

Identity Games and Narration: Paul Auster's Literary Personae

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Abstract: The New York Trilogy by Paul Auster, written between 1985 and 1987, has been cited as an example of postmodern literature. The theme of complex identity is a recurring theme in his novels, and they can be read as an exploration of identity issues in the postmodern era, where the concept of the autonomous subject has given way to a concept of subject and identity marked by uncertainty and ambiguity. And in the realm of narrative fiction, the characters identities are mainly formed by narrative discourse. Identity can be seen "as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character traits." (Shlomith 1983, 59) particularly in postmodern fiction. The importance of narration for establishing identification as well as depicting literary character is an intriguing feature of the study of characters in Auster's works. Furthermore, Rimmon-Kenan Shlomith goes on to identify the primary means of constructing a character in narrative literature, such as direct description, indirect presentation (action, expression, exterior appearance, and environment), and reinforcement by comparison (which is subdivided into analogous names, analogous landscapes, and analogy between characters) in his work dedicated to contemporary poetics. (2002, 59-71) According to sociologist Anthony Giddens, a person's identity can be found "in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going" (1991, 54). Auster sets the characters against a traumatic/post-traumatic backdrop, with the aim of portraying as much of the fantasizing traumatized subject as possible, as well as his reaction to the context in which he is put.

Keywords: Identity, Narrative fiction, postmodernism, loss, trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

In his moral philosophy work *After Virtue*, published in 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre presents a notion of the narrated self. He explains the current state of moral philosophy in his debate as "concept of selfhood, a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative beginning to middle to end" (205). The failure of these narratives leads to meaninglessness and the erasure of self, according to MacIntyre. "When someone complains [...] that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a telos" (217). The need of having people modify and amend one's own life storey is also emphasised: The other aspect of narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable; I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives. (218)

According to psychology and sociology theories, having a solid identity, a sense of basic trust, especially through meaningful relationships with others, and maintaining a consistent biographical storey can all help to strengthen a sense of meaning. One could argue that being able to relate one's tale is necessary for establishing one's identity. This necessitates the ability to see links and relationships between many aspects, as well as the ability to organize details and comprehend causality. This skill or tendency is intimately linked to our overall desire to draw conclusions, even if based on incomplete knowledge, to smooth out irregularities, and to make all details fit together into a logical whole. This process is strongly tied to storytelling and reading, both of which require a high level of these abilities. The narrated self has emerged as a major theory in contemporary self studies. I will argue that the characters' perceptions of themselves are based on their understanding of their stories. Characters in a literary book are created by narration, however in postmodern literature, mimesis is reduced, and narratives are frequently fractured, contradictory, and challenging to the reader's capacity to comprehend the characters as personae. I will aim to emphasize the importance of narratives for characterization in these works, using narrative theory to study the role of narration.

The Concept of Identity and Narration

Identity is complicated, contradictory, and multilayered, identity is dynamic across time and place, identity creates and is produced by language, and ultimately, identity production must be understood in connection to wider social processes, distinguished by coercive or collaborative power relations Peirce (1997). Playing with identities is a crucial component in The New York Trilogy in order to grasp the hunt for meaning, which is typically seen as the novel's most essential theme. Each primary character seeks to re-define himself as a result of experiences with others who question the individual's previous self-perception. The necessity of storytelling for a concept of self is explored here through literary works, as well as palimpsest identity and assumed roles and masks that substitute autonomous identity. The protagonists' unfinished stories are intertwined with the stories of other people, in such a way that their structures fill in the gaps in the primary characters'. Cross-references to parallel identities abound throughout the three novels, both inside and across them (Springer 2001a).

The unity of the self is, as MacIntyre has explained, determined by its unity and Quinn sees the fragments of the stories of his characters, since they are his only form of narration that is presented to him in his isolation. This results in a characteristic complexity in the novel. Because narration is such a powerful part of the support of identity, Quinn is drawn rather to his fictitious characters than to his own true self. The more fictitious he is, he fluctuate between three separate identities as the storey begins, the more real he is to him. As the storey begins to develop, he takes on more complicated roles and masks so that the mystery of his 'case' is resolved. Quinn uses the alias William Wilson to pen his not-so-ambitious detective novels, which are titled after the narrator of an Edgar Allan Poe short storey about doppelgangers. Wilson is also the name of a Mets baseball player that plays centre field. Quinn never made up a life storey for him, thus he doesn't have one. Quinn's detective narrator, "private eye" Max Work, on the other hand, is a figure with whom he has a deep affinity. Work was the one "who gave purpose" (6). "If he lived now in the world at all, it was only through [...]Max Work" (9). He is a persona created through the telling of stories. Quinn's storey has no one to tell or listen to it any longer, whereas Work's storey has an audience, as seen by the scene with the reading girl on the bench. As a result Work's persona feels more real and stronger to Quinn than his own. "it

reassured him to pretend to be Work as he was writing his books, to know that he had it in him to be Work if he ever chose to be, even if only in his mind" (9). Quinn is able to respond to the odd phone request for "Paul Auster," private detective, thanks to this identification. He begins to investigate the Stillman case, which leads to a transformation in his life. However, as he loses more and more of Quinn while becoming the detective, and as he gets lost about the case, he loses his own identity as a result of this role play.

In a postmodern world, identity is polymorphous and changeable. It deconstructs established ideas of identity markers like ego, self, and character in the process of explicating the fluid situation of identity through the idea proposed by Erik Erikson and Norman Holland. These attributes lead also to postmodern identity conflicts in the themes of the novel and thus transform the Quinn character into themed functions (the meaning of a character as a representative entity of the subjects in a text). They are essential for the progress of the novel; Quinn's decision to follow Stillman depends on his qualities. Another example of emphasizing the synthetic nature of the characters is the absurdity of the "Paul Auster" identity, which is so identical to the genuine author's biographical facts. 'The' Character functions are linked to the progression, which is made up of causality and temporality in narration. When certain elements are in short supply, such as When the synthetic function is activated, it directs attention to the Characters' identity difficulties are revealed through the unravelling of their narrated stories themselves. The use of such tactics in literature emphasises the reader's awareness. since the novel is a construct, and the goal of characterization is to Rather than describing a realistic person, investigate a concept. However, it's worth noting that bringing the literary features to the fore allows us to communicate the complexity of post-modern concepts' identity, which differs from more conventional literature, which employs mimesis as a fundamental distinctive method.

The sheer concept of narration involves the presence of a narrator who tells the stories; as a result, the reader's impression of the various characters is influenced by the storytelling approach used as "characters are constructed by the reader" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 119). As described by Frow (1986: 227), "the concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and most undertheorized of the

basic categories of narrative theory. It is perhaps the most widely used of all critical tools, at all levels of analysis and its sheer obviousness disguises the conceptual difficulties it presents” An extra-heteroditic narrator (Genette 1972, 248) may be identified at the beginning of the City of glass who, rather than being involved in the actual storey, uses an external focus or view to connect the events from within, has access and information on the principal figure. The narrator seems to include in his account the storyteller in the use of o f, in the second paragraph, "We know, for example, he was thirty five years old" (3). In the first pages, the narrator makes many judgments on the character of Quinn, explaining his past, his activities and preference to the reader. It is apparent in three identical passages referring to Quin's dreams that the narrator has the opportunity to access any inner thought of characters: 'In his dream which he later forgot, himself [..]' (9, 7 2 , 106). Despite the traces of external focusing, the majority of the novel is however narrated from within Quinn through an internal focal point.

A narrative framework is generally seen as more genuine than fragments, as it provides links that build meaning. Donalt E. Polkinghorne builds parts of his beliefs upon the reasoning of MacIntyre and regards story as an important part of the experience of humanity.

..... [H]uman beings exist in three realms — the material realm, the organic realm, and the realm of meaning. The realm of meaning is structured according to linguistic forms, and one of the most important forms for creating meaning in human existence is the narrative. The narrative attends to the temporal dimension of human existence and configures events into a unity. The events become meaningful in relation to the theme or point of the narrative. Narratives organize events into wholes that have beginnings, middles and ends. (Polkinghorne 1988, 183)

Furthermore, if this applies to the narrated self, it can be suggested that autonomous identities based on a strong narrative must be regarded as more real than ones with less developed biographies; and this conflict play an important part in promoting Auster characters in their battle against conflicting identities. This is seen in the trilogy especially. Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of City of Glass, is confused about his identity as a result of his grief over the loss of his wife and children. Transitional moments like a personal crisis can often lead to a change in one's perception of self-identity (Giddens 1991, 143).

Crises as an important factor in Auster's works have been treated extensively by Springer (2001b).

Loss as Identity Shaper: The author's writings have a leitmotif that generates countless identity games: loss is the key factor of the search for identity. In *The City of Glass*, Auster's first excellent fiction novel, the protagonist Daniel Quinn suffers the same loss of family members - wife and boy – but the sorrow is not as overt. a disadvantage. Auster returned to the same starting place fifteen years after finishing the trilogy and wrote a storey based on *City of Glass*. The revival of *The Book of Illusions* after crisis of its main character is affected by its meeting with a man supposed to have been dead many decades before. It is the reconstruction that leads Zimmer back into life of the missing moviemaker's escape from its identity. In this novel are also the parallels of various identities, but the importance of relationships with others is explored more thoroughly. In *The Book of Illusions*, on the other hand, loss is followed with tremendous agony, a sensation of nothingness, and the inability to find a reason to keep living. David Zimmer is at a loss for words, unable to cope with his new situation. In an attempt to cope, David seeks sanctuary in "wandering across the world, gazing at silent comedies." 6 Another method to try to transcend the emptiness of Hector Mann's existence would be to write a book about him. His entire life was centered on "books, language, and the written word." (7) The silent films provided a new perspective and a fresh sense to the audience. His existence appears to be meaningless. As he characterises himself, David insists on his inner strength. as he puts it, his inner life, which is more significant than his physical appearance. (9) "For several months, I lived in a blur of alcoholic grief and self-pity, rarely stirring from the house, rarely bothering to eat or shave or change my clothes. (...) When I wasn't drunk or sprawled out on the living room sofa watching television, I spent my time wandering around the house." (8)

Most of the characters in Auster's novels are narrative constructs, and the focus of the following section of the paper will be on Hector Mann, the narrative construct of David Zimmer, the novel's narrator who struggles to account for his hero's verisimilitude when there are no more proofs of his existence Following Hector's death, his wife was tasked with destroying the former actor's body as well as his films. As a result, there's no clear evidence that Mann ever existed.

Hector is the major character in *The Silent World of Hector Mann*, but he is also the focus of David's metanarration, in which he goes beyond the silent comedian's films and attempts to rebuild the charade through memory and narrative discourse. Zimmer brings up a word from Chateaubriand's writings that Hector Mann has highlighted in his book *The Book of Illusions*, and it appears to be the key to understanding both personalities in terms of crises.: "The book fell open somewhere in the middle, and I saw that one of the sentences had been underlined faintly in pencil. *Les moments de crise produisent un redoublement de vie chez les hommes. Moments of crisis produce a redoubled vitality in men*" (238) The tale, as Anthony Giddens says, or the autobiography, may be seen as one "among many other possible stories which may be related about her evolution as a self" since Auster's work bears the traits of autobiographical stories (the trait rarely seen in postmodern metafiction). 55. Of course, in the case of *The Book of Illusions*, only we, the readers, are aware of the writing's fictitious nature and the narrator's unreliability, as he has been greatly traumatised by the losses he has suffered, as well as the mourning period that followed, during which he sank into heavy drinking and isolation.

Like *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*' narrator appears to be outerdiegetic, apart from the story. The focus is inner, within the events of blue and most of the novels, and the narrator sometimes closely follows his view and coincides with the thoughts of blue. However, there is an ironic distance from the main character at certain points, especially at the beginning and at the end, and everything can be seen through an outside focuser with access to knowledge beyond the thoughts of the characters. "Little does Blue know, of course, that the case will continue on for years," the narrator says, pinpointing the plot's start in 1947. (136). The reader is also placed at a distance from the events through the narrator's statement "Who are we to blame him" (157). Other characters' focalization is never used by the narrator. Even though the narrator does not see Black's point of view, we learn that he does provides information on him and White (163), such as when he Blue will gain a complete comprehension of the storey if he reads it slowly in this case. These external focalization portions convey the idea that the narrator is telling this storey to make a point, rather than to achieve the realism of a detective novel. When describing the facts in the beginning, the narrator conveys a strong feeling of organising, interpretation, and control, for

example, when he states that it all begins with White going in through the entrance. The narrator expresses his opinion on what is significant, and the selection of information appears to be quite deliberate, with the majority of them being kept to a minimum.

In *Ghosts*, the narrative method emphasises the characters' foregrounded synthetic dimension much more than in the other two works. The focalization is external, and the narrator is more overt than in the others, and the location serves as an encouragement to interpret the story as if it were a hypothetical circumstance. The use of present tense in the main narrative also suggests that the author is depicting a hypothetical situation rather than telling a storey, and this is true throughout the text except for the retrospective sections, in which Blue reflects on other people's stories or his own past outside the scope of the narrated time.

The Locked Room uses a different storytelling method than the other two. Even if there is a narrator-protagonist telling his own story, he is placed in an extradiegetic writing scenario seven years after the main plot begins, above the actual diegetic or story level. "Seven years ago this November, I received a letter from a woman named Sophie Fanshawe" The narrator's focalization and voice are mostly his because he is homodiegetic and tells his storey in the first person. "My struggle to remember things as they really were, I see now" (209) highlights how, despite the fact that the narrator is the same age, there is a significant contrast in time and experience between the narrator's writing circumstance when all is over and when the storey begins seven years earlier. It is never obvious what kind of understanding he has gained. The narrator's account is presented in retrospect, which establishes some distance between the material and the narrator; yet, some of the events, particularly the climactic scene, are given without signs. As if nothing had transpired after that, in hindsight. The impact on the environment the reader interprets this as the end of the novel, and associates the tearing of the pages with the end of the story from the notebook scene to the overall conclusion of the storey. As a result, the characterization approaches completion and reaches structure completeness. Unlike the other two stories in the trilogy, where the storytelling style builds a barrier between the characters and the audience, this one does not described events as though taking a step back, regardless of how obstructed or opaque the vision was. This conclusion is unique in that it depicts the character's reaction to the

situation. As a result, it becomes vital to our perception of the narrator's return to a new life after Fanshawe's obliteration.

The narration's power strengthens identity, but it also causes identification issues, such as not being able to tell who is who. The point is whether these double-gangers are to be read as one or two characters, as each seems to be mirror-reflections of one other (Springer 2001b, 127). At the same time, they seem to be more realistic than Quinn, or Blue, than the other main characters in the trilogy. This is due to the employment of internal focus by the homodiegetic narrator, which leads to a more "realistic" psychology because we presumably read a person's thoughts from within his own head rather than from an outside narrator, as in the other two works. The background of the synthetic dimensions of the characters is shown in this novel by the ambiguity of the two characters, and the two other novels of the trilogy are not as pronounced. The question of the combination of the character is never clear, but it points out other people's problems in the form of the mirror image confusing with someone else.

In order to comprehend the narrator's motivations, MacIntyre's views on using storytelling to communicate identity become crucial. Writing Fanshawe's biography appeals to him as a means of gaining control over him. However, his writing difficulties led him to consider the difficulty of depicting a person based on biographical data. The narrative of one's identity is crucial in this case: a person would listen to a tale about another person and develop a "true" tale about the person based on the outer facts, providing the false impression that he knows who the other is. In an interview, Auster stated that it is difficult to relate to the lives of others since we don't know enough about them, let alone ourselves, to write a reliable biography (Skrderud 2002, 64). Other subsidiary or minor character narratives are also prominent in this work, as is *mise en abyme* (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 93).

Auster returned to the same starting place fifteen years after finishing the trilogy and created a novella based on *City of Glass*. The main character's rebirth after a crisis in *The Book of Illusions* is impacted by a meeting with a guy who is believed to have died many decades before. Zimmer is brought back to life by retracing the missing filmmaker's escape from his identity. Although there are connections between different identities in this work, the value of relating to others is examined in greater depth. The significant usage of mirrored identities and

characters in the New York Trilogy is replicated in this work, although in a new fashion. As the example of parallelism between Mann and Chateaubriand shows, it is more an issue of events than full persons that are mirrored. The similar link may be found between Zimmer and Mann, where crises and losses are replicated. The parallels between Mann and Zimmer, according to Zimmer, indicate a connection between them. As he learns more about Hector Mann, his affinity with him grows, and both Alma and Hector have a significant impact on him. There are several levels to *The Book of Illusions'* narration. Zimmer's usage as a homodiegetic narrator is straightforward, but it is his use of a Chinese box principle to connect other stories, as well as his use of distinct diegetic levels and a complexity of story and discourse time span, that adds to the plot. Characters have gained mimetic proportions, similar to the approach used in *The Locked Room*; but, unlike the sketched-out setting described in *Ghosts*, the synthetic is not as prominent, giving *The Book of Illusions* a more conventional shape. Zimmer is a more homodiegetic narrator than the narrator of *The Locked Room*, but he is nevertheless able to maintain a greater distance from the events, owing to the fact that he has had the chance to adapt and gain an insight that this narrator lacks.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to demonstrate that the protagonists' battles with identity creation within the four novels have varying outcomes counting on how successfully they are ready to build and sustain their own narratives, yet as learn from the tales of others. There's a pattern to how these four personalities handle their problems. Quinn is that the polar opposite. He becomes overly identified with Stillman and his stories, and he becomes lost in his passion; his disappearance appears imminent. When he tries to place together the fragments of his many identities, he finishes up being nobody, a bit like Stillman's son, and every one the risks of human dignity deprivation are revealed. Blue includes a hazy understanding of who he is and therefore the mystery surrounding his predicament, but he discovers himself for the primary time through the mirror reflection of a tale that's similar to his own, led by a personality named Blue.. Some self-understanding is accomplished by confrontation together with his difficult opponent, instead of stagnation and dissolution, as is that the case with Quinn. The situation is comparable for the third novel's anonymous narrator, who discovers that his sense of self

is imperilled since his childhood friend's tale is so linked together with his own. The narrator ends his retracing of his friend's storey by tearing up the notebook that he substitutes for Fanshawe's stories give him nothing and must be destroyed to free him;. The narrator is in a position to relinquishing of his addiction and return to the planet of people, symbolised by his family, by destroying the notebook. Both the narrator and Blue start to return out of their shells and reconnect with people and therefore the outer world. Mann's stories, both in his biography and in his films, have helped Zimmer return to something. Because he can empathise with Mann's problem and break through his isolation, Zimmer's role as a reader of Mann's biographical narrative affects his perspective on himself. Another man's storey becomes a mirrored image of his own troubles. In contrast to the first protagonists within the trilogy's first two novels, who fail at relationships, and also the third novel's narrator, who only returns to his wife after the crisis has passed, Zimmer's interaction with Alma becomes an important a part of his development. The use of the narrator-narratee connection as a literary device reflects the reader's impression of the characters as personae. There appears to be a shift in Auster's manner here, parallel to the maturation of the characters; the more accessible storylines also approach solutions to these people's identity issues. Auster's literary experiment in characterization provides an arena in which the complexity of narration as a means of constructing identities may be dealt with, while postmodern narrative self-reflexivity techniques provide a literary structure for these themes.

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