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2023, Vol. 20 (2), 33-48(126)
journals.uni-lj.si/elope
https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.20.2.33-48
UDC: 821.111(73).09-31Auster P.

Invisible or "The Fine Art of Scribbling:" Paul Auster's Metafiction in Postmodern Narrative Discourse

ABSTRACT

The intention of this article is to study Paul Auster's novel *Invisible* (2009) as an exercise in metafiction and a poststructuralist game in which Auster introduces different fictional layers to make the figure of the author disappear. Auster presents the story of Adam Walker and Rudolph Born, two characters who become antagonists but whose lives depend on each other. By a series of narrations, the novel tells how the story of these two characters extends in time, challenging literary genres and multiplying different narrative layers.

Keywords: Paul Auster, metafiction, narrative discourse, literary theory

Invisible ali "umetnost kracanja": metafikcija Paula Austerja v postmodernem pripovednem diskurzu

IZVLEČEK

Namen članka je obravnava Austerjevega romana *Invisible* (2009) s stališča metafikcije in poststrukturalistične igre, v kateri Auster s plastenjem fikcijskih ravni briše avtorja. Auster predstavi zgodbi Adama Walkerja in Rudopha Borna, ki sta, čeprav antagonista, življenjsko odvisna eden od drugega. Auster skozi niz pripovedi razvija zgodbo obeh protagonistov skozi čas ob hkratni relativizaciji literarne žanrskosti in z množenju različnih pripovednih plasti.

Ključne besede: Paul Auster, metafikcija, pripovedni diskurz, literarna teorija

1 Introduction

Paul Auster is one of the most representative writers of postmodern American fiction. His fiction is, above all, an excellent example of metafiction where the problematics of language, the limits of literary genres, the creation of infinite fictional layers and, of course, the authorship of the text are discussed. One of Mark Currie's answers to his question "What is a postmodern novel?" (2011, 2), explicitly states: "Postmodern novels are metafictions: fictions about fiction; self-conscious fictions; fictions that incorporate critical and theoretical reflection into their fictional worlds" (2011, 3). Part of Auster's fiction deals with "fictions about fiction" or fictions that "highlight the presence of an author, such as the intrusive authorial narrator who steps in to declare the fictionality of a fiction" (2011, 2), or a combination of these and "the surrogate author: a figure within the fictional world who occupies the role of an author, or a role analogous to the author" (2011, 3), which is the case with *Invisible*.

Published in 2009, the novel is a postmodern and metafictional game in which Auster questions the authorship of the text with the use of successive fictional layers and blurring the lines between the narrator, reader, and author. Predominantly about different narrators reading or writing about other writers' stories, the novel is centred on the figure of Rudolph Born, a French political science professor and presumed spy who becomes the Machiavellian character of the novel and opens all the different fictional layers of the text. Together with Born, Auster introduces Adam Walker, a young poet who decides to write about his experiences with the Frenchman and gives the manuscript to his friend Jim in the last days of his life. The aim of this article is to discuss how Auster's novel *Invisible* becomes a metafictional example of Auster's postmodernity and how, through it, he shows the process of creation of a literary space and questions the authorship of the novel by referring in the title of the novel to the invisible nature of the author. In this novel, Auster challenges narrative theory by introducing a form of metalepsis that blurs the limits of the different narrative levels and connects the different imaginary worlds, singular Chinese boxes, through an invisible thread.

2 Paul Auster's Postmodern Literary Space

To analyse the different narrative levels that construct the novel, it is fundamental to study the postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives of the text. Apart from the undeniable postmodernist essence of Auster's fiction, his literary spaces are a response to the influence on his work of French symbolist and surrealist poetry, and consequently from French literary critics such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot (Arce 2016; Kloeckner 2017). Auster openly talks about this literary intertextuality in his non-fictional works, especially in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), as one of his foundational works, published before his first novel, *The New York Trilogy* (1987). From this perspective, *Invisible* is a clear example of Auster's postmodernity and metafiction in a context in which the characters show the construction of the literary space they inhabit and make the role of the author disappear by overlapping different narrations. According to Patricia Waugh, what metafictional writers have in common is the fact that "they all explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (2001, 2), or, in other words, as she concludes "the

lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction" (2001, 6). Certainly, Auster sets out his theoretical and literary principles in his non-fictional works (*The Invention of Solitude* [1982], *The Red Notebook* [1995]) and puts them into practice in his fiction, but there is still a strong connection between Auster and the theory of narrative discourse. It could be argued that he writes about the construction of a literary space in his fiction not only in *Invisible* but also in novels such as *Oracle Night* (2003), *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), *Man in the Dark* (2008) and *Sunset Park* (2010). Moreover, his first novel, *The New York Trilogy*, deals with the construction of a literary space, the process of writing and the role of the writer. From this perspective, Auster's *Invisible* responds to Martin Paul Eve's definition of metafiction when he asserts that the word "is used to describe fiction that is 'self-aware', fiction that knows it is fiction, fiction that draws attention, through various stylistic conceits, to itself as a work of fiction" (2016, 29). As a "self-aware" fiction, the novel, in its succession of fictional layers, deconstructs the role of the traditional author. As Waugh claims, "[m]etafictional novels thus reject the traditional figure of the author as a transcendental imagination fabricating, through an ultimately monologic discourse, structures of order which will replace the forgotten material text of the world" (2001, 16). Thus, one of the ultimate aims of metafiction is to make the author disappear, as occurs in *Invisible*.

In his work *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998), Lubomír Doležel asserts that "metafiction is a case of metalepsis" (1998, 166). Some years earlier, Genette, in his theory of narratology, used the term metalepsis to explain how "the transition from one narrative level to another can in principle be achieved only by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation" (1983, 234). Doležel explains that metafiction is a self-disclosing narrative where "[f]iction making procedures are overtly exposed" and "the text simultaneously constructs a fictional world and the story of this construction" (1998, 160). As a case of metalepsis, the transition between narrative levels can be considered a transgression that the critic Jeff Thoss describes as "transgressions between a story world and another (imaginary) world" (2011, 190). Thoss also argues that "metaleptic transgressions occur when entities travel between the different planes or interact with the other ontological sphere in ways that are perceived to be impossible" (2011, 192). The novel starts with a first-person narrator that the reader finds out later is the voice of one of the protagonists, Adam Walker. Indeed, the novel can be divided into five narrative levels and Auster decides to start on the second level. From a narratological perspective, there is a first level of narration linked to the present time of the novel, which deals with Adam Walker in the last years of his life and the narration of his college friend Jim. Auster transgresses this narrative level and introduces a second one in which the narrator, Adam Walker, narrates his experience with Rudolph de Born and his wife Margot. Evidently, one of the reasons why the novel starts in the second narrative level is because all the other narrative levels depend on the encounter between Adam Walker and Rudolph de Born, more concretely on Born. Metalepsis in the novel becomes another invisible element in the narration, a very subtle narrative strategy that makes Auster's metafiction so particular and this text so groundbreaking in terms of transgression of narrative levels. As Péter Csató (2022, 268) asserts,

> metalepsis in *Invisible* is not deployed as an overtly disruptive textual technique, but rather as a surreptitious narrative strategy, much like a hidden undercurrent, which becomes visible once we have pieced all the puzzles together that are strewn across the novel's four chapters.

Genette has shown that "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" (1983, 228). In relation to this, Genette explains that all the events that take place in a first level of narration are called an extradiegetic level (1983, 228). Those events narrated inside the first level of narration are called diegetic or intradiegetic, and finally those events narrated in the second level of narration are called metadiegetic (1983, 228). He thus concludes: "the narrating instance of a first narrative is therefore extradiegetic by definition, as the narrating instance of a second (metadiegetic) narrative is diegetic by definition" (1983, 229). Bearing Genette's analysis in mind, the first level of narration in *Invisible*, or Jim's narration, can be considered the extradiegetic level. Therefore, Walker's narration and his experience with Born becomes a diegetic or intradiegetic level. Yet, this diegetic or intradiegetic level, also considered a second level of narration, expands up to four different metadiegetic levels in which Jim reads Walker's stories (Summer), rewrites and recreates Walker's notes (Fall), transcribes Walker's last notes, and translates Cécile Juin's diary, all of them centred on the character of Born. This illustrates, as Marie-Laure Ryan asserts, the "interpenetration, or mutual contamination" between narrative levels that "will become entangled when an existent belongs to two or more levels at the same time" (2004, 442).

Rudolph Born is the pivotal character of *Invisible*, the one who leads the action and opens the different fictional layers. The novel starts with Walker's narration about the first time they meet, "I shook his hand for the first time in the spring of 1967" (Auster 2009, 3), a statement which already implies the importance of the character in the development of the action. Before talking about Born himself, remarkably, Walker talks about Born's namesake, a twelfth-century French poet who becomes a character in Dante's *Inferno*. Certainly, Dante describes him with his head in his hand, reproduced by Gustave Doré in 1868 and in his famous engravings of *Divine Comedy*, as a punishment "for having counseled Prince Henry to rebel against his father, King Henry II, and because de Born caused division between father and son and turned them into enemies" (Auster 2009, 3–4). These lines that Walker interprets from Dante's *The Divine Comedy* predict what is going to happen between Rudolph and himself. Moreover, Born's attitude towards Walker seems to be the same Bertrand de Born had with Prince Henry and King Henry II, but the other way around: Born, in his attempt to control and manipulate Walker, pushes him to rebel against his mentor. And, unavoidably, once introduced to Walker, he asks his new friend if he is any way related to the Provençal poet, to which he replies: "that wretched creature who lost his head. Perhaps, but it doesn't seem likely, I'm afraid. No *de*. You need to be nobility for that, and the sad truth is I'm anything but noble" (Auster 2009, 4). The possible connection between Rudolph Born and Bertrand de Born is open to interpretation, since Born himself states "perhaps", supporting in a way the previous lines where Walker explains the confrontation between father and son that turns them into enemies, the same that will happen between himself and Born in the future. In the case of Walker, his name is also fundamental for the understanding of his relationship

with Born and the metafictional meaning of the novel. His first name, Adam, refers to the biblical character. Certainly, this biblical reference takes us back to *City of Glass* (1985) and Peter Stilman Sr.'s project about recovering the original language spoken in the Garden of Eden as a way of healing the existential crisis of the postmodern individual (Auster 2004, 43). His last name recalls the act of walking, which again takes us to *The New York Trilogy* and the urban essence of the postmodern existence. In the context of Auster's postmodernity, "walking", as de Certeau asserts (1997, 93), means "writing":

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city, they are walkers (…) whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it.

From a narratological perspective, Auster presents what Doležel calls the "multiperson world", that in which more than one character interacts in a fictional space. According to Doležel, "The positions of the protagonists in the agential constellation remain fixed for the duration of the story; but their connections, dominated by the ambiguous love/hate emotional relation, are unstable and subject to sudden reversals" (1998, 76), words that describe the dynamics of the characters in the novel, particularly the interaction between Walker and Born, which is the origin of a great part of the fictional layers. In order to understand their interaction from the beginning, it is fundamental to mention what Doležel calls the "motivating interaction" through which "motivational systems are enhanced by two additional components, absent in the one-person world: interpersonal relations and social representations" (1998, 100–101). One of this "motivational systems" is power, "a means whereby one person – the power-holder controls the intentions and acting of another – the subordinate" (1998, 101). From the start of the novel Born exercises control over Walker, sometimes so strongly that it seems supernatural. And this point is made clear by Walker from the first lines of his narration (Auster 2009, 4):

> I have no memory of why I was there. Someone must have asked me to go along, but who that person was has long since evaporated from my mind. […] But that night, inexplicably, I said yes, and off I went with my forgotten friend to wherever it was he took me.

This inexplicable force pushed him to the party where Born was waiting for him. This can be analysed from Doležel's perspective and his interactional system in which Born would be the "power-holder" and Walker the "subordinate". Also, from a metafictional perspective, this "inexplicable" control that Born exercises over Walker can be interpreted differently. If the novel is a succession of fictional layers and Born is the main origin of all of them, he can be considered the "creator" or "inventor" of this fictional space. In fact, leaving aside the relationship between Rudolph Born and Bertrand de Born, if we consider the meaning of his last name there is a possible link between the word "born" and the words "originate", "invent", or "create", among other synonyms. In this context, Walker, like all the other characters in this fiction, would be creations of Born but that would not stop Walker from performing his role as author in the fiction, or more concretely his role as character-author. This reinforces a whole structure of authorship in the literary space, governed by Born, that contributes to the

disappearance of the role of author itself. This interpretation will be considered throughout the whole analysis in order to discuss how Auster questions the authorship of the novel.

However, according to Doležel's proposal, it can be considered that the power Born exercises over Walker is a mental power "originating in superior mental capacities (knowledge, skills, expertise, etc.) [and] is applied through semiotic acts of information and persuasion" (1998, 103). There are different ways in which Born puts his power over Walker into practice, and this interaction with him is seen throughout the different events that take place in their friendship. Yet, Born's first manipulation of Walker is through his wife, Margot. After their first meeting at a party where Walker does not remember how he arrived there, they meet in a bar in the West End. Walker's first impulse is to ignore him since he had already had a bad impression of this man (Auster 2009, 14):

> that wasn't to deny his other qualities–his charm, his intelligence, his humor–but underneath it all he had emanated a darkness and a cynicism that had thrown me off balance, had left me feeling that he wasn't a man who could be trusted.

This feeling of darkness and wickedness provoked by Born haunts the whole novel and predicts the terrible events of Walker's early future. In this second encounter, Born openly persuades Walker to do something by seducing him with his own wife Margot. In a very suspicious tone, Born tells Walker that Margot was very impressed by him (Auster 2009, 16):

> She's taken a real liking to you, but you should also know that she's extremely worried.
>
> Worried? Why on earth should she be worried? She doesn't even know me.
>
> Perhaps not, but she's gotten it into her head that your future is at risk.

Certainly, Walker's future is at risk but not because of any external factor to come but because of his relationship with Born. As Doležel explains, "the most representative motivational complex is the erotic cluster" (1998, 104) and concludes: "the factor of sexual drive gives erotic activity the character of a need, similar to hunger and thirst. The emotional constituent – love – united eros with the grand passions of the mind" (1998, 104). Remarkably, this is how Born justifies Margot's interest and attraction towards him: "She thinks you need help. Margot might not possess the quickest brain in the Western world, but she meets a boy who says he's a poet, and the first word that comes to her is *starvation*" (Auster 2009, 17). So, Walker's supposed need is Born's excuse to help him with a job: he proposes that he to run a literary magazine (Auster 2009, 17–18). With this, Born establishes a strong professional bond with Walker that allows him to control and manipulate his actions. And this is confirmed when Born and Walker have a conversation together in front of Margot about the possibility of Walker having sex with her. This scene takes place in Born's house, after their professional agreement with the literary magazine, and a delicious dinner prepared by Margot. Born openly talks about Margot with Walker, as follows (Auster 2009, 38):

> And what about Margot herself? Are you attracted to her as well?
>
> She's sitting across the table from me. It seems wrong to talk about her as if she weren't here.

> I'm sure she doesn't mind. Do you, Margot?
>
> No, Margot said. Not in the least.
>
> You see, Mr Walker? Not in the least.

Through these lines, it could be inferred that either Margot is part of this game, or she is also being manipulated by Born to manipulate Walker. In other words, if Walker is Born's fictional creation, so is Margot. And her fictional role in this narration is to have sex with Walker. After admitting that he feels attracted to Margot, Born takes the situation to its limit and goes on coercing Walker (Auster 2009, 38–39):

> Am I to understand that if Margot threw herself at you and asked you to fuck her, you wouldn't be interested? Is that what you're saying? Poor Margot. You have no idea how much you've hurt her feelings.
>
> What are you talking about?
>
> Why don't you ask her?
>
> Suddenly, Margot reached across the table and took hold of my hand. Don't be upset, she said. Rudolf is only trying to have some fun. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

Evidently Walker is part of a plan and Margot is there to help Born. A few pages later, Margot and Walker make love and in fact spend five nights together, however it is Margot who tells Walker that, after those nights, everything will be over (Auster 2009, 53):

> I've loved being with you, but we've run out of time now, and the moment you walk out of here, you'll understand that you don't need me anymore.
>
> That's not true.
>
> Yes, it is. You just don't know it yet.
>
> What are you talking about?

Margot's words suggest that she knows Born's plan and she is just one of his puppets. She decides to participate in this macabre game in which this disloyalty to Born will have a very high cost for Walker. As a matter of fact, Born has created this situation not only to manipulate Walker psychologically, but also to emotionally blackmail him at the end of this part of the novel. Again, Margot, in her condition as a fictional character in Born's fiction, is completely aware of the fact that once she has accomplished her role in Born's work it will be her end. That is the reason why, a few lines before the extract quoted above, she says "I don't know why, but something tells me this is the end, that this is the last time I'll ever see you" (Auster 2009, 52), or more explicitly, when she tells Walker "the moment you walk out of here, you'll understand that you don't need me anymore" (Auster 2009, 53).

Once the sexual encounter between Walker and Margot takes place, Born has total control over Walker. In Doležel's words, "the subordinate agent has to follow the power holder's intentions. In this asymmetrical constellation the mode of peremptory interaction is generated. Whatever the specific arrangements, the subordinate agent is in the service of the

power holder" (1998, 106). Born then tells Walker that he knows he has slept with his wife. Unexpectedly, Born expresses his gratitude in relation to the incident and tells Walker his big secret, that he is in love with another woman in Paris (Auster 2009, 57):

> Thank me? For what?
>
> For showing me the light of truth. I feel greatly in your debt.
>
> I still don't know what you're talking about.
>
> Margot.
>
> What about her?
>
> She betrayed me.
>
> How? I asked, trying to play dumb but feeling ridiculous, crumpling up with shame as Born continued to smile at me.
>
> She slept with you.

Even though Walker also betrayed him, Born's understanding of the situation, instead of creating certain suspicion in Walker, strengthens the intimate links between them to such an extent that Walker asserts (Auster 2009, 62):

> I felt happy, awash in a sense of well-being, and whatever misgivings I might have had about Born were beginning to melt away, or at least had been put in abeyance for now. … I was willing to give him every benefit of the doubt.

The whole situation is reversed when, at the end of part one, both Walker and Born, walking about Riverside Park, are mugged by a black teenager with a fake gun. Born stabs the kid showing again his wicked nature. Walker, in a desperate reaction, tells him to take the boy to the hospital but Born replies: "Don't be an idiot, Born said, grabbing hold of my jacket and giving me a good hard shake. No hospitals. The boy is going to die, and we can't have anything to do with it" (Auster 2009, 65). All the suspicion and mystery about the risks to Walker's life if he stays with Born are confirmed but, as expected, he rebels and leaves to find some help: "I don't care. Walk away from it if you like. Go home and drink another bottle of gin, but I'm running off Broadway right now to call for an ambulance" (Auster 2009, 66). When he comes back, both the black kid and Born have disappeared. The *New York Post* reports that same afternoon: "the body of eighteen-year-old Cedric Williams had been discovered in Riverside Park with over a dozen knife wounds gouged into his chest and stomach. There was no doubt in my mind that Born was responsible" (Auster 2009, 67). This is what Doležel, in terms of the characters' power dynamics, calls "conflict": "the influencee reacts by protecting the status of independence and the influencing agent persists in his or her attempts at domination, conflict is inevitable" (1998, 108). Thus, among the three different sequences of actions that can result from conflict, Born chooses a concrete speech act, threat and ultimatum (Doležel 1998, 109): "Not a word, Walker. Remember: I still have the knife, and I am not afraid to use it" (Auster 2009, 68). This will not be the only conflict in the novel. Born will come back in Walker's fiction, titled "Summer", where he will try to face Born again and do justice to Cedric Williams by telling everyone Born is a murderer. This is how Walker's and Born's conflict starts since both the erotic cluster and the conflict extend in parts two and three of the novel.

3 The Character-Author: Walker

The second part of the novel changes narrator but still deals with Walker as one of the protagonists. This time Jim, Walker's college friend, narrates the story of how he received a letter "less than a year ago" (Auster 2009, 76) from Walker. From a narratological perspective, according to Genette, we are dealing here with what he calls an anachrony: "the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative" (1983, 36). He further explains that narrative anachronies "implicitly assume the existence of a kind of zero degree that would be a condition of perfect temporal correspondence between narrative and story. This point of reference is more hypothetical than real" (1983, 36). Part II takes us to the present time of the novel, 2007, and to a new narrator, Jim, who still keeps a link with Walker. In fact, part II starts with a past reference, the time and setting where both characters met, Columbia University, in 1965. In this context, Part II becomes an "internal analepses" or "heterodiegetic" part (Genette 1983, 50): "analepses dealing with a story line (and thus with a diegetic content) different from the content (or contents) of the first narrative" (Genette 1983, 50). Indeed, it is different in the sense that it takes us from 1967 to 2007, and the person who narrates the story is different but still related in some way with one of the protagonists of Part I – Walker. Therefore "such analepses deal, classically, either with a character recently introduced whose "antecedents" the narrator wants to shed light on, or they deal with a character who has been out of sight for some time and whose recent past we must catch up with" (Genette 1983, 50). In this analepsis, Jim is in charge of shedding some light on Walker's antecedents through the package he receives in spring 2007. He also deals with him as a character who has disappeared from his life for a long time, and consequently from his literary space and this narrative level. Remarkably, when Jim opens the UPS package he receives from Walker he explains: "it contained the manuscript of Walker's story about Rudolf Born (Part I of this book), along with a cover letter from Adam" (Auster 2009, 76). The role of Jim as a narrator is affected by this statement since, by giving the reader the instruction of "Part I of this book", he is placing himself in the role of writer. This is a fact that becomes even more explicit when he transcribes Walker's notes and translates Cécile Juin's diary to include it in what seems to be his book. From a postmodern perspective, this is a form of *mise-en-abyme* technique that becomes the basis of the whole narration. As the critic Brian McHale explains, "it is a nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world" (1990, 124). The influence of "this disruption of the logic of narrative hierarchy" is directly linked in postmodernism with the authorship of the text. Through this technique, postmodernist authors open the discussion of the role of the author, as it occurs here when Jim refers to the book the reader has in his hands and indirectly to the novel *Invisible*. Moreover, Walker, in his letter, talks about his manuscript as follows (Auster 2009, 76–77):

> By way of anticipation, I enclose a still-not-finished draft of the first chapter of a book I am trying to write. I want to go on with it but seem to have hit a wall of struggle and uncertainty – *fear* might be the word I'm looking for – and I'm hoping that a talk with you might give me the courage to climb over it or tear it down. I should add (in case you are in doubt) that it is not a work of fiction.

Apart from playing with the idea of a story within a story, Auster plays again with authorship since not only is Jim an author, so is Walker. Both perform the roles of character-authors as a key fictional game to reinforce the metaleptic structure. The succession of character-authors blurs the frontiers between narrative layers and, of course, contributes to the invisibilization of the role of the author itself. The reader needs to get to Part II to find out that what he or she reads in Part I is a fragment of a manuscript written by Walker himself. According to Rosemary Huisman, "the narrator begins to write only *after* he has read everything" (2013, 272), which would imply a complete manipulation of the text from a creative perspective and an impersonation of Walker's role as an author. And, of course, he also plays with the nature of the text, is it a true story or is it fiction? Jim has an answer for this (Auster 2009, 79):

> If I hadn't been told it was a true story, I probably would have plunged in and taken those sixty-plus pages for the beginning of a novel (writers do, after all, sometimes inject characters who bear their own names into works of fiction) and then I might have found the ending implausible – or perhaps too abrupt, which would have made it unsatisfying.

Jim literally tells the reader what he has done with Walker's manuscript: use it as the first chapter of a novel. Here, the thin line between a true story and fiction is questionable, as Currie affirms "[t]hey like to thematise their own artificiality, often by constructing an internal boundary between fiction and reality, which allows for reflection on the relation between fiction and reality, as well as the irony that both the fiction and the reality are, in the end, fictional" (2011, 2). In this particular case, as Currie states, Jim plays the role of the "intrusive authorial narrator" (2011, 2) to confirm in a subtle way that Walker's manuscript is fiction, and it is part of his novel. If Jim accomplishes the role of the intrusive authorial narrator, Walker becomes the "surrogate author" (2011, 3) as he performs the role of the character-author.

In order to reinforce the authorial discussion, Jim, as an "intrusive authorial narrator" keeps on talking about his role in the narration. In a letter sent to Walker as a response to his first letter, Jim shares his experiences as a writer to help him with his manuscript, and again he talks about the book the narrator has in her or his hands (Auster 2009, 89):

> Part One was written in the first person, and when I began Part Two (which was more directly about myself than the previous part), I continued writing in the first person, grew more and more dissatisfied with the results, and eventually stopped. The pause lasted several months (difficult months, anguished months), and then one night the solution came to me. My approach had been wrong, I realized. By writing about myself in the first person, I had smothered myself and made myself invisible, had made it impossible for me to find the thing I was looking for.

In this fragment, Jim not only talks about his role as author but about the process of writing. Furthermore, he questions the use of the first-person singular in Part II of the novel. This decision challenges his existence in the text, turning him into an invisible entity. Some lines after, he explains that "I needed to separate myself from myself, to step back and carve out some space between myself and my subject (which was myself)" (Auster 2009, 89), and the

transition from "myself" to "subject" is the literary space where he disappears and becomes a character-author. McHale explains this in the following way (2011, 202):

> The author is another tool for the exploration and exploitation of ontology. S/he functions at two theoretically distinct levels of ontological structure: as the vehicle of autobiographical *fact* within the projected fictional world; and as the *maker* of that world, visibly occupying an ontological level superior to it.

Apart from the fact that the issue of authorship is used in the text as a tool to open different fictional layers and thus contributes to the metafictional discussion, in this case Jim is a "vehicle of autobiographical *fact*" as a way of dealing with the confrontation between reality and fiction. Above all, Jim's role is that of the "*maker* of that world" who occupies an "ontological level superior" to the ones in which Walker becomes the protagonist of his narration. Jim's role as a writer is reinforced by the introduction of what Genette would call an "internal homodiegetic analepses", that is, "internal analepses that deal with the same line of action as the first narrative" (1983, 51). Considering the first narrative with which the novel starts, Jim brings to the text the rest of Walker's novel (Auster 2009, 93):

> Two days after the phone call, the second part of his book arrived at my house in a FedEx envelope. A brief cover letter informed me that he had at last come up with a title, *1967*, and that each chapter would be headed by the name of a season. The first part was *Spring*, the part I had just been sent was *Summer*, and the part he was working on now was *Fall*.

Again, Auster introduces the *mise-en-abyme* technique, and Jim, through Walker, introduces the idea of the novel within the novel which McHale explains as "the nested representation *reproduces* or *duplicates* the primary representation as a whole" (2001, 124). Jim is the means through which the reader gets to know Walker's novel: "still fresh in my mind, I braced myself for something unbearable, a story that would be even more harsh and troubling than *Spring*" (Auster 2009, 94). From Jim's words, the reader can infer that he is also a reader of Walker's fiction and the link between the three chapters, "Spring," "Summer" and "Fall". However, from a metafictional perspective, Jim also becomes the "*maker* of that world" (2001, 202) since he can be the real author of Walker's story and therefore be playing with the narrative roles. Indeed, with the last part of *1967* Jim sees himself forced to decode Walker's encrypted notes to finish the novel. Jim receives a letter from Walker after he learns he is dead (Auster 2009, 165):

> [T]he news that Walker was dead, and now he was talking to me again, a dead man was talking to me, and I felt that as long as I held the letter in my hand, as long as the words of that letter were still before my eyes, it would be as if he had been resurrected, as if he had been momentarily brought back to life in the words he had written to me.

Consequently, the author is dead. Here, Jim points to two things that seem to echo certain ideas reflected in Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" (1967). On the one hand, the narrator refers to the fact that "a dead man was talking to me" underlining the importance of language and the fact that "the words of that letter were still before my eyes". Barthes

states that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality, to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me'" (1990, 168). In this context, the invisibility of the author reinforces the importance language has in the literary space to the extent that it makes the author disappear. On the other hand, Jim believes Walker is resurrected through his own words, and therefore through his own fiction, which highlights the relevance of the reader in the act of writing. A few years earlier, in 1955, the critic Maurice Blanchot was already discussing the relationship between the author and reader in the literary space: "The reader, without knowing it, is engaged in a profound struggle with the author" (1989, 193). Moreover, he (1989, 193) concludes that:

> What is a book no one reads? Something that is not yet written. It would seem, then, that to read is not to write the book again, but to allow the book to *be*: written – this time all by itself, without the intermediary of the writer, without anyone's writing it.

From this perspective, the role of the reader is more a creative one which emerges from the invisibility of the author to rewrite the book again. And that is exactly what Jim does through reading or, in this creative act, "rewriting" Walker's manuscript. In this line of thought, Barthes culminates his essay by asserting: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (1990, 172). Thus, the death of Walker is at the cost of Jim's birth as a reader who, at the same time, takes a creative role in the fiction as a way of impersonating Walker, since he literally has to transcribe his words (Auster 2009, 166):

> Telegraphic. No complete sentences. From beginning to end, written like this. Goes to the store. Falls asleep. Lights a cigarette. In the third person this time. Third person, present tense, and therefore I decided to follow his lead and render his account in exactly that way – third person, present tense. *As for the enclosed pages, do with them what you will*. He had given me his permission, and I don't feel that turning his encrypted, Morse-code jottings into full sentences constitutes a betrayal of any kind. Despite my editorial involvement with the text, in the deepest, truest sense of what it means to tell a story, every word of *Fall* was written by Walker himself.

Jim's act of writing is also an act of reading that affirms Walker's death as an author. As Blanchot explains: "every reading where consideration of the writer seems to play so great a role is an attack which annihilates him in order to give the work back to itself: back to its anonymous presence, to the violent, impersonal affirmation that it is" (1989, 193). In other words, back to its invisibility.

4 The Death of the Author: Jim's Ghosts

If "Summer" tells of the incestuous relationship between Walker and his sister Gwyn during the summer of 1967 in New York, "Fall" brings back Born, but this time in Paris. Walker goes to Paris for his junior year in college, but his desire for revenge is uncontrollable and his stay in Paris becomes a way of unmasking Born and his evil nature. In "Fall" the narrator again uses the same narrative technique used in "Spring", the erotic cluster and the conflict. Certainly, Walker's desire for revenge is in a way an act of rebellion in the sense that he challenges Born's domination of him and his own world. His aim is to tell everyone in Born's

new life (his wife, Hélène Juin and her daughter, Cécile Juin) that he is a murderer. From a metafictional perspective, if we consider Born the creator of Walker's literary space, then as a fictional character he is threatening his fictional existence since he is not supposed to face his own creator in a literary space he is not allowed to transgress. However, in this new phase of his life Walker succumbs to continuing his romantic relationship with Margot, a character that still works as an inseparable link with Born, and even though they do not have any contact anymore, she will take him back to him (Auster 2009, 172):

> Margot smiles, then changes the subject by asking him for a cigarette. As he lights the Gauloise for her, Walker looks at Margot and suddenly understands that he will never be able to separate her in his mind from Born. It is a grotesque realization, and it utterly smashes the playful, seductive tone he was trying to initiate. […] Even if Margot is no longer a part of Born's life, she is tied to Born in Walker's memory, and to look at her is no different from looking at Born.

The transgression takes place some lines after, when Walker tells Margot "about the stroll down Riverside Drive on that May evening after she left New York. He describes the stabbing to her. He tells her pointblank that Born is without question the murderer of Cedric Williams" (Auster 2009, 172). Here, Walker defies Born even more, and evidently does not respect his ultimatum. Moreover, by acting contrary to Born's orders, he also defies Born's role as a manipulator, as the influencer of this "multicharacter" narration. In this context, considering Born the influencer and creator makes Walker the influencee or character-author of this fictional layer, and thus he challenges Born's authorship. Indeed, Walker is convinced that he can still control the situation since, in his role as character-author, he believes he is writing this part of the story; he is the one who defies Born by meeting Margot again and planning to casually meet him. However, he finds out that there is nothing he can do to avoid Born's manipulation (Auster 2009, 182–83):

> He glances up, and there, standing directly in front of him, is Rudolf Born. Before Walker can say or do anything, the future husband of Hélène Juin sits down in the empty chair beside him. Walker's pulse begins to race. He is breathless, speechless. It wasn't supposed to happen this way, he tells himself. If and when they crossed paths, he was the one who was going to spot Born, not the other way around.

From this point onwards, Born's domination of Walker is absolute, and even though Walker believes he can get into Born's world again as a strategy to reveal to his new family that he is a murderer, this is only one more example of Born's power over Walker and how he ends up trapped in his own game. Since Born reappears on the scene, the narrative discourse changes by blurring the limits between literary genres and ending the different parts of the narration with stage directions such as "End of Act I. Curtain" (2009, 187) or "End of Act II. Curtain" (2009, 222) until the last part of the manuscript written by Walker titled "Act III" (2009, 222). The introduction of stage directions to the narrative discourse reinforces the *mise-en-abyme* technique by opening a new discussion in relation to the literary genres used in the novel. This is also reflected in the last fictional layer when the authorship of the novel is questioned by Jim about becoming a translator, and accordingly, an author. Moreover, the last part of "Fall" is supposed to be a literal transcription of Walker's final notes, leaving

behind Jim's role as a narrator to become a copyist. Thus, the conflict started in the first level of narration, "Spring", culminates in Born's final act, when he uses Cécile to put "two and a half kilos maybe three" (Auster 2009, 241) of hashish in Walker's room while he is having a walk. The police arrest him, and Walker is deported back to the United States with the condition of not coming back again to France. This is how Born wins the conflict, this is how Born "succeeds in overpowering the antagonist" (Doležel 1998, 109). In other words, this is how Born "prove[s] his domination by punishing the conquered, up to and including his or her annihilation" (Doležel 1998, 110). And, of course, this is how Born kills Walker as a character in his fiction (Auster 2009, 244–43):

> He will never go back there, and he will never see any of them again. Good-bye, Margot. Good-bye, Cécile. Good-bye, Hélène. For years later, they are no more substantial than ghosts. They are all ghosts now, and W. will soon be walking among them.

The last part of the novel confirms Jim's performance as character-author and the transformation of Walker's notes into his own fiction, as he states: "I have already described how I revamped Walker's notes for *Fall*. As for the names, they have been invented according to Gwyn's instructions" (Auster 2009, 260). The next level of narration is a translation of Cécile Juin's diary. Certainly, Jim impersonates Walker not only as an author, but also as a translator. Born himself introduces Walker to Cécile as a translator (Auster 2009, 200), an act of premonition bearing in mind that Walker's impersonator, Jim, will end up translating her diary and last experiences with Born. As a narrator, Jim makes a clear statement of his mission with the diary: "The diary was written in French, of course, and what follows is my translation of that French into English, which I am including with the author's full permission" (Auster 2009, 274). This statement is ironic, since Jim is the author of Cécile Juin's diary. If the narrator plays with his role of reader to become an author, he also contributes to this discussion in his role of translator. As mentioned before, once Jim becomes a translator he is again impersonating Walker and becoming an author. In *The Invention of Solitude*, Auster talks about the relationship between the translator, the text translated and the original author (Auster 1989, 136):

> A. sits down in his own room to translate another man's book, and it is as though he were entering that man's solitude and making it his own. […] Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two. A. imagines himself as a kind of ghost of that other man, who is both there and not there, and whose book is both the same and not the same as the one he is translating.

Thus, in the same way that Jim is Walker's ghost, he is also Cécile Juin's ghost. If, at first, he was Walker's ghost through a process of reading, here he becomes an author through the process of translating. Two ways of approaching and decoding a text that contribute to the *mise-en-abyme* technique. In other words, different fictional layers open to mirror the novel itself by introducing several ways of becoming the author of a text. The translation, as a new piece of fiction inside the story, connects with the other through its protagonist, Born. Now he has removed Walker from his fiction, this time the story deals with the encounter between Born and Cécile Juin after many years. The novel ends with Cécile finding out

Born's real identity, his real job as a spy for the French government and discovering his real, murderous nature. Cécile, the last survivor of Born's world, accomplishes Walker's mission as a redemption for what she did to him.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, with this last fictional layer Jim questions once more the authorship of the novel but, in this succession of fictional levels and the repetition of different authors, the figure of one single author disappears. Certainly, Jim mirrors his role of author in all the different fictional layers and in his ghosts, Walker, Born and Cécile. From this perspective, *Invisible* can be considered an exercise of metafiction, a poststructuralist game in which Auster shows the reader the whole process of writing and the creation of a literary space with the aim of erasing the author as its central theme. Rather than excluding the author from the text, Auster plays with different character-authors who will successively disappear in the multiplication of several narratives. Author and character-authors meet in Rudolph Born's story in which Walker sees himself immersed in Born's trap as his fictional character, and therefore his whole life depends on Born's creative decisions. This fictional layer is reflected in Jim's story, questioning the authority of the text he is reading and the novel the reader has in her or his hands. In this sense, Jim stands as the writer, rewriter and translator of Walker's life experience which at the same time becomes a fiction in the hands of Jim. Whereas Auster's metafiction is characterized by fictionalizing the literary space and the practice of fiction, what makes *Invisible* stand out from the other works is how Auster constructs a metaleptic structure in which characters and readers navigate through imperceptible narrative layers linked with an invisible thread that connects them all. In this context, Auster's fictional work is adroit in weaving the different fictional spaces whose frontiers turn invisible, giving the title a new meaning apart from its reference to the disappearance of the author in the novel. *Invisible* gives Auster's postmodernity a new perspective in which the construction of the literary space is infinite and the boundaries between the fictional layers are erased in order to make the author invisible.

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