixote story exactly as it was composed 300 years beforehand by Cervantes- in essence creating a copy as authentic as the original. In just six pages the tale, published in 1939, offers profound meditations on the instability of textual meaning and ownership in the face of historical context.

Forty-six years after Borges' story was first printed, Paul Auster also penned an essay dealing with the authorship of *Don Quixote.* However, this Paul Auster is only a fictional character found in the novel *City of Glass*. The real Paul Auster produces this first installment in 1985 of what would later be known as *The New York Trilogy*. The novel recounts the brief career of a writer, turned detective-by-accident, David Quinn, who decides to take up a case, and thereafter gradually disappears into his own madness. As mentioned previously Auster

slyly slips his own name into the story by creating a character named "Paul Auster"[1] who is by chance, writing an essay that claims that the story of *Don Quixote* was written by the fictional character of Don Quixote himself. The proceeding mis-en-abyme is not a bad way to grab the attention of a reader, and introduce yourself to the reading public, as evidenced by the novel's immediate critical and public success. The later editions of the trilogy, titled *Ghosts* and the *Locked Door*, both published one year after *City of Glass* in 1986, also explore the motif of disappeared writers and the detectives who try to decipher their mysteries.

Returning to Borges and looking beyond both authors' mutual interest in Cervantes and metafictional aesthetics, Borges and Auster's trilogy also overlap on notions of influence and legacy on literary theory. On the one hand, Borges' ideas about writing, interpretation, and authorship seem to have at least provided a foundation for post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and certainly Baudrillard (Giskin 105). On the other hand, Auster's early fiction represents for many critics the result of these theories, due to the sheer number of the postmodern trope boxes the novel checks off. Conventions of genre are subverted through character self-referentiality, questions surrounding the nature of identity and self are explored through the metaphors of linguistic aporia and interdependency, and of course there is no shortage of masterful ironic dialogue and displays of metafictional wit.

Not surprisingly, Derridean deconstruction theory has been a central focus for much of the early criticism dedicated to *The New York Trilogy,* which sees the novel as a validation of said theories. Allison Russel's article, "Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction", is a comprehensive and often cited example of how the trilogy lends itself easily to a deconstructive reading. Her article borrows Derrida's notions of

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[1] Quotation marks will be used to specify between "Paul Auster" the fictional character and Paul Auster the empirical author.

polysemic *difference* and *presence* and contrasts them with traditional detective genre conventions to lay the ground work for the two major prevailing trends of interpretations which will later come to dominate the criticism surrounding the novel (83). The first is the idea of the anti-detective, whereby Russell applies the concept to analyze the *New York Trilogy*'s non-linear plot and character development concluding that it destabilizes ontological assumptions of identity. The second direction imparted by Russell's essay demonstrates how the novel deconstructs language's referential capacities between sign and signified. Norma Rowen's study published a year later in 1991 titled, "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*" builds on the logocentrism of Russel's initial work focusing on the villain character, Peter Stillman, as he slips into madness in his quest to recapture a prelapsian tongue (81). Both studies firmly ground future readings within the boundaries of postmodernist theory.

More recent scholarship suggests that this early criticism has overemphasized the role of deconstructionist influence on readings of *The New York Trilogy,* with Dimovitz reporting that Auster actually "never read a word of Derrida, and was only apparently familiar with structuralist-era Barthes" (629). In fact he goes as far to suggest that "Auster's antipostmodern project almost inadvertently writes back against the critical discourses written by his contemporaries" (Dimovitz 629). Nevertheless, it was not until about five years after Russell's influential essay that focus moved beyond the realm of anti-detective and logocentric readings to include the themes of authorship in the trilogy.

Scholars like Steven E. Alford, for example, have made subtle distinctions between the different characters of author/implied author, narrator/narratee, and reader/implied reader. His article titled "Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy" concludes that through their role reversals, authorial interpretation becomes ontologically unstable (33). Madeleine Sorapure meanwhile synthesizes the author-detective characters in her study "The

Detective and the Author: City of Glass" arguing for the notion of the real author Paul Auster to be understood as a kind of "master-reader" who accordingly thwarts efforts by the scholars and the detective-readers alike, as all interpretations seemingly fail to arrive at any unified "(re)construction of the text" (87). William Lavender's essay, "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's *City of Glass*", makes an important adjustment on the theoretical barometer moving as it does from deconstructivist paradigms back to poststructuralists by suggesting how Auster responds to Foucault and Barthes in the post "Death of the Author" era. Lavender notes that it is "Auster's portrait of the author as a developing function" which underpins the trilogy like "a search through the labyrinth of theory and tradition for a new authorial identity, one that can survive in an age when authority is not necessarily bound to text by spontaneous attribution" (237). Hence he gives priority to Auster's concerns with authorship rather than language, genre, or Derrida.

Yet it is probably not until John Zilcosky wrote his essay titled "The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory" that the topic of authorial presence in *The New York Trilogy* becomes the center of analysis for the first time. In response to Lavender, he writes that the novel does not only engage with theory on the formal level, instead "Auster enquires into the nature of authorship and its claims to authority" (205). Whereas Lavender can only lament Auster's engagement with authorial theory as embodying "negative academic reductions" (238), Zilcosky's reading praises its centrality in the text. He provides clear examples of how Auster might have experimented with transferring his own authorial involvement by means of grafting his personal "biography float[ing] from one character to the next" (Zilcosky 204).

While important contributions have been made by some of these studies they also leave room for further investigation into how authorship is represented in *The New York Trilogy*. For example, Alford's detailing of double characters arrives at a somewhat whimsical

conclusion as he tries to imagine what the ontological consequences would be if *Don Quixote* and *City of Glass* were written by their fictional protagonists. Lavender's reliance on biographical evidence and authorial intention has, no doubt raised some methodological objections by some literary scholars who continue to reference Wimsatt and Beardsley strongly argued rejection of such evidence.[2] And while Zilcosky saw no problems with Lavender's methods, his positioning of authorship at the heart of the novel's themes is no doubt significant for the current study at hand. Yet his article only superficially discusses how historical constructions of authorship affect understandings of creative production, and thereby misses an opportunity to apply useful previous theoretical contributions of genealogical investigation like those found in Michel Foucault's influential essay, "What is an Author?". Hence the fact remains that since the exigency of examining author representations in the novel was first outlined in Zilcosky's essay published in 1998, little has been done to exhaust the topic.

A recent publication on the subject which examines the performativity of Auster's own authorship in *City of Glass* could be evidence of an emerging renewed interest. In Sonja Longolius' book *Performing Authorship: Strategies of "Becoming an Author" in the Works of Paul Auster, Candice Breitz, Sophie Calle, and Jonathan Safran Foer* published in 2016, she shows how authors "not only create artworks. In the process of creating, they simultaneously bring to life their author *personae*" (1). In only eight pages she demonstrates how Auster begins "imagining himself as an author or rather as many different authors" and by doing so "perform[s] his own authorial identity" (Longolius 165). Despite breaking new theoretical ground her study is broadly comparative, making only marginal analysis of the novel *City of Glass,* and none whatsoever of the other two installments of the trilogy. Furthermore, her close reading of author-type characters ignores the strong encouragement for

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2 The "Intentional Fallacy" (1946) by K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley has come to represent the touchstone text that moved theory away from author based interpretation methods to textual-only readings promoted by the New Criticism school of theory.

historical comparison called for in some of the foundational texts which outline the performative authorship theoretical perspective. For example in "Authorship as Cultural Performance: New Perspectives in Authorship Studies", Ingo Berensmeyer calls for the "renewed investigation of concrete historical manifestations (performance) of *empirical* authorship as well as a renewed effort to come to terms with different concepts or models of authorship… in different areas of culture" (Berensmeyer 12). Thus, Longolius has left room for the development of further analysis of the *New York Trilogy* as a whole when identifying what authorship models Auster employs in his fiction and how he performs his authorial identity.

Therefore this study will analyze how representations of authorship found in Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* function in performing the creation of his author *persona* through raising questions of authority. The study employs models of historical and performative authorship constructs which will aide in analyzing these representations found throughout the narrative, in continuation of the work already laid out by Zilcosky, Lavender, and subsequently Longolius. The historical constructs of authorship outlined in Jörg Schönerts' *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, as well as contributions by Stephen Donovan et al. in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* provide this study with the necessary theoretical conceptualizations of authorship and authority models. Furthermore this study will apply the concept of "staging", or the textual experiences that explore other possible selves, through a close reading of the text in order to approach the trilogy and its author from a performative lens. "Staging" is a concept first proposed by Wolfgang Iser and will be discussed in greater detail along with the other theoretical concepts of this study in the following chapter. On a final note, the analysis of the study is organized sequentially following the order of the volumes as they appear in the trilogy for as Lavender has already pointed out they function as a sort of *künstlerroman* of authorship (237). Given this developmental impulse

it would seem appropriate to analyze the three volumes in terms of them providing a beginning, middle, and end to Auster's portrait of an emerging author.

Theoretical Approaches to Authorship

Genealogy of Authorship

Contemporary understanding of authorship often involves the picture of a single individual who is responsible for producing works of original cultural or creative interest (Donovan et al. 1). Yet the term's origins, being far from uncontentious, reveal quite the opposite. Classical linguists trace the word's literal genealogy not to the poetry of antiquity but rather the Roman legal term *auctor*. Originally meaning one who bears special privilege", an *auctor* possesses the *auctoritas* to decide on legal matters or "authorize" the transfer of rights to others (Schönert 4). And while there is no direct equivalent to *auctor* in ancient Greek, Stephen Donovan et al. have pointed out that the term authentes (auto+ entes) signifies "a doer or master" and at the same time "murder" (3). The scattered genealogy serves to demonstrate the fluid meaning of this ghost word and as many scholars of authorship studies have pointed out, the concept, like all social phenomenon, is historically relative, taking different forms to reflect ever-changing and prevailing ideologies.

Citing cultural practices which were common during the Middle Ages, such as the collective production of texts by anonymous clerks and scribes, Michel Foucault, in his essay "What is an Author?" coins the term *authorial-function* (1631). By imploring us to look at authorship as a function of discourse rather than the title reserved for individual genius, the process of becoming an author depends on the circulation of literary products pertaining to a certain name. These texts emanating from an author are either circulated or censored according to their compatibility with existing power structures (Foucault 1636). Thus, legacy depends on a relationship to ever changing societal norms. Foucault's conclusions are relevant to the

question of what it means to be an author, suggesting that the answer is neither self-evident nor finite, but rather evolving through reconfigurations.

Authority

Closely linked to this understanding of authorship is the notion of authority, or in other words who or what is responsible for the text. There is no doubt that empirical writers have always existed and produced texts, yet their practices, ideas, and means of claiming credit for their products have varied significantly throughout history and often times are not evident to the contemporary readers. For example, Stephen Donovan et al., citing Kathleen B. Jones, point out that medieval understandings of authority relied heavily on the divine revelation of God, and thus the authorization to speak was obtained through spirituality and granted by God, rather than linguistic invention (4). Later notions of authority during the romantic period mark a shift in recognition which emanated directly from the internal, emotive, and mental states of the author him or herself, coinciding with the rise of mid-eighteenth century copyright laws that provided writers exclusive license over the content of their works (Donovan et al. 8). The concept of an authorial authority has seen its most intensive interrogation from all sides of literature and theory for most of the twentieth century. Coinciding with the erosion of faith in objectivity and conventional notions of authority under the general banner of aesthetic modernism, literary theory, by way of Barthes and Foucault, has signaled the ultimate decline in authoritative authorship. Yet despite the demise of confidence in authority and authorship, they remain areas of scholarly interest in the twenty-first century (Longolius 20).

Performance

Acknowledging that the author-function is situated in a series of discourses means that it is socially constructed. Similarly, authority is assigned through a range of contexts and is thus historically contingent. Understanding authorship in this dynamic way allows for a scholarship

that moves beyond traditional understandings of an author owning his or her text by default of being its creator. Instead a more recent approach, known as cultural performance theory, examines how authorship is executed as an operation of social practices. Its field of interest lies in asking what procedures must occur for an individual writer to become an author.

Borrowing on J.L. Austin's pioneering work with illocutionary speech acts, performance theory takes as its point of departure the notion that certain types of utterances constitute their meaning not in reference to other phenomenon but in the act of uttering the speech act itself. Deemed "performative utterances", actions such as promising, threatening, or proposing, bring into being their own reality (Austin 90-100). Likewise there has been much effort dedicated to detailing the ways in which literature would appear to fit this general description of performative utterances, since as Jonathan Culler puts it, "a literary utterance creates the state of affairs to which it refers" (97). As far as one acknowledges that the existence of characters, settings, genres, and other essential elements to narrative fiction all depend on the speech acts contained in literary texts, the same can be said about the fact that these texts also "bring into being the concepts and ideas that they deploy" such as romantic love or tragic death (Culler 105). The point is that literature, through language, shapes the ways we experience certain aspects of human life.

Wolfgang Iser's work on performativity examines one aspect of life which is particularly shaped by literature: identity. Like Culler, literary texts for Iser are performative in that they bring into being a sort of persona that the reader must create or "stage" in his or her imagination. Iser describes the process as a performance during which, "we are both ourselves and someone else. Staging oneself as someone else is a source of aesthetic pleasure: it is also the means whereby representation is transferred from text to reader" (*Prospecting* 244). Thus, a reader's mind works like the Austin's illocutionary speech acts- wherein the act

of promising brings into being the promise itself, by imagining him or herself in the role of given characters in a text.

The concept of "staging" is supported by Iser's analysis of identity and the self. Premised on the idea that the coherent and ever-present self is an illusion, he describes human beings as occupying a "decentered position, who are but do not 'have' themselves" (*Fictive* 296). The idea is that one exists, yet cannot access oneself entirely and intelligibly. Despite the self being unobtainable, one is incessantly inclined to try and bridge this insurmountable distance between "being and "having" by exploring questions of identity. This is evidenced by the fact that humans do not tire of exploring these questions through the characters represented in stories since, as Iser puts it, literary "staging" exposes the "extraordinary plasticity of human beings, who, precisely because they do not seem to have a determinable nature can expand into an almost unlimited range of culture bound patternings" (*Fictive* 297). Ben De Bruyn, quoting Iser, contextualizes this idea more succinctly: "since we are never able to fully grasp our own selves- the impossibility of becoming present to ourselves – of ever fully knowing who we are – ensures the possibility of becoming different from ourselves" (196). Consequently, "staging" in literary texts provides a space for individuals to try out different versions of themselves due to the undetermined nature of the self.

While "staging" is a concept that usually examines the space between reader and text, Iser's theory can be applied to the authors of literary texts as well. As Longolius has already demonstrated, composing a literary text can also provide a space for imagining a version of one's self- especially one which concerns the themes of identity. Therefore, the process of imagining, constituting through language, and creating a new possible self through the text will provide the operational definition that this study applies to the notion of "staging".

Performing Authorship in *City of Glass*

From its onset *City of Glass* was conceived as a project of personal imaginary exploration. As Auster admits, the inspiration for the novel came from a wrong number phone call asking him for the Pinkerton detective agency two nights in a row. Wondering what might have happened had he replied that he was in fact the detective, Auster found the idea that provided him with the imaginative foundation for the first novel of the trilogy (Hutchisson 14). Like imagining different versions of himself as a detective, the author-characters in the *City of Glass* provide Auster with early attempts at his own authorship.

The story follows Daniel Quinn, writer turned detective, who by sheer accident of a misdialed phone call is hired by Peter Stillman to follow his father also named Peter Stillman. As Quinn tracks Stillman's ambiguous moves throughout the streets of New York he records them in a red notebook. Eventually faced with mounting uncertainties about the nature of his role he abandons his solo quest, in order to seek the help of the true detective Paul Auster for which he has been misidentified. [3] By the end of the narrative Stillman Sr. has vanished, and Quinn deteriorates into a vagabond before holding up in Stillman Jr.'s abandoned apartment doing little but writing in the red notebook before vanishing himself. The narrative is completed by the anonymous narrator who finds the red notebook "less full than the author would have liked" but assures the reader that the "story is based entirely on facts" (Auster 114). Thus the story weaves a complex relationship between several possible author characters.

Beginning with the protagonist Daniel Quinn, the reader is made aware from the first pages of the story that he is a complex writer. He uses the *nom du plume*, William Wilson, through which he channels his creativity when composing his own detective fiction. The motif

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[3] This is yet another Auster character who never actually appears in the novel but is only mentioned by Quinn.

of ventriloquism in the following passage reveals that Quinn enters a third alter ego, his detective character, Max Work, when imagining his stories:

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

By referring to himself as the dummy and his artifice as the ventriloquist, Quinn inverts the active and passive positions of creator and created. Thus even from the first description of authorship in the novel, Quinn reveals the necessity for an extension of *personae*. Like the *poeta vates* of antiquity Quinn uses Wilson as a conduit or muse *in-absentia* to channel his artistic production. [4] This also problematizes Quinn's own authority, since, as it has been pointed out, "clearly if the author does not so much write but rather is written through, then he or she has no more interpretive authority than any other reader" (Hawthorn 69). Hence through Quinn, Wilson, and Work the question of authority is immediately brought into the narrative fold.

Later Quinn's problematic relationship with the authority of his texts is further emphasized in his role as poet and non-author in two scenes of recognition and unrecognition. Recognition as a trope plays an important role in both authorship and authority, since, as Bo

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[4] The *poeta vates* is a poet or bard who is inspired by divine intervention or the spirit of creativity (Schönert 4).

G. Ekelund has noted, "literary authority, like any form of authority, exists only when it is recognized" (89). The first scene sees Quinn misrecognized for his work when on the subway. Quinn painfully watches as a young woman disinterestedly reads his first detective story that he penned under his pseudonym of William Wilson titled, *The Suicide Squeeze*.[5] After a clumsy exchange of words he admits that he harbors a desire to reveal himself as the real author to the girl, who by no fault of her own, does not fully appreciate the story of Max Work and is unaware of who has written it.

The second scene of recognition occurs after Quinn has lost track of Stillman Sr. He decides to seek out Paul Auster the detective in order to "work [together] to save Peter Stillman" (Auster 91). Upon arriving "Auster" has no difficulty in recalling Quinn from his earlier work as a writer, however not as a detective novelist but rather as a poet. Just as Quinn believes he will meet a different Auster (Auster the detective), so too has "Auster" met a different Quinn: one that has published a book of poetry titled "Unfinished Business". Having never appeared before or after in the novel, this reference perhaps serves to further stage the biography of Paul Auster into his fiction.[6] It would seem that both of Quinn's texts represent two poles of authorship which Berensmeyer identifies emerging from the eighteenth century onward. On the one hand, there is a Romantic sensibility which "celebrates the poet as a cultural figure of sublime authority" but on the other hand, there exists the reality of a growing market demand which generates a compulsion of literary production or (hack writing) where the "the paradoxical status of authorship … [becomes] caught between glory and misery, success and starvation… " (18). That is to say that Quinn attempts at balancing between a mode of authorship which is artful: poetry, and one which provides economically: low brow popular

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[5]*Squeeze Play* is a detective story written by Paul Auster, published in 1982 under the pseudonym Paul Benjamin, which follows a New York detective named Max Klein.
[6]See *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays*, 1970-79by Paul Auster (1990). Auster also translated French poetry for much of his early life beginning to work professionally in 1974.

fiction. This dynamic is reflected in the real Auster's early biography as well. After his work with poetry but before gaining notoriety from the trilogy, Auster describes himself as going through a starving artist phase where he wrote his first detective novel, *Squeeze Play,* in about six weeks just to pay the bills (Capen 102). Thus, it would appear that this early struggle plays an important role as the foundation for Austen's journey towards recognition.

Additionally, the fictional character of "Auster" serves as a separate more desirable identity of authorship. The case has already been made that it seems to fulfill the projected desires of the real Paul Auster. Longolius notes that Auster further stages himself in the story by giving Quinn, and "Auster's" son the same first name as his real son, Daniel, thus subtly suggesting a paternal-filial relationship between the real author Auster and his ficitonal offspring (171). The fact that "Auster" is presented as a confident scholar living in a seemingly idyllic middle-class New York family appartment is contrasted with Quinn who, by his own attempts to become "Auster", has initiated his own deterioration.

Recognition is thus established through "Auster" giving Quinn some authority over his own work which essentially consists of doubling the real Paul Auster's own early work. Despite these subtle stagings of authorial performance, and self-recognition throughout the story, the narrative leaves questions of authority ambiguous by the conclusion of the first novel in the trilogy.

Auster keeps the authoritative doubting game alive in *City of Glass* through the narrator, who by the end of the novel, informs the reader that the entire story so far has been taken from Quinn's red notebook. He also assures us of his fidelity to its reproduction, by stating it is a "story based entirely on facts" (Auster 114). Yet, his assurances are noticeably dubious, and often immediately self-contradicting given that Quinn only buys the red notebook halfway through the novel and admits that the pages are a series of scribbled notes gathered while following Stillman's aimless wanderings. Even the narrator notes that Quinn, "had often

written two or even three lines on top of each other producing a jumbled, illegible palimpsest" (Auster 62). If one is to believe the narrator, when he says that the text of *City of Glass* was not of his own complete fabrication, it follows that the source of it is far from an inspired individual act of creativity. Rather it comes from the subconscious whims of Peter Stillman Sr. and more closely resembles the *écriture automatique* of the French Surrealist movements which sought to cancel the boundaries of "author oriented work" in favor of the autonomously productive force of the unconscious mind (Schönert 6). Hence Auster creates a double blind of individual source authority. An unreliable narrator reads from an unreliable text, which emphasizes the *how* of the text's composition and (re)composition rather than the *who*. This problem reoccurs in different forms throughout the trilogy, yet the manner in which it is resolved changes in each novel. As it will be seen in the following chapter, *Ghosts* is a story concerned with the authority of the past.

Performing Authorship in *Ghosts*

While all of the novels share similar plots, characters, and thematic elements, none of the other books deal with the theme of mimicry of the past to quite the degree that *Ghosts* does. Set on the same day that Paul Auster was born, February 3, 1947, the middle volume of the trilogy functions as a minimalistic version of the other two. The main character Blue is a detective hired to follow the supposed criminal Black as he records his every move in a notebook echoing the same detective/author text production motif as the previous story. From his window facing Black's apartment, Blue watches him read and write daily, suggesting a mirror-like relationship between the two characters is created in the glass windows. Eventually boredom sets in driving Blue to speculate that the nature of Black's writing, " is merely a sham, page after page… each word [taken] from the dictionary in alphabetical order, or a hand written copy of *Walden*"

(Auster 172-173). For fear that his job has become an elaborate ploy of entrapment, anxiety urges Blue to dress himself in disguise and contact Black.

In ragged clothes and a fake white beard Blue poses as a beggar whom Black stumbles upon and comments that he looks just like Walt Whitman. Black proceeds to discuss anecdotes of how Henry David Thoreau once met Whitman in a building close to their location. Shortly after he digresses into a plot discussion of Hawthorne's shot story, "Wakefield"- a story itself about a man who disappears from his family for 20 years the whole time living in close proximity to them relying on elaborate disguises. As the novel draws to its conclusion Blue finally steals some pages from what we assume to be the massive manuscript that Black has been working on only to discover that within the vast pile of mismatched documents there are pages taken from his own reports of Black. The narrative concludes with Blue killing Black and reading the rest of his manuscript "right through, every word from its beginning to end", suggesting that it is actually Black's account that has provided the source text for the narrative (Auster 197). However, just as in the case with Quinn's red notebook the story leaves enough ambiguity for reasonable doubt between Blue's report and Black's composition. The two examples of mimicry and misrecognition (Blue as Whitman and Black as Blue) are important in their relationship to how *Ghosts* displays performative authorship in relation to the past.

Just like an actor getting ready for a show, Auster dresses up his character Blue, in order to enter the theatre of American literary cannon. *Ghosts* focuses particularly on the three American authors Thoreau, Whitman, and Hawthorne. While others do appear in the trilogy, the spotlight on these three is further established when Blue surveys Black's austere apartment to find little more than a few books resting on a bookshelf "*Walden, Leaves of Grass,* [and] *Twice Told Tales*" (Auster 187). It is of note that the three texts mentioned represent the three genres in which Auster worked in up until the publication of the *New York Trilogy*: autobiography, poetry, and popular narrative fiction. Of course Poe and Melville feature in the

other parts of the trilogy, but their presence is perhaps better understood as nods of intertextuality within the detective genre. While the works of these three authors represent a diverse range of style and genre, the commonality between them lies perhaps in their historical relationship to the creation of public author *personae*. Whitman is commonly recognized as the original self-promotor of his own work, practically creating of himself a certain archetypical American literary celebrity/huckster. While Thoreau's approach to writing was essentially always occasioned by his own real life and prior political actions. That is to say that the content for which Thoreau's writing became most famous for, almost always predicated itself upon the dramatic swings between Thoreau's own public and private lives. This certainly holds for his two most well-known works: "Resistance to Civil Government" and *Walden*. Whereas the mention of the famously reclusive Hawthorne is best understood as a nod to the opposite side of authors as public figures: the solitude which writing requires.

The point is not that Paul Auster wished to copy or become these authors, for as Herald Bloom has already established, his literary masters being Kafka and Beckett are rather un-American in their traditions, and closer to his general aesthetic (1). Rather, Auster stages characters that in a sense play the part of these great American authors, who themselves actively crafted their own author presence. The fact these authors set a performative precedence during a time when the general American reading public was still in its naissance is significant. It seems to point to an American tradition of exigencies that an author like Auster would have to conform to in order to have his highly experimental work be taken seriously. Accordingly, the fatal outcome of Black's mimicry also underscores this delicate balance that a writer must strike in the world beyond the text in order to become an author that is deemed of sufficient originality.

Thus, there is a clearer operation of authority going on in *Ghosts* than is apparent in *City of Glass*. On the one hand, Auster utilizes the past as a sort of cradle for examining

previous examples of authorial *personae* creation while at the same time appropriating them to incubate his own. The engagement with these national literary canonical figures such as Whitman and Thoreau also yields authority through claims of erudition and continuity. Auster seems to attempt to gain authority through endowing his fictional characters with an esoteric knowledge of his literary American predecessors. This suggests a continuity between them and himself, despite their radically different aesthetic approaches, through the mutual act of performance. Thus from out of the literary past Auster finds canonical models in which to base his future *persona*.

Performing Authorship in *Locked Door*

Time has caught up with the real Auster as the trilogy reaches its final instalment, *Locked Door.* He sets his novel in between the years 1978 and May of 1984 in New York, which was roughly the same time he took to compose the trilogy. This is a world less engrossed by the intrigues of crime and mystery and more by the literary publishing industry, in which the real Paul Auster had now himself become increasingly immersed. The story, above all else, asks the question of what happens to a literary text when a public author is not present to answer for it.

The main character, the narrator is given the task to review, publish and ultimately take over the life's work of his childhood friend and author named Fanshawe who, like Stillman and Quinn, has vanished.[7] Initially things seem to go well for the narrator as a budding literary critic. After the first book, *Neverland*, in company with his own salubrious article are published, the narrator quickly finds himself operating the profitable author industry of Fanshawe's unpublished literary works. Describing it as if he were "like an engineer,

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[7] Fanshawe is a reference to Hawthorne's first novel sharing the same name. He published it with his own funds anonymously, and quickly grew ashamed of his book. He worked to recover and hide the remaining copies from the public thus "denying the legitimacy of his work" for the rest of his life (Marling 302).

pushing buttons and pulling levers… adjusting a part here, devising an improvement there… I was the mad scientist who had invented the great hocus-pocus machine" (Auster 233).

Meanwhile the reading public begins to doubt the existence of Fanshawe and speculate that it is the narrator who is responsible for *Neverland*, making him wonder "what it means when a writer puts his name on a book" (Auster 238). As a solution the narrator resolves to write a biography of his deceased friend and settle the Fanshawe myth once and for all. However, after receiving a secret letter from Fanshawe proving he is still alive and wishes to remain incognito, his plan is immediately compromised. The rest of the novel deals with his quest to reveal the details of Fanshawe's early life while maintaining the burden of being the only person to know the truth about his continued existence. Ultimately, it proves to be an unbearable paradox for the narrator as he succumbs to playing the role of the public puppet which the reclusive Fanshawe manipulates and, just like Quinn and Blue do before him, the protagonist becomes obsessed with tracking down his master.

Naturally, this relationship highlights the tension of authority found between readers, literary critics, and authors- particularly deceased ones. The public demands verification of Fanshawe's authorial presence and the narrator's biography project as remedy seems to underline conventional understandings of authority being predicated on an author having the final word over their texts. Moreover, it could be said that the problem demonstrates a greater anxiety over the instability of meaning in literary texts were information on an author's life is not directly available to aid in resolving interpretive queries. In other words, as Berensmeyer points out, authorship is an institution which functions as the "focusing agent[s] for the precarious coherence of a literary text" (22). The narrator hopes to authenticate Fanshawe's texts by offering a characterization of the author, indeed a *persona*, so that his reader's anxiety is alleviated and *Neverland*'s meaning is stabilized. This also justifies the narrator's critical commentary, and in doing so, ensures that his readers continue buying future

Fanshawe titles. Thus, the plot reveals the fragility with which literary texts are accepted in the modern world of mass publishing as well as how consumerist motivations are predicated on the necessity to have access to an authorial presence.

However, Auster confronts this paradox presented in the biography genre head on most clearly in *Locked Door*. The final volume stands out in the trilogy as the most detailed autobiographical expose of Paul Auster's own past. Both in specificity and quantity, there are too many instances to mention, but the point is that their existence provides the material for the narrator's search of Fanshawe's past. It simultaneously offers a partial autobiography of Paul Auster's formative years. After committing himself to writing the book the narrator meditates upon the impossible task of creating a true account of a dead man who is actually still alive:

> We imagine the real story inside the words, and to do this we substitute ourselves for the person in the story, pretending that we can understand him because we understand ourselves. This is a deception. 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 ... – for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself. (Auster 249)

The passage recalls Iser's description of how versions of the self are staged through literature. Staging is made possible due to the fact that no one has access to themselves and thus a substitution, or an imagined version of the self can occur. It also explains the appeal of biography, appearing as a genre based deceivingly on factual presentation of the past. However, as the passage highlights, the narrator realizes he cannot simply present Fanshawe's biography in this way. Instead he must invent, stage, and represent a version of Fanshawe the author for

his readers. Thus the passage is a meditation on the fictionality of biographical narratives which also depend on staging-like operations.

The same could be said about Auster the author since he cannot simply be the real Auster. Rather the real Auster too must invent a version of himself, not "inside the words" but outside of them. He does so through the intimate presentation of details surrounding his early life shared in the novel. While the narrator ultimately rejects writing Fanshawe's biography, Auster, on the other hand, succeeds in a way, and by doing so creates the author *persona* he intends to be.

Locked Door and the trilogy as a whole function like Auster's authorial story, producing his authorial *persona* yet in doing so it reverses the conventional ordering of fiction. Usually, characters are understood to be a subordinate element of the story, that is to say that through a character's actions a story is produced. Yet, as Auster's authorial game between story and authorial *persona* unfolds, it creates a real life character. In what is perhaps the most extra-diegetic intervention by the real Paul Auster in the narrative, the narrator (and/or Auster) recognizes the nearing conclusion of the trilogy:

> The entire story comes down to what happened at the end, and without that end inside me now, I could not have started this book. The same holds for the two books that came before it, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*. The three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about… The story is not in the words it is in the struggle. (Auster 294)

As the passage suggests the narrative throughout the trilogy has been a step-by-step semantic loading of this "end" to which the entire story comes down to, allowing for several different readings. Taken literally it refers to the real and final ending of the novel of *Looked Door*

concluding with the narrator receiving a notebook from Fanshawe which supposedly tells the truth and will answer all of his questions: essentially "the real story inside the words". However, unlike the previous two volumes of the trilogy, this time the narrator destroys the text signaling his acceptance of ambiguity of meaning and suggesting the real text of the novel has also materially reached its conclusion.

Yet, the passage, if read as Auster's own words, which indeed they are, also yields a sense of development by way of each story representing a "different stage" in the author's own "awareness of what it is about". Claiming that he can now see "the end inside of" himself implies that a transformation has occurred. Just as Iser notes that readers never appear to tire themselves by re-exploring the same topic of identity through the infinite fictional worlds, so too has the *New York Trilogy* presented the same story three times (the three separate books) and yet each one yields a unique experience.

Ultimately, for Auster there is no doubt this "same story" refers to his journey towards becoming "the end" or the author he had always wished to be. The last line of the passage is significant due to the reoccurring notion of this "real story" not existing in "words". If "the words" relate to the actual textual aspect of this fiction and the "real story" is the author's journey- an kind of auto-*künstlerroman*, it can then be said that the now self-aware Auster realizes that it is rather in the "struggle", or process of writing itself which has provided him with the stages to turn himself into an author. Hence writing *The New York Trilogy* for Auster is performing, imagining, and ultimately becoming Auster the author. As if stepping out from behind a locked door, Auster's *persona* is now complete.

Conclusion

This thesis could be broadly described as an investigation into how Auster reflects upon the process in which writers become recognized authors. It has taken as its point of departure the notion that authorship is a historically contingent and a socially complex phenomenon which

relies on a series of operations from which authority is granted. This authority has been examined not as a given consequence of writing a text but rather a product of important strategies based in culturally oriented and performative practices.

These perspectives are relevant when looking at the success of Auster, since at the time he began writing the trilogy it was far from certain. He had up until this period immersed himself within a variety of textual disciplines and eruditions, such as translating, poetry, editing, and criticism yet they would not provide him the recognition for which authorship in his time required. At almost 40 years of age, he was faced with new exigencies of imagining, writing and experimentation beyond masterful writing and biography alone- all necessary to provide him with the means to create an authorial other.

By examining the work which provided Paul Auster with his entry into literary notoriety, *The New York Trilogy,* representations of authorship and authority in the text provided suitable material for this analysis. The purpose of this study was to examine how by questioning authority and different authorial models, Auster is able to perform his own authorship. As revealed in the first chapter of this thesis it is argued that Auster begins to stage his authorial *persona* in *City of Glass* by examining his origin as a starving artist and imbedding a metafictional "Paul Auster" character which serves as a model of his future successful self. However, the issue of authority is left open to be resolved in the subsequent volumes. Later in *Ghosts* Auster relies on the past by engaging with authors from the American literary canon who notoriously performed their own authority and authorships. By doing so he roots himself in the American literary canon and thus vests himself with the authority that the canon bestows upon him as a writer. Finally, in *Locked Door* Auster offers his own autobiographical details as an authoritative past, which functions like a backdrop for the conclusion of his own novel of artistic formation, ultimately bringing the trilogy and his own authorial *persona* into completion.

A stylistic return to Borges may be an appropriate rhetorical elucidation of this point. In one of the short stories published quite later in his literary career titled "Borges and I" he examines his relationship to a second Borges- one that his life as a now famous author has created. He begins by noting that it is the other Borges, who is now the famous one, "that things happen to" (Borges, "Borges and I" 701). He draws similarities between the two, yet admits the other's preferences mirror his only "in a vain sort of way that turns them into the accoutrements of an actor." (Borges, "Borges and I" 702). Finally, he concludes: "I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone)… I do not know which of us has written this page" (Borges, "Borges and I" 702). Like many of his other stories Borges relies on himself or at least his name to provide a character for his tale. This character is the public figure of Borges, but not the man himself, and yet the story is understood to be narrated by Borges as well. Hence its ending finishes in ambiguity, neither narrator nor the "other" that he refers to can distinguish who the true Borges is. Carrying a tone of alienation, the brief enumeration of similarities and distances between person and *persona* is perhaps a befitting glimpse into how one author had come to terms with his authorial creation later in life. His narration is thus a brief finale, the closing act to the same expansive project which Auster would embark on almost twenty five years later.

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