

# The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory

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Edgar Allan Poe's legendary detective, Dupin, insisted that the good detective know how to *read* his criminal, how to decipher his "intellect" and "identify" with it ("The Purloined Letter" 118). Dupin's theory, a kind of intentional fallacy for detectives, is conceptualized in the 1928 "rule" of detective fiction advanced by influential detective novelist and critic S. S. Van Dine. In any good detective novel, Van Dine writes, the following "information" homology must be observed: "author : reader = criminal : detective" (Todorov 49). For Van Dine, the reader should be dependent on the author for information-clues just as the detective is dependent on the criminal. Postwar novelists such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor, however, found such a dependence downright criminal. They, like Poe, allegorized detectives as readers, but they deliberately overturned Van Dine's traditional hierarchy. In Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* (1953), the detective literally replaces the criminal. He shows up early at the scene of the crime and commits the murder himself, thus "erasing" the criminal from the plot and usurping his role as originator of clues and narratives.

This "new," "oedipal" detective symbolized, according to Frank Kermode, the larger political program of literature and literary theory in postwar left-intellectual France: the revolutionary detective becomes the "herald of the new [readerly] order" (Kermode 168). Robbe-Grillet's upstart detective, indeed, exemplified the postwar reader. In the work of Roland Barthes, an admirer of Robbe-Grillet, that reader is "liberate[d]" from the tyranny of the author ("Death" 147). It is important to note that Robbe-Grillet's 1953 oedipal detective *preceded* Barthes's virtuosic reader of 1968. The "new" detective story, we could argue, anticipated, even preempted its theorization.

What has become of the "metaphysical" detective novel—the genre that intermixes fiction with literary theory—in the four decades since Robbe-Grillet? In this essay, I will investigate one example: Paul Auster's genre-crossing *The New*

*York Trilogy* (1985–86), a work esteemed by mystery connoisseurs and professors of postmodernism alike.<sup>1</sup> In the light of *The New York Trilogy*, I will discuss the metaphysical detective novel's continued and often competitive engagement with literary theory.

### Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory

Auster, in a 1987 interview, claimed to be using the popular detective genre for much the same reason that Beckett employed the standard vaudeville routine. He wanted to reinvigorate his writing, to bring it “to another place, another place altogether” (*Art of Hunger* 261). At the same time, Auster also was using the detective story to explore theories of reading à la Poe and Robbe-Grillet. Each of Auster's novels features a detective who literally reads the manuscripts of his criminal. Auster's detectives thus are vehemently readers, so much so that Auster considered inaugurating his trilogy with this epigraph from Wittgenstein: “And it also means something to talk of ‘living in the pages of a book’” (*Art of Hunger* 263).

But Auster's reader-detectives are very different from those imagined by Robbe-Grillet and later theorized by Barthes. Auster's detectives are dependent, often desperately so, on their criminals. Each reads carefully his criminal's books and notebooks; Quinn, the hero of volume one, even turns his criminal's daily walks into a text: he traces the paths of his criminal's journeys onto a piece of paper and reads them as letters in the alphabet. Not until the last section of each novel does the criminal disappear from the narrative—finally leaving a space for a newly liberated detective to emerge. But the reader-detective (with the eventual exception of the hero of volume three) is, *pace* Barthes and Robbe-Grillet, not triumphantly “born”; rather, he devolves into a deranged vagabond (*City of Glass*), disappears into the narrator's vague fantasy of freedom by sailing to China (*Ghosts*), and dissipates (initially) in a phantasmagorical binge (*The Locked Room*). It is as though Auster's 1986 detectives had not yet discovered the literary theory of 1968. They must learn all over again, step by step, that the author is a construct, a false endpoint of reading.

But Auster's plot strategy is neither amnesiac nor regressive. Instead, it is an assertion—at the familiar crossroads of detective story and literary theory—that Barthes's readerly revolution was more theoretical than actual. Indeed, in American book-culture, the notion of the “author” as a single personality is probably more entrenched now than it was twenty-five years ago. Within a shrinking industry, publishers construct increasingly convincing and compelling personalities on book jackets, and present-day readers, like Auster's detectives, ardently pursue their authors at popular book signings and readings. Moreover, a professorial industry now flourishes around authors such as Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida.

According to Barthes, that fetishizing of the author should have ended long ago. In his famous 1968 essay, he sentenced the author to “death”—for crimi-

nally “limiting” interpretative thought. There, Barthes replaces the author with the “modern scriptor,” whom he grants only a marginal existence: as a “being” that abides only in the process of writing (“Death” 145). The truly (post)modern author should, according to Barthesian politics, either efface his person, or, as in the contemporaneous schema of Foucault, accept dispersal into historical “functions” (107–120).

Within that hostile poststructuralist landscape, authors have tended to hide themselves, disguising authorial imprint beneath layers of artifice and quotation. But Paul Auster quite literally rejects theory’s imperative to die or disperse: he appears, conspicuously, throughout his novels. Leaving behind disconnected, yet obvious fragments of autobiography and, once, even making a cameo appearance (as “Paul Auster” the writer, holding “an uncapped fountain pen, . . . poised in a writing position”), Auster blatantly exposes himself (*City of Glass* 143). He reveals his authorship, I would argue, the better to investigate the concept of authorship itself.<sup>2</sup> Instead of writing himself out of history in favor of either a “series of specific and complex operations” (Foucault 113) or a virtuosic reader (Barthes, “Death” 148), Auster experiments, in fictional practice, with the possibilities of life after authorial death. He authorizes his own (and several other criminal writers’) disappearances to explore writing beyond authorship.

### City of Glass

*City of Glass*, the first volume of *The New York Trilogy*, opens with a pseudonymous detective novelist, Daniel Quinn, being drawn into a real-life “tail-job.” A stranger calls twice, asking for the Paul Auster Detective Agency, and Quinn, without knowing exactly why, agrees that he is Paul Auster and takes the case. Quinn, like the reader in Van Dine’s homology, begins the case without significant information, either about himself or about the case (8, 14). He imagines his psyche splintered into three personalities: Daniel Quinn, the person who eats and sleeps and walks the streets; William Wilson, the Poe-inspired pseudonymous writer of detective novels; and Max Work, the self who, as the protagonist of the novels, is active in the world. Only when the case begins, when Quinn starts to pursue his real-life criminal, Stillman, does he gain a sense of himself as unified. He symbolically inaugurates his detectival quest by stripping naked and inscribing his own initials, not William Wilson’s, onto the first page of his red case notebook (64).

Quinn achieves this sense of self, significantly, only as a reader, not as a writer. He gives up writing in order to pore over Stillman’s cryptic book and follow him all over New York. A parody of the biographical literary critic, Quinn jots down Stillman’s every move, assuming that each step, regardless of how insignificant, contains clues to Stillman’s intentions. Quinn even reads Stillman’s random paths as letters forming words. (Projecting an inherent logic onto random walks,

he creates and completes an incomplete text, "OWEROFBAB" becomes "THE TOWER OF BABEL" [111].)

In this way, Quinn attempts to contain his criminal's haphazardness. He refuses, in the manner of Barthes's "classic" critic, to accept a disorderly narrative: "He . . . disbelieve[d] the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions. He wanted there to be a sense to them" (109).

When Stillman finally disappears, Quinn is stupefied. Like Poe's Dupin (whose cases Quinn has read and admired), Quinn has trained himself to uncover the "intentions" of his criminal (141).<sup>3</sup> With Stillman gone, however, this traditional methodology is worthless: "Stillman was gone now. . . . Everything had been reduced to chance, a nightmare of numbers and probabilities. There were no more clues, no leads, no moves to be made" (141). Two-thirds of the way through the novel, then, the criminal author has disappeared, and the reader-detective is paralyzed by a surfeit of possibilities.

According to Foucault, the fear of such a surfeit is one of the major reasons that authors were constructed in the first place: "The author is . . . the . . . figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (119). He states that we are afraid of plurality—personal, social, textual—and thus demand the circumscribing convention of the author: "[T]he great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world" can only be reduced and encircled by recourse to the author (118). The "author-function," then, neutralizes contradiction and potentiality and leads to the consolidation of existing power relations. Only through the destruction of the author, Foucault surmises, can human possibility begin to unleash itself. Reading and writing will unfold and expand, and criticism will take up its vital task: to "locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance . . . and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers." That new, author-free space is characterized by fragments—by "gaps and breaches"—not by unities (105). It is an area where, in Barthes's words, "everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*" ("Death" 147).

Quinn imagines that his new, criminal-free world is governed only by "fate." Fate, for Quinn, implies the acceptance of uncertainty, the slackening of his fierce, detectival desire for order: "Fate in the sense of what was, of what happened to be" (169). But Quinn cannot accept the vagaries of this new order. He remains the prototypical detective, ardently desiring a solution to his case. He regards the incessant busy signal at Virginia Stillman's as "fate," and he interprets it narcissistically: as a "sign" to continue with his case (169). Stillman is already gone, however, and Quinn—the detective in denial—stakes out a building that has no criminal inside.

### Questioning Author-ity

In the penultimate section of *City of Glass*, after Quinn's failed stake-out, he becomes a writer again. He turns, like Paul Auster himself,<sup>4</sup> from writing detec-

tive fiction to autobiographical reflections—in Quinn’s case, Baudelairean portraits of the city’s downtrodden. Finally, in the novel’s last section, Quinn disappears from the narrative completely. He is replaced by two writers: “Paul Auster,” the writer whom Quinn visits earlier (whom I shall refer to as Auster<sub>1</sub> and to the real author as simply Auster)<sup>5</sup> and an unnamed first-person Narrator (for whom I will use a capital N) who claims to be the editor of Quinn’s ever-present red notebook. The Narrator vehemently denies authorship of *City of Glass*, claiming that he did no more than edit Quinn’s notebook. But this is clearly a lie: Quinn does not even buy the notebook until page 63 (which explains the Narrator’s enigmatic comment in the final paragraph: “The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand” [202]). Thus we can assume—in terms of Auster’s conceit—that the self-effacing Narrator is responsible for most, if not all, of the story. He has created the characters (from Quinn to Paul Auster<sub>1</sub>) as well as the plot, which leads Quinn to solitude and madness. The Narrator, however, refuses responsibility for his imaginative violence, laying the blame on Auster<sub>1</sub> instead: “[Auster] behaved badly throughout,” he claims, and because of that, “our friendship has ended” (202–203). His hands now clean, the Narrator can carry on as the implied author of the entire trilogy.

Although this game of blame-shifting could be read as just that, a game, it also has important ethical ramifications. Paul Auster, we could argue, is trying to distance himself from his “bad behavior”: his mistreatment of Quinn (his alter ego) as well as his writing a fiction too narcissistically tied to his own life. In the light of Auster’s earlier work, it is indeed likely that here he is attempting to work through his ethical position as author. Referring to his memoir about his dead father, the first section of *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), Auster formulates his profound distrust of his own author-ity: “[‘Portrait of an Invisible Man’] still seems to me not so much an attempt at biography but an exploration of how one might begin to speak about another person, and whether or not it is even possible” (*Art of Hunger* 258). *The Invention of Solitude* immediately precedes *City of Glass*. In *City of Glass*, I would argue, Auster discovers how to speak about another person, himself, without wielding the authority he so distrusts.<sup>6</sup> By transferring authority from himself to the Narrator, he “kills” himself and reinvents himself as an implied author. Auster thus adds to Barthes: the author is dead, but his implied self, his “ghost,” is alive and well.

## Ghosts

The second novel of the trilogy, *Ghosts*, by far the shortest of the three, begins on February 3, 1947 (the birth date of Paul Auster and thirty-five years before the start of the other two volumes, *City of Glass* and *The Locked Room*). Narrated in a shallow present tense that precludes any sense of past and featuring two-dimensional protagonists designated as Blue, Black, and Brown, *Ghosts* functions as a

kind of scaffolding, a bare-bones framework for the other two novels. It brings out skeletally, like the middle section of a triptych, the structural elements shared by all three texts.<sup>7</sup> The detective protagonist, Blue, for example, is, like Quinn, a reader of his suspect's manuscript; Black, the criminal, is, like Stillman, an author. Blue reads what Black writes and also what Black reads (*Walden*), hoping, in the manner of a "classic" critic, to "solve" Black by going back to his literary sources. Blue believes, as do the protagonists of *City of Glass* and *The Locked Room*, that if he reads the criminal-author correctly, he will bring order both to the case and to his life. In the end, Blue kills Black, thus establishing the figure of the dead or dying author-criminal, common to all three novels. The Narrator, unseen throughout the novel, reverts to the first person in the final paragraph to announce, as in *City of Glass*, that the reader-detective has mysteriously disappeared.

### The Locked Room

In *The Locked Room*, similarly, a reader-detective (this time the Narrator himself) tracks and "reads" a fugitive author, Fanshawe. The Narrator, like Quinn, places all hope for resolution, personal and textual, in the figure of the author. The Narrator reads Fanshawe's letters and early poems, interviews Fanshawe's friends and relatives, and even plagiarizes Fanshawe's life: marrying his wife, adopting his son, sleeping with his mother. By getting closer to Fanshawe, by getting inside his skin, the Narrator hopes to come "into focus" for himself (57).

But Fanshawe proves to be untraceable, an imaginary fantasy. The Narrator sifts through Fanshawe's biography (reading letters and interviewing surviving friends and relatives) and is left with an inconclusive residue of rumors, stories, and possible lies (131–32). The Narrator despairs; he sets off on a hallucinatory binge on the rue Saint-Denis. He "los[es] track of [him]self," seeing the world in "fragments" and "bits and pieces that refuse to add up" (148). His new, author-less landscape exceeds the logic of his detective's search. Like Quinn following the death of Stillman, the Narrator has a crisis of purpose and identity: "[I felt] like a down-and-out private eye, a buffoon clutching at straws" (145).<sup>8</sup> For Quinn, the chaos of his criminal-less world is "fate"; for the Narrator, it is "randomness" (155). But the Narrator's reaction is diametrically opposed to Quinn's. The Narrator does not try to contain fate; rather, he accepts and welcomes it: "[T]hat . . . thrilled me—the randomness of it, the vertigo of pure chance" (155).

The Narrator's acceptance of author-less contingency is, I would argue, a metaphor for Auster's welcoming of a new type of "author-less" writing. Auster's earlier, less contingent mode of writing is represented by the writings of Quinn and Fanshawe.<sup>9</sup> Like the young Paul Auster, Quinn and Fanshawe begin their careers as intensely self-reflexive poets. Quinn writes an obscure poetry collection (*Unfinished Business*) and Fanshawe authors a collection (*Ground Work*)

bearing the same title as Auster's self-probing collection (written between 1970-1979).<sup>10</sup> Both Quinn and Fanshawe, like Auster, eventually turn from poetry to prose, but their goals remain that of self-examination, or as Fanshawe puts it, "explanation" (175).

### Writing Solitude

Tied to that motto of self-examination is the enduring image of solitude. As the Narrator writes, this image of the author is stamped indelibly in his mind: "Fanshawe alone in that [locked] room, condemned to a mythical solitude" (147). Two years before beginning *City of Glass*, indeed, Paul Auster was working out his own myth of solitude. Living alone in New York (his marriage and family having just broken up and his father having died), Auster writes in *The Invention of Solitude*: "[A.] is in New York, alone in his little room at 6 Varick Street" (76-77). This book features Pascal's famous quote on the importance of isolation: "As in Pascal: 'All the unhappiness of man stems from one thing only: that he is incapable of staying quietly in his room'" (76). It also is replete with references to solitary artists: Hölderlin (98-100), Emily Dickinson (122-23), Van Gogh (142-143), and others. Fanshawe claims, in the spirit of his artistic predecessors, to find in solitude "a passageway into the self, an instrument of discovery" (*Locked Room* 125).

Each of these "solitude" narratives, real and fictional, ends in some sort of madness. Auster's assessment of solitude thus seems to waver from a celebration of the mythical site of production to a fear of a cruel and un-representable loneliness:

[T]he room is not a representation of solitude, it is the substance of solitude itself. And it is a thing so heavy, so unbreatheable, that it cannot be shown in any terms other than what it is. (*Invention of Solitude* 143)

It is precisely this unrepresentability, this dangerous emptiness, that Auster—as well as his later fictional stunt men, Quinn and Fanshawe—strived to represent in his early writings. Auster writes autobiographically about A.: "By staying in this room for long stretches at a time, [A.] can usually manage to fill it with his thoughts, and this in turn seems to dispel the dreariness . . ." (77). Quinn later echoes A.'s sentiment in *City of Glass*, when, alone in his empty room, he dreams of "filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city . . ." (200). The lyricism of this passage notwithstanding, Auster is critical of Quinn's and his own artistic *modus operandi*. Like Fanshawe after him, Quinn is sentenced to madness—forced to live through a 1980s repetition of Hölderlin, Dickinson, and others. Hidden in Auster's critique is a condemnation of the literary tradition in which he is so well schooled. The intensely isolated self, Auster seems to be saying, can no longer "fill" a "darkness" with his voice nor presume to endow a world with meaning.

## Writing beyond Solitude

The Narrator, Auster's final detective and final authorial stand-in, transcends that image of artistic isolation. Auster's Narrator begins the narrative trapped, like A. in *The Invention of Solitude*, within an image of his past self: he sees himself only as the inferior boyhood rival of Fanshawe: "[W]ithout [Fanshawe] I would hardly know who I am" (7). This crippling imaginary fantasy drives the Narrator to thoughts of murder or, better, of schizophrenic suicide. After physically attacking "Fanshawe," the Narrator remarks that he can suddenly see "[him]self dead" (161).<sup>11</sup> The specter of his own corpse, as ubiquitous and undeniable as an "odor," now replaces his image of himself as Fanshawe (156). The new sensation—of death—remains with the Narrator for the rest of the novel. It leads him, like Auster after the death of his father, to re-invent himself. (According to Auster, "[M]y father's death saved my life [*Art of Hunger* 288].) The Narrator abandons his manhunt for himself and evolves instead into what he calls a "self . . . in the world" (143), a father among a family ("the bodies I belonged to" [162])—a being awash through death in human life and living.<sup>12</sup>

Following that confrontation with death, the Narrator "officially" gives up writing (160). New modes of storytelling, such as his stepson's improvised fable about elephants and emperors, enter the Narrator's life, and he is no longer driven to acquire significance through a Fanshawean mode of authorship. When Fanshawe, intimating his residual authorial power over the Narrator, says, "I'm just reminding you of what I wrote," the Narrator responds confidently, "Don't push me too far, Fanshawe. There's nothing to stop me from walking out" (167). When the Narrator does leave, he reads Fanshawe's red notebook, which, even more than the red notebook in *City of Glass*, functions as an *Urtext*.<sup>13</sup> But the Narrator immediately tears it up, even though it seems "unfinished" and begs "to be started again" (179).

## Writing and Death

Quinn, Auster's first authorial stand-in, has an antithetical reaction to the "end" of the red notebook: he equates it with the end of his life. Premonitions of death do not free him for new modes of storytelling. Rather, they entrench him deeper into his existing method. Like Scheherezade in Auster's account of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Quinn believes in the dictum, "as long as you go on speaking, you will not die" (*Invention of Solitude* 149). Quinn tries to ward off death through writing, longing to postpone what Foucault calls "the day of reckoning that [will] silence the narrator" (102). Sequestered in his room, Quinn does not experience death as immanent in storytelling and living; on the contrary, writing remains his hope of transcendence. He writes instead of eating, writes smaller and smaller to conserve pages, and hopes that he will be able to "face the end of the red notebook with courage" (200).



In the end, however, Quinn does not die; his red notebook is read and related to us by the Narrator, allowing Quinn to live on through fiction. At the end of the trilogy, we discover that he has survived as a character behind the scenes of *The Locked Room*—relentlessly tracking Fanshawe across the country, attempting to solve yet another case. That second case, like the first, is one Quinn seems afraid to solve. He shudders at the prospect of a resolution, perhaps because it would signify the closure he both desires and fears. As Fanshawe remarks, Quinn never apprehends him, not because he was unable to but rather because “I scared him to death” (169).

It is important to remember that the Narrator—despite the fact that he “officially” gives up writing—does, like Quinn, create a text. The vital difference is that Quinn’s writing expresses only narcissism and fear; he desires to “fill” a world and to ward off death. For the Narrator, such fantasies of omnipotence are distant memories. “[T]he truth,” he claims, is “no longer important” (160). The Narrator’s writing is now rooted in supersubjective contingency: the “anythingness,” of the world. “It is the power of this *anything*, I believe,” he writes, “that has made the story so difficult to tell. For when anything can happen—that is the precise moment when words begin to fail” (161). The Narrator realizes that self-expression—storytelling—is difficult, if not impossible, in a world where subjective will is muddled in a pool of infinite possibilities. However, if every contingency, even death, is accepted as given, the story will begin to tell itself. As the Narrator explains, his courage in accepting the state of things allowed language itself to divulge the tale:

[A] moment came when it no longer frightened me to look at what had happened. If words followed, it was only because I had no choice but to accept them, to take them upon myself and go where they wanted me to go. (149)

The Narrator’s writing, steered by chance, is more than a surrender of self to language. It is a “struggle” to “say goodbye to something” (149)—an effort continuously to self-transcend, to speak while dying. His writing is born of an oedipal destruction that will repeat itself for as long as he lives. He will never fill the void left by the dead author—criminal. His writing, beginning and ending in absence, is not, like Quinn’s, an attempt to saturate the darkness. Rather, it happens in the gray spaces of his living, in the hollows of the bodies he belongs to. Perhaps it is this kind of writing—produced within contingency, beyond solutions and the usual suspects—that enacts a birth.

We could argue that Auster, in the guise of his final and most accomplished stand-in, emerges from the rubble of dead author—criminals to become a virtuosic Barthesian “producer”—a reader who rewrites while reading (*S/Z* 4).<sup>14</sup> But Auster, it is important to remember, vehemently emphasizes his “authorship.” He appears repeatedly among (and inside of) his characters to announce, “I’m the writer!” (*City of Glass* 190). Such a brash assertion of authorship traditionally brings with it, in the paradigms of Barthes and Foucault, claims to authority. Not

so for Auster. By appearing and disappearing randomly throughout his three-volume text (in the guise of Quinn, Paul Auster, Fanshawe, and the Narrator), Auster disrupts the notion that an author “controls” his fiction. His “biography” floats from one character to the next, and, in the end, Auster inheres only as another two-dimensional character in his refracting city. We, like the reader-detectives of *The New York Trilogy*, discover that our “author” exists—but only as shards, as pieces of his fictionalized personal history.

### Epilogue: Writing for the Book Industry

For Auster, as for most successful authors, including Barthes and Foucault, there is an ironic epilogue. Auster’s creation of the virtuosic anti-author, followed by the publication of the last installment of *The New York Trilogy*, led to the birth of another “author”—Paul Auster himself. *The New York Trilogy*, Auster’s first work of fiction, was published in three volumes by a small press (Sun and Moon), then quickly rereleased (just past Auster’s fortieth birthday) by Penguin. In 1990, Penguin published a one-volume edition. That edition includes an impressive literary biography (“Paul Auster’s work has been translated into fifteen languages,” “*The New York Trilogy* won the Prix France-Culture de Littérature Étrangère for the best work by a foreign author.”) and, for the first time, the dates corresponding to Auster’s work on each volume (“1981–1982,” “1983,” “1984”), were written on each final page. These temporal markers uphold, however ironically, the singularity of the act of creation—by one “author” at a certain moment in history (Lavender 236). Is Paul Auster—now firmly entrenched in the complicated nexus of public readings, promotional “bios,” and book signings—destined to repeat the errors of Quinn? Will he, despite his revision of author-ity, necessarily become an “author,” a subjectivity stable and expansive enough to “fill” a world?

Auster, I would argue, continues to undermine his own “author-function” through the alliance with contingency developed at the end of *The New York Trilogy*. In a 1990 interview, Auster claims that his goal is to remain “open” to the “anything-ness” of the world: “The unknown is rushing in on top of us at every moment. As I see it, my job is to keep myself open to these collisions . . .” (*Art of Hunger* 273). Auster’s estimation of chance collisions is evidenced by the plots of his more recent novels, which often develop out of accidents not unlike the wrong number that “started it” all in *City of Glass*.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Auster allows his day-to-day writerly practice to be affected by what he calls “the powers of contingency” (*Art of Hunger* 271).<sup>16</sup> In a recent work, “The Red Notebook” (1993), Auster describes a chance collision that led directly to more writing and, at the same time, reminded him “that it is possible for stories to go on writing themselves without an author” (253). Ten years after completing *City of Glass*, “Auster” remembers sitting at his desk, “trying to work,” when the phone rings.

It is a stranger, asking three times for a "Mr. Quinn." Another wrong number, "Auster" claims, and again his writing begins (253).

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### NOTES

1. *City of Glass*, the first installment, was nominated for the Edgar Award for the best mystery novel of the year (1985).

2. I agree with the point of William Lavender (in his article on *City of Glass*) that Auster's work engages contemporary literary theory. But Auster's encounter with theory does not stop with the formal concerns—point-of-view, character, plot—that Lavender highlights. As I argue below, Auster inquires into the nature of authorship and its claims to authority.

3. Earlier in *City of Glass*, Quinn quotes Dupin's theory of reading, and identifying with, his opponent's intellect (65).

4. Auster, like Quinn, began his career as a little-known poet and later wrote a pseudonymous detective novel. Like Quinn at the end of *City of Glass*, Auster turned to autobiographical prose in 1982, with *The Invention of Solitude*.

5. Notice the intentional blurring of the two figures: Both Austers have a wife named Siri and a son named Daniel; moreover, Auster<sub>1</sub>, during his brief appearance in *City of Glass*, is vehemently an "author," holding a "fountain pen . . . poised in a writing position" (143).

6. That process of discovering how to write about the Other, who is oneself, begins in the second section of *The Invention of Solitude*: "As in Rimbaud's phrase: 'Je est un autre'" (124). Auster comments on this section of *The Invention of Solitude* in *The Art of Hunger* (259).

7. The triptych tends to have a static middle section, which, like *Ghosts*, serves as a still model for the wings, where the action occurs. I thank Thomas Dertwinkel for bringing this to my attention.

8. Although the Narrator is not actually a detective (neither is Quinn), he refers to himself as such at least one other time: "I was a detective, after all, and my job was to hunt for clues" (131).

9. Fanshawe's biography is very similar to Auster's: They are exactly the same age (*Locked Room* 45); both began their careers as poets and published collections called *Ground Work*; and both house-sat and wrote in a cottage in the South of France. For the biographical similarities between Auster and Quinn, see note 4.

10. *Ground Work: Selected Poems and Essays 1970-1979*. The collection contains titles such as "In Memory of Myself," "Searching for a Definition," and "Autobiography of the Eye."

11. This man is probably not really Fanshawe, only the Narrator's fantasy of him.

12. See Auster's remarks on family and fatherhood in a 1990 interview: "Becoming a parent connects you to a world beyond yourself, to the continuum of generations, to the inevitability of your own death. . . . You begin to let go, and in that letting go—at least in my case—you find yourself wanting to tell stories.

When my son was born twelve years ago, Charlie Simic . . . wrote me a letter of congratulations in which he said, 'Children are wonderful. If I didn't have kids, I'd walk around thinking I was Rimbaud all the time'" (*Art of Hunger* 290).

13. Fanshawe filled his red notebook in a "brick" house on "Columbus" Square in "Boston" under the pseudonym "Henry Dark"—all details that are strongly reminiscent of Stillman's linguistic paradise, "New Babel" (in *City of Glass*), where language promises to regain its lost unity in the New World.

14. The Narrator does not “create” *The New York Trilogy*; rather, he, like Barthes’s “producer,” reads texts (Quinn’s and Fanshawe’s) more or less creatively and re-assembles them.

15. *The Music of Chance* (1990) begins with a man haphazardly meeting a stranger—who changes the man’s life and kick-starts the plot of the book—on the side of the road. *Leviathan* (1992) begins with a young writer meeting another writer at a joint reading that both almost canceled out of; the latter eventually becomes the subject of the former’s book, *Leviathan*.

16. According to Auster, a chance tele-miscommunication led to his writing of *City of Glass*: “One day, . . . the telephone rang, and the person on the other end asked if he had reached the Pinkerton Agency. I said no, you’ve got the wrong number, and hung up. . . . [T]he very next day another person called and asked the same question. “Is this the Pinkerton Agency?” Again I said no, told him he’d dialed the wrong number, and hung up. But the instant after I hung up, I began to wonder what would have happened if I had said yes. Would it have been possible for me to pose as a Pinkerton agent? And if so, how far could I have taken it? The book grew out of those telephone calls. . . . The wrong numbers were the starting point” (*Art of Hunger* 294).

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The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory. Article. Mar 1998. I examine some of the philosophical foundations of nursing theory and deconstruct some of the more preternatural theories that have become established as the dominant conventional wisdom in the academy. It is argued that this can be characterized as a form of self-deception, and overall has had a negative impact on advancement of the nursing profession and public health care. Let Paul Auster guide you through some of the best. The Art of Hunger: Essays, Prefaces, Interviews, The Red Notebook. by Paul Auster. 1997. 3.85/418 Ratings. In this astonishingly acrobatic work, Paul Auster traces the compulsion to make literature -- or art -- through essays on Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Paul Celan, Laura Riding, Knut Hamsun, John Ashbery, and other vital figures of our century. In a section. Why Write? An essential collection from one of the finest thinkers and stylists in contemporary letters. The celebrated author of The New York Trilogy, The Book of Illusions, and Oracle Night presents here a highly personal collection of essays, prefaces, true stories. Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure. by Paul Auster. 2003. 3.62/1,530 Ratings. Paul Benjamin Auster (born February 3, 1947) is an American author known for works blending absurdism, existentialism, crime fiction and the search for identity and personal meaning in works such as The New York Trilogy (1987), Moon Palace (1989), The Music of Chance (1990), The Book of Illusions (2002) and The Brooklyn Follies (2005). John Zilcosky The Revenge of the Author: Paul Auster's Challenge to Theory. Critique, 39:3 (Spring 1998), pp. 195-206. Hide "Further Reading" Section. This author page uses material from the Wikipedia article "Paul Auster", which is released under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share-Alike License 3.0. Total Books: 437. Chronological List.