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The Writings of/on Mirror-Imaged Others in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

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Once, I had given birth to a thousand imaginary souls. Now, eight years later, I was going to take a living man and put him in his grave. [...] The two actions were opposite and identical, mirror images of one another. —Paul Auster

Introduction

Paul Auster's first three novels, *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986), subsequently published as *The New York Trilogy* (1987), have been reviewed in relation to the genre of detective fiction. The most influential suggestion to read them as a deconstruction of the genre was made by Alison Russell in 1990. In response to Russell's frequently cited label as "anti-detective fiction" (97), which she borrowed from Stefano Tani, Scott A. Dimovitz argues that the trilogy "exploits the already exhausted antidetective genre to explore dimensions of ontology, ultimately reaffirming a metaphysical system in which chance overrides all questions of postmodern indeterminacy" (614). He emphasizes the importance of the theme of doubles in the trilogy, relating this to the ontological subjectivity: "Doubles proliferate repeatedly not to disseminate the notion of subjectivity, but rather to underscore the notion that these characters each reflect different ontological dimensions of the self" (625). Moreover, other critics, such as Jeffery T. Nealon and Madeleine Sorapure point out the synchronicity between the role of the detective and that of the author. While Sorapure refers to Russell's criticism by awkwardly re-labelling it as a "meta-anti-detective" approach (72), Nealon argues that Auster transforms the role of the

detective from detective-as-reader to detective-as-writer (95).

These critical responses to the trilogy encourage us to read it as a writer-centered story, highly concerned with notions of subjectivity. To be sure, this book can be interpreted as invoking theories of postmodern subjectivity, but we need to read it more closely to find subtle differences in the nuances of the three stories, and find a key motif with which we can move to Auster's other works. This motif, I would argue, is a mirror, where images of self are split, reflected, and propagated. This paper will demonstrate that the three stories in Auster's *The New York Trilogy* seek to illustrate the different stages of facing mirror images as "others," in a quest of what it means to write *on* someone, to attain the writing *of* someone, and to be subject in the writing *of* someone. Auster's protagonists engage in writing about someone they know, but simultaneously, become the subjects of someone else's writing. In the first section of this paper, we see how *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* utilize certain narrative devices of pseudonyms and masks for propagating several identities, like holding a mirror to oneself, and how the protagonists stray into a labyrinth of these mirror-imaged others, lost in an I-narrator's narrations. In the second section, we focus on *The Locked Room* in a comparison with the former two, to examine how its first-person narrator describes the mirror-imaged other incarnated as the character Fanshawe. While the first two stories in the trilogy exhibit the process in which the writer-character's self faces the impossibility of accepting the other, the third assumes the alternative attitude of embracing the unreachable other, which is a necessity for the act of writing.

The Other as the Propagated Mirror Images of the Writer—*City of Glass* and *Ghosts*

In both *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, the protagonists write a notebook or reports on the cases they manage. The objects of their vigils are the physical others they face, but what is important is, rather, the multiple mirror-imaged others whom they create from their own mirrored selves in search of the physical others. There are two ways to see the mirrored relationships in these stories: firstly, the way the protagonists feel like mirroring other people when they see them; and secondly, the way in which they use the principle of mirroring to multiply

their self-images. In the latter case, both protagonists have certain devices to multiply their mirror-imaged selves as alternative faces toward the other characters: pseudonyms and masks. This section examines the relationship between propagated mirror images and the act of writing as the embodiment of the mirroring processes.

Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of *City of Glass*, was once a writer who used two different pseudonyms, William Wilson, his pen name, and Max Work, the detective hero of his fictional works. However, when the story begins, Quinn notices that he confronts the predicament of writing with this threesome of Quinn, William Wilson, and Max Work:

Since finishing the latest William Wilson novel two weeks earlier, he [Quinn] had been languishing. His private-eye narrator, Max Work, had solved an elaborate series of crimes, had suffered through a number of beatings and narrow escapes, and Quinn was feeling somewhat exhausted by his efforts. Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. (6)

Here we can see the peculiar relations between the three personae. In Quinn's head, while the fictional character Max Work becomes as real as he is, William Wilson plays the role of a ventriloquist. Quinn's notion of divided self as author invokes the argument of the "author function," which, following the concept of "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault defines as something that "does not refer purely and simply to a real individual," but rather "can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects" (386). The interesting point, unique to Auster, is that he depicts his triad as an extension of one human figure: the ventriloquist. We need to remember that it is not Quinn but William Wilson who plays the role of the ventriloquist. In the usual scenario of the split authorial self, the author is the ventriloquist who creates the multiple voices of his characters, mimicking their languages. Instead, Auster makes the author Quinn the passive dummy without power to manage the "enterprise." The

degradation of Quinn into the puppet of his pseudonyms, Wilson and Work, augurs Quinn's loss of identity as an author.

At the beginning of the story, Quinn pretends to be "Paul Auster," the detective, during a misplaced phone call he answers one night. By disguising himself as the detective Auster, Quinn begins to get lost in the labyrinth of pseudonyms. The first and most significant encounter is with the client Peter Stillman Jr.¹⁾ A physical other, as counterpart to Quinn-Auster, Stillman speaks evasively, repeatedly denying statements, and especially his true identity. For instance, he says, "My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. My real name is Mr Sad. What is your name, Mr Auster? Perhaps you are the real Mr Sad, and I am no one" (17). Quinn, under the pseudonym of Auster is affected by his encounter with Stillman Jr. On returning home, he records in his notebook how this meeting created his new personality:

To remember what it feels like to wear other people's clothes. [...] And then, most important of all: to remember who I am. To remember who I am supposed to be. I do not think this is a game. On the other hand, nothing is clear. For example: who are you? And if you think you know, why do you keep lying about it? I have no answer. All I can say is this: listen to me. My name is Paul Auster. That is not my real name. (40)

Quinn is influenced by Stillman Jr.'s way of speaking, as if mirroring the latter's thought and language. However, he does not say that he becomes entirely another person once he acquires his pseudonym, but, balanced on the wall like Humpty Dumpty, he tries in vain not to fall into the black hole of being no one.

Being the detective Paul Auster, indeed, entails a risk of losing his identity as Quinn, author of detective stories. Stillman Jr. assigns Quinn to watch and protect him from his father, Stillman Sr. However, at their first meeting, the detective introduces himself as Quinn, "[s]ince 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" (74). The concept of the truth, here, becomes an invention, which reduces the binary opposition between truths and lies to nil. Stillman Sr.'s response, however, surpasses Quinn's tactic of pretending to be another, by listing words which pun on the name "Quinn," as

“twin,” “sin,” “in,” and “inn” (74). Confronted by the puns, Quinn loses the protection afforded by his pseudonym “Quinn,” which turns out to be interchangeable with other words.

When he meets Stillman Sr. for the second time, Quinn calls himself “Henry Dark,” the name of a theologian from Stillman Sr.’s academic thesis. However, Quinn’s attempt to make another impression fails when Stillman Sr. reveals that Henry Dark is his invention, not a real activist-scholar. He created the protagonist of his thesis to conceal his own idea; in other words, he used the pseudonym for reasons similar to Quinn, who once used different names to write his detective stories. As Stillman Sr. explains, “I needed him [Henry Dark], you see. I had certain ideas at the time that were too dangerous and controversial. So I pretended they had come from someone else. It was a way of protecting myself” (80). This means that the pseudonym Henry Dark, which Quinn chooses, is fictional, and the authenticity of his adopted persona is thwarted. Instead, Quinn becomes aware of the dangerous ambiguity that the name creates when Stillman Sr. claims that the name arose from Humpty Dumpty, “the purest embodiment of the human condition,” or “a prophet, a man who spoke truths the world was not ready for” (81).

In their third meeting, Quinn is wary of Stillman Sr.’s uncanny and repeated misidentification of him. Then, in a bold attempt, Quinn calls himself Peter Stillman, that is, an attempt at the most radical mirror image of both Stillmans as himself. Stillman Sr. is quite surprised, because his name is also Peter Stillman, but when Quinn says, “I’m the other Peter Stillman,” he chooses to incorrectly identify Quinn with his own son Peter Stillman Jr. He says, “Oh. You mean my son. Yes, that’s possible. You look just like him. Of course, Peter is blond and you are dark. Not Henry Dark, but dark of hair. But people change, don’t they? One minute we’re one thing, and the another another” (84). His remark, however, is not a simple misunderstanding, but an ironic play on the concept of personal identity and duplicity. Apparently, Stillman Sr. no longer believes in the appearance of visual differences. Thus, there is nothing left for Quinn to identify himself with authentically as the other for Stillman Sr., and at the same time, Quinn can identify himself with everything. This is how Quinn propagates his mirror images by both self-denial and by being denied one identity after another.

In this a confusion of pseudonyms, the relationship between father and son

is very important, and this theme appears repeatedly in the story. Not only does Quinn play the role of the son Peter in the scene above, the name “Peter” also designates Quinn’s dead son. The most impressive scene that represents the father-son relationship is when Quinn sees the “real” Paul Auster, who is not a detective but a writer, and his son Daniel. In addition to Quinn’s bewilderment about Auster “taunting him with the things he had lost” (101), that is, Quinn’s wife and son, there is a strange dis/connection between what turns out to be two “Daniel”s:

Auster saw the yoyo in his hand and said, ‘I see you’ve already met. Daniel,’ he said to the boy, ‘this is Daniel.’ And then to Quinn, with that same ironic smile, ‘Daniel, this is Daniel.’

The boy burst out laughing and said, ‘Everybody’s Daniel!’
‘That’s right,’ said Quinn. ‘I’m you, and you’re me.’ (102)

Then, when Quinn is about to leave, the boy tells him, “Goodbye myself!” (102). The motifs—the conversation, the yoyo, and Auster’s inquiry to Quinn to see if he can get Quinn’s number on the phone book (to which Quinn replies to the effect that his name is the only one in the book [102], but it turns out to be impossible because Quinn never actually returns to his apartment)—all designate one thing: Daniel Quinn’s self which proceeds extreme proliferation is entrapped in an infinite circulation through a labyrinth of pseudonyms. The father-son relationship is important here because it functions as a kind of mirror, a motif that creates a certain similarity between different people.

By these encounters with others in the guise of multiple mirror-imagined selves, Quinn loses the power of his pseudonyms and his self-identity as the detective author Quinn. The following scene provides the moment when he literally faces a mirror and becomes unable to retrieve an identifiable image of himself. After a prolonged vigil, watching the building where Stillman Sr. is supposed to be, Quinn looks into the mirror on the façade of a shop, only to find “a stranger” instead of himself (120). This change occurs not only because of his long surveillance watching the building on the street, but also because he mentally loses the idea of himself. Quinn finds the loss of no importance:

He [Quinn] tried to remember himself as he had been before, but he found it difficult. He looked at this new Quinn and shrugged. It did not really matter. He had been one thing before, and now he was another. It was neither better nor worse. It was different, and that was all. (121)

The fluidity of his self-identity is the results of his using pseudonyms as he encounters with others, such as Stillman Jr., Stillman Sr., Paul Auster, and his son Daniel.

Quinn is also deprived of his identity as a writer. Through his encounter with another professional writer Paul Auster, Quinn affirms that he is no longer the writer whose name Auster knows from the cover of Quinn's old book of poetry (93). Then the final and decisive attack on his identity as a writer comes from the new occupant of his apartment, a woman who shouts that he does not look like a writer (126). Consequently, Quinn finds that he is remote from the time he wrote the detective stories, "He remembered the books he had written under the name of William Wilson. It was strange, he thought, that he had done that, and he wondered now why he had. In his heart, he realized that Max Work was dead" (128). Now that Max Work, the voice of his ventriloquist, is silenced, Quinn is confronted with the paradox of using pseudonyms and concludes that the practice is in vain.

Even after discarding his identity as an author, Quinn keeps writing his red notebook, in fear of what will happen when he uses up all the pages. In other words, his fear arises from a suspicion that he has become mere words on the page, rather than a human who lives outside the notebook as author. The culmination of this expectation is achieved when the perspective of the narration suddenly changes to someone who finds and reads the notebook and states, "The last sentence of the red notebook reads: 'What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?'" (132). Thus, Quinn's writing *on* the case of the Stillmans (and also on himself) turns into the writings *of* the other, an indeterminate meta-narrator. For the I-narrator who appears here reduces Quinn to a character made out of words. Thus, as a consequence of losing his authority as a writer, Quinn cannot be the author of his antidetective adventures, as he once did in his detective stories, but becomes a figure written by the hidden narrator.

Ghosts, the second tale in the trilogy, follows a similar format, in which the

protagonist loses himself in his encounters with the physical other and disseminations of his mirrored self-images. The differences between *Ghosts* and the previous novel are mainly on these three points: firstly, the protagonist Blue is not a novelist, or a literary person, but a professional detective; secondly, he uses masks and disguises instead of pseudonyms, when he encounters his target Black; and thirdly, in the end, he eliminates Black, his mirror-imaged other.

Blue is a professional private-eye, unlike Quinn's pretense. Thus, his writing takes the form of case reporting in concise and matter-of-fact statements about the target of his surveillance. Significantly, before Blue takes on the Black case, he observes, "[w]ords are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world" (148). This is a traditional way of seeing language as a tool for representing reality. However, when he encounters the case of Black, he finds himself in a "predicament" concerning representation (149):

There is the notebook, of course, but when he looks through it to see what he has written, he is disappointed to find such paucity of detail. It's as though his words, instead of drawing out the facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear. [...] At this point, Blue can only surmise what the case is not. To say what it is, however, is completely beyond him. [...] Blue brings himself up short, realizing that they have nothing really to do with Black. This isn't the story of my life, after all, he says. I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself. (149)

Blue confronts the problem of writing about Black—that writing about Black is almost paradoxically equal to writing about himself—and his idea of the transparency of language is flawed. This predicament shows his writing is only going to a dead end because he is enclosed within the endless self-referential circle without outlet. Blue thus realizes "that they [his statements concerning Black] have nothing really to do with Black," and gets confused to the extent that he has to say to himself, "I'm supposed to be writing about him, not myself" (149).

Surveilling Black, at a distance from across the street, gradually has an effect on Blue, as it were, of looking into a mirror. While what Black actually thinks remains a mystery, Blue starts to copy Black: buying the same book, walking the same streets to the extent that Blue senses a harmony between them—a sense

that he can predict what Black is doing without looking at him. However, this peculiar relationship that exists when he sees and mimics his mirror image across the street prevents Blue from reaching into the interior of the other, in a similar way of self-identification that Blue notices when he writes about Black. This can also be considered as a separation between written words and their object of representation, another variation of the technique of *City of Glass*, when Quinn is infected by the discourse of Stillman Jr., who repeatedly negates his identity. This endless loop of self-reference as an inability to reach the other is a central idea of the trilogy.

In order to escape the cycle of slippery identification, Blue decides to make a contact with his target, an irregularity in detective work. In preparation for meeting Black, Blue disguises himself as new identities. At one point, he puts on tattered clothes, a white beard and long hair to create a local homeless man Jimmy Rose. In another instance, he concocts the persona of "a jovial blowhard by the name of Snow, a life insurance salesman from Kenosha, Wisconsin" (181). Like a writer who invents his fictional characters, Blue propagates his alternative selves, both inventing and playing the role of his characters. As we can see from the fact that all the names in *Ghosts* have something to do with color, visual information is an important theme. The use of masks (the client White wears a Halloween mask) and Blue's art of disguise support this observation. The emphasis on visual images in *Ghosts* can be compared with, and contrasted to the use of language in *City of Glass*. Masks have technically the same role as pseudonyms, to conceal the real identity by fabrication. The tactic of concealing reality is highly important in both stories because it leads to the protagonists' loss of their "real" identity. In other words, there is no longer a certain stable identity, under the layers of invented personae produced by pseudonyms and masks.

In spite of the similar functions of pseudonyms and masks, the stories end quite differently. While *City of Glass* ends with the disappearance of Quinn without any explicit confrontation with someone who trapped him in, *Ghosts* concludes with a battle between Blue and Black, which Blue wins. Blue punches Black because he feels uneasy in seeing himself reflected by Black. Blue ends the mirrored relationship by exercising his physical power. However, the action of smashing his mirror image also leads Blue to deny the image of himself. Blue is not aware of this, but before being struck down, Black explains why he makes

Blue observe him:

To remind me [Black] of what I supposed to be doing. Every time I looked up, you [Blue] were there, watching me, following me, always in sight, boring into me with your eyes. You were the whole world to me, Blue, and I turned you into my death. You're the one thing that doesn't change, the one thing that turns everything inside out. (196)

Here, Black explains that, in order to exist, he needs to be observed. When Black says Blue was the whole world to him, he means that the world is the mirror image he sees in Blue, through the eyes of his opponent. Thus, Blue is the mirror of Black and to transgress the boundary between the two worlds means death. Black strays very close to that boundary by allowing his mirror image, Blue, to contact him. Then, Blue, who understands nothing of this reciprocity, employs force to transgress the mirror surface to the other side.

Since Blue loses Black, the other, who makes his self-image stable as the image, he must be narrated by a third party. Without explaining why the first-person narrator knows the story, as in *City of Glass*, the narrator sees Blue from a distant and detached perspective. This retrieval of the protagonist by the first-person narrator is necessary in both cases, because neither maintains their alter egos embodied by pseudonyms and masks. Nor do they maintain their balanced reciprocal relationship. They are deprived of any personality as the author of their writing, which is lost in multiple mirror images. Thus, they cannot write themselves in their own words, but only written by those of another.

In this way, *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* are variations on a theme of how one's identity gets confused, troubled, and lost among relationship with others, by disseminating personalities into a number of pseudonyms and masks. This risky relationship between self and other is based on the necessity of an objective perspective in the act of writing. However, as both Quinn and Blue show in their writing, the perspective of the other is unreachable. They are examples of how one acts upon the other as mirror image of self. What *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* present in this respect is that the mirrored propagation of names and images is the source of Auster's problematic notions of self and other, and the relation of self-identity to the act of writing that permeates his writing career.

Embrace of the Unreachable Other by Writing—*The Locked Room*

While the protagonists in the first two novels of the trilogy fail to have their own voices with which they narrate their stories in the first-person, the story of *The Locked Room* is narrated by a first-person narrator. In this change, the most important factor is the function of the mirror-imaged others' writings which are handed over, read, modified, lost, or destroyed by the protagonist. Auster develops this key motif of the mirror-imaged other into the theme of treating not only writings *on* the other but also *of* the other.

The mirror relationship between two personae, the unnamed I-narrator and his old friend Fanshawe, is apparent from the beginning of *The Locked Room*. Fanshawe acts as the other self of the narrator, which parallels the relationship between Blue and Black. This appears in the very first part of the story: "It seems to me now that Fanshawe was always there. He is the place where everything begins for me, and without him I would hardly know who I am" (201); "He was a ghost I carried around inside me, a prehistoric figment, a thing that was no longer real" (202). The sense of being with Fanshawe, of possessing the other figure in himself, is important, and distinct from the similar sense of the other two protagonists, Quinn and Blue. The narrator's position in narrating Fanshawe's story is supported by a sense of the impossibility of understanding his other self, reflected in Fanshawe. That is, Fanshawe is not only a friend of the narrator, but also another self within himself which he knows nothing about. He explains that this me-as-a-stranger feeling is inherent in the process of storytelling as follows:

We all want to be told stories, and we listen to them in the same way we did when we were young. 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, 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. (249)

What is important here is that he relates the act of reading stories to the subject of the unknowability of oneself. What the anonymous narrator “I” wants is Fanshawe’s story, which had been a mystery to him after they had parted. Subsequently, Fanshawe’s wife asks the narrator to accept the bulk of Fanshawe’s manuscripts, contained in the two suitcases that are “as heavy as a man” (210). The anonymous narrator is thus aware that he does not understand himself as well as Fanshawe.

The story then proceeds to an anecdote about having invented many names when the “I” was working as a census taker in Harlem. He enjoys inventing names and familial relationships, instead of visiting the actual residences. He says, “It was not precisely like making up characters in a story,” because “[a]s opposed to the story writer, I was offering my creations directly to the real world, and therefore it seemed possible to me that they could affect this real world in a real way” (251-52). Even though he is aware of the difference between fiction making and inventing names on the census paper, in the next paragraph, it is clear that he connects them to a certain extent:

All this came back to me when I sat down to write about Fanshawe. Once, I had given birth to a thousand imaginary souls. Now, eight years later, I was going to take a living man and put him in his grave. I was the chief mourner and officiating clergyman at this mock funeral, and my job was to speak the right words, to say the thing that everyone wanted to hear. The two actions were opposite and identical, mirror images of one another. (252)

On the one hand, inventing names means turning something imaginary into reality. On the other hand, writing about a “real” human named Fanshawe means putting him into a text and converting him into a character which the text organizes. Instead of creating numerous others with names, the narrator now tries to face the particular mirror-imaged other, Fanshawe. In this sense, the significance of mirroring oneself into the image of the other shifts from the over propagation of selves into one particular other, and this is also reflected in the difference between the first two stories in the trilogy and *The Locked Room*. This makes it possible to embrace the other within oneself. As the narrator uses the terms of life and death, it is indeed a big exercise of power in transgressing the

borderline between the living and the dead, through naming someone and converting their persona into words.

The unnamed narrator also experiences his predicament in writing the biography of Fanshawe, that is, the writing *on* the other. The problem of names recurs as a sign of the predicament of losing one's identity, just as we have seen in *City of Glass*. In *The Locked Room*, the "I"'s use of pseudonyms in the next scene is more imminent and dangerous; he literally comes close to the death of his self. In order to gather materials for Fanshawe's biography, after all of his manuscripts have been published, the "I" goes to Paris where Fanshawe lived for a time. Taking great pains to search for the people who knew Fanshawe, little by little he loses track of himself. His sense of identity disintegrates, and he says, "I encounter images of myself in various places" (293). The repetition of reflexive personal pronouns shows that there is a division within himself, between who acts and who perceives the actions as: "I see myself falling down drunk on the street [...]. I see myself sitting in a movie theatre [...]. I see myself prowling the rue Saint-Denis at night [...]. I see my cock being sucked, I see myself on a bed with two girls [...]" (293).

He comes then to the realization that "he [Fanshawe] was gone—and I was gone along with him" (294). With this notion, he crawls into a bar, and finds it amusing to use the pseudonym, Herman Melville, and to name one of the customers Fanshawe. He insists, "This man was Fanshawe because I said he was Fanshawe" (296). This violent attribution of the fake names shows the power of naming and identification, which decides one's role in the world. The anonymous "I" names himself Melville, the author who wrote "[t]he one about the whale," enquiring of the stranger, "Perhaps you've read some of my books" (296). The power of naming is connected here to the act of writing, of being an author. The attribution of names, however, betrays his expectation because he is punched repeatedly by the man he called Fanshawe, who ironically claims his real name is Peter Stillman. This violent reaction makes the "I" realize the failure of his attempt to question the attribution of identity. In his search for Fanshawe, by pseudonyms and falsified attribution, he has come close to losing his own identity.

This predicament of the narrator's self, however, unlike Quinn or Blue, does not lead to the fatal destruction of his self as author. He chooses to return to

Manhattan and distances himself from all things about Fanshawe, without completing the biography, or saying a word about him. This period of silence makes the narrator understand that Fanshawe is like the death of himself, something he must have within, but must avoid until the last moment:

I learned to live with him in the same way I lived with the thought of my own death. Fanshawe himself was not death—but he was like death, and he functioned as a trope for death inside me. If not for my breakdown in Paris, I never would have understood this. I did not die there, but I came close, and there was a moment, perhaps there were several moments, when I tasted death, when I saw myself dead. There is no cure for such an encounter. Once it happens, it goes on happening; you live with it for the rest of your life. (301)

The encounter with the notion of his own death, in the figure of the other, becomes an essential factor of his sense of self, and at the same time it invites him to his destruction. This knowledge differentiates the narrator from the other protagonists of the trilogy, Quinn and Blue, in the sense that he accepts an unreachable existence as the other within himself. In other words, a definite part of him is Fanshawe, the other, and the most important thing is that he knows that he can never reach it, just as one cannot reach beyond a mirror. However hard he tries to reach the other in himself, this cannot be achieved. This quest for the other is, in the strictest meaning, oriented toward his own death.

This acceptance of Fanshawe as the other self of the narrator is crucial to the final twist at the end of the story—an encounter with Fanshawe through a locked door. The narrator can only hear Fanshawe's voice behind the door, without seeing nor touching him directly, and this exemplifies the unreachability of the other within him. Once, the narrator said that he was imagining Fanshawe in a locked room in his head (293). Now that he actually comes to the front of that door where Fanshawe locks himself in, the narrator learns that his expectation has become true. Despite his effort to reach him, Fanshawe resists, but he insists the narrator take his notebook. After a harsh dispute, the narrator agrees, leaving Fanshawe and his own death in the room. The narrator reads the notebook, but immediately after finishing it, he tears the pages one at a time, and

tosses them into a garbage can. This recurring motif of discarding the manuscripts of the other in this instance means that the narrator, rejected by Fanshawe, now rejects him. This is a symbolic action of separation, rather than an actual separation between self and imagined other that represents the ambivalent relation of being *with* the other who maintains a remote alterity. The unnamed narrator chooses not to smash the mirror as Blue did, but instead, takes the writing of the other and discards it. This shows that he, the unnamed narrator, is the author of this story, not Fanshawe.

Therefore, one can say that the coexistence of separated selves is necessary to the act of writing. Writing needs the objective perspective of the third person. Auster invents this perspective by holding the figure of the other within himself. These other selves are at first captured as multiple mirror images, exemplified by the use of pseudonyms and masks, and when he encounters physical others whom he recognizes in himself as their mirror image, he is aware of his own self at risk. Of the three stories in the trilogy, the first two are the examples of failing to establish the authorial self, and not narrated by the protagonists' own voices. *The Locked Room*, on the other hand, is a comparatively successful attempt of achieving the author's other self, incarnated as the character Fanshawe. The final scene of the ambivalent acceptance of Fanshawe and the rejection of his writing illustrates how the embrace of the other in oneself is reflected in the writer's relationship with his mirror-imaged other.

Conclusion

Auster's first three novels show variations in the quest for otherness by the act of writing. The first two treat the impossibility of maintaining one's self as an author by encountering the mirror-imaged others and proliferating one's identity by multiple pseudonyms and masks when encountering physical others whom the protagonists find themselves mirroring. The third story shows the possibility of keeping a distance from the mirrored self, of keeping his authority over the other as a mere character embodied by the written word.

The unnamed narrator in *The Locked Room* comments on the relation between it and *City of Glass* and *Ghosts* that "[t]hese three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it

is about” (294). He alludes to his relationship with Fanshawe in his head, but, having seen how the other two stories differentiate themselves from the third, we can find another connotation. The new level that *The Locked Room* achieves is the one where the writer locks his mirror-imaged other self in a room inside himself and attempts to maintain his authority as a writer who writes *on* the other, without surrendering his authority to the writings *of* the other.

[Note]

- 1) I call him Jr. because his father also has the same name, whom I call Sr. In Auster’s story, however, they are not clearly distinguished as Sr. or Jr., which can be considered to be Auster’s intention to confuse the reader, as if he also sets here a mirror between the father and son.

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SUMMARY

The Writings of/on Mirror-Imaged Others
in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*

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Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* is considered a collection of stories concerned with postmodern subjectivity. Many critics, though, have neglected the subtle differences in the nuances among the three stories in the trilogy, that is, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*. This paper proposes to explicate these stories with the motif of the mirror, to illustrate Auster's way of thinking on the relation between self and other. The stories in the trilogy seek to illustrate the different stages of facing a mirror, as the mirror-imaged other, in a quest to answer the difference of what it means to write *on* someone and be the subject to the writing *of* someone.

In both *City of Glass* and *Ghosts*, the protagonists propagate the mirror-imaged other by using pseudonyms and masks, in order to confront the physical others in whom they also find themselves mirrored. In *City of Glass*, the protagonist Quinn loses his identity as an author in encountering the physical others, Stillman Jr. and Sr., and becomes entrapped in a labyrinth of pseudonyms. On the other hand, *Ghosts* depicts how Blue smashes his mirror-imaged other, Black, after disguising himself as several personae. Since both protagonists have lost their authorships among multiple mirror images, they cannot write about themselves in their own words. They must be written by someone else, an anonymous meta-author above them.

While the first two stories of the trilogy fail to narrate their stories in the first-person, *The Locked Room* has a first-person narrator who writes the story. This story focuses on embracing the mirror-imaged other, who remains unreachable within. The mirrored relationship between the unnamed narrator and Fanshawe turns on the treatment of the writing *of* the other, which is replaced by the writing *on* the other by the narrator.

Thus, each story of the trilogy represents different stages of the limits and possibilities of embracing the unreachable other as if reflected in a hall of mirrors.