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1. Introduction

While Paul Benjamin Auster (1947–) is regarded as one of the most important American writers of the second half of twentieth century, he remains most widely known for his debut novel, *The New York Trilogy* (1987). The three novellas – initially published separately as *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986) – brought Auster to the public eye and introduced him as the new voice of the postmodern scene. His later works – *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), *The Music of Chance* (1990), *Leviathan* (1992), or *The Book of Illusions* (2002), to name a few – were all well received by both critics and public; nonetheless, *The New York Trilogy* remains synonymous with Auster (<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/12/04/spellbound/>).

Much in the same vein, when metafiction is examined in the context of American postmodernist literature, *The New York Trilogy* is often mentioned as one of the examples. This is not without reason, of course, as the *Trilogy* perfectly encapsulates the main premise of metafiction: “[a] fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact” (Waugh 2). However, what is noteworthy is that other works by Auster¹ are rarely observed as metafictional, despite numerous characteristics of metafiction being present in his canon.

It is for this reason that I have set out to analyze the dominant metafictional qualities of three of Auster’s novels – *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), *Man in the Dark* (2008), and *Invisible* (2009) – and the role these metafictional elements play in Auster’s works. I aim to examine both

¹ Apart from *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), but more on this later.

the technical aspects of metafiction as well as their overall impact on the reader and story. The goal of this thesis is not merely to make a case for Paul Auster as the writer of metafiction (although by the end of it, this should be an obvious conclusion), but to provide an in-depth analysis of some of the most common metafictional elements and their functions and place within the Auster's work.

The starting point, therefore, will be crafting a working definition of metafiction that will suit the project at hand. As metafiction is most commonly regarded as a postmodern technique, it is important for this thesis to define metafiction in terms of postmodernism and, in doing so, make it applicable to Auster's works. It is worth pointing out that, while postmodernism is a social, philosophical, aesthetic movement, due to the nature of this work, I will focus solely on literary postmodernism and analyze the works as examples of literary postmodernism. For this reason, I will also maintain the term 'metafiction' as opposed to 'metareference' introduced by Werner Wolf. Wolf prefers metareference as it encompasses the entirety of media, not just literary fiction (Wolf v). He argues that self-reference across all media can have a metareferential purpose and should be recognized as such, not limited to one medium. I, however, will focus on literature alone and will therefore use the term that is most commonly used for discussing literary fiction – metafiction.

1.1 Introducing metafiction

Patricia Waugh, one of the first literary critics of metafiction, defines metafiction by saying that

[it] is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship

between fiction and reality. [...] such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh 2)

In other words, metafiction can be classified as fiction about fiction, the process of writing, and the fictionality of the text itself. This can be achieved in many ways: a book may address the reader directly (as in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, 1979); a story may contain more stories within itself and reference them throughout (as in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, 2004); a book might give footnotes which comment on the story and provide guidelines for the reader (as in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, 2000); or a book might contain an analysis of another work of fiction (e.g., Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, 1962).

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Waugh mentions that the concept of metafiction is a “contemporary” one (Waugh 2), although examples of metafiction can already be found much earlier: in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) or Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759). Despite having been present in books for centuries, metafictional elements remained relatively undiscussed until the second half of the 20th century.

The first use of the term metafiction is accredited to William Gass. According to Waugh, he coined the term in 1970 (Waugh 3). In his book *Fiction and the Figures of Life* he talks about “anti-novels [...] like some of the work [...] in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed” (Gass 24–25). Gass calls such novels “metafictions” (Gass 25), from Greek μετά-, meaning ‘after’ or ‘beyond’. He also notes that the use of such mechanisms in writing was becoming more and more prominent as novelists became increasingly aware of the tool they were using for delivering the message – language (Gass 24).

There was very little acknowledgement of metafiction until the second half of the 20th century. Linda Hutcheon writes in her book *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* about metafiction as the “kind of fiction which began to run rampant in the 1960s” (Hutcheon 1). She states that initial reviews of “new metafiction” in the early 1970s were predominately negative (Hutcheon 2) but that it has since become accepted by the critics. One reason for this could be that, with the emergence of metafiction, “the roles of writer and critic are often fulfilled by the same person” (Currie 3). This, however, does not imply that in metafiction the author is necessarily a critic, but that the line separating fiction and criticism is “dramatised” (Currie 3), blurred, and exploited for the purposes of the work itself. Fiction and criticism began to interlace in a new way, which, in turn, laid the foundation for a wider, more positive recognition of metafiction.

Hutcheon’s first definition of metafiction calls it “fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (Hutcheon 1). However, the self-awareness in metafiction is not always employed for the purpose of self-criticism. As Waugh points out, the aim of this self-exploration is more often than not to “explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction” (Waugh 2). Rather than focus on criticizing the work before the critics do (and in that process perhaps criticize the critics or other writers), metafiction sets out to examine the very fabric of the world through examining fiction. To achieve this, metafiction relies on language: “If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself” (Waugh 3). And, since in literary fiction one can only “‘represent’ the discourses of [the] world” (Waugh 4), we use language to create those discourses.

In metafiction, the process of discourse creation is exposed and equated to the process of creating fiction, thus showing that “composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one’s ‘reality’” (Waugh 24). This shifts the focus on the act of writing itself.

Fictionality becomes the main point of interest and the ultimate goal is to uncover it:

“Questioning not only the notion of the novelist as God, through the flaunting of the author’s godlike role, but also the authority of consciousness, of the mind, metafiction establishes the categorization of the world through the arbitrary system of language” (Waugh 24–25). To further emphasize this, metafiction systematically draws the readers’ attention to the artificiality of the text, constantly reminding them of the ‘fakeness’ of it all, not allowing for complete immersion. Paradoxically, this in turn draws the readers deeper into the narrative as they “become co-creators of its meanings” (Neumann 4). This inclusion of the reader in the process of creating fiction is something that was alluded to in the famous essay by Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author* (1967). Arguing that the “unity of a text is not in its origin, [but] in its destination” (Barthes 6) and announcing the death of the author, Barthes simultaneously brings upon the birth of the reader.

Hutcheon calls this “the paradox of the reader” (Hutcheon 7) – the reader is asked to commit to a fictional world and accept it as the true world of the book, but, at the same time, metafiction reminds the reader of that world’s fictionality, asking for their active participation in the co-creation of it all. The power that is given to the reader, then, alters the approach to the perception of the work – both in the writer and the reader – and allows for multiple interpretations of the ‘truth’, or even a denial of its existence. This tactic is decisively postmodern as it moves past the modernist notion of author being the sole creator of ‘the ultimate truth’ of the work and the only one in possession of it.

The departure from the idea that a literary text is supposed to provide concrete answers to well-defined questions is in line with the observations of Brian McHale on postmodernism. He cites the change in the “focusing component of the art” (McHale 6) – the dominant – as the key shift from modernism to postmodernism. The dominant in modernism is epistemological, knowledge-oriented, and it concerns itself with questions such as “Who knows what, how do they know it, and how reliably?” (McHale 15). In postmodern fiction, however, this dominant becomes ontological, focusing more on the existential questions of “What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?” (McHale 10). While both types of questions may occur in the same text, in postmodern literature “epistemology is backgrounded, as the price for foregrounding ontology” (McHale 11). Therefore, it is no surprise that metafiction is most commonly considered a postmodern category as its flaunting of the fictionality of the text instinctively invites ontological questions, giving little support to the epistemological ones.

Werner Wolf introduces four pairs of metafictional (metareferential) types: intracompositional (direct) vs extracompositional (indirect) metafiction; explicit vs implicit metafiction; *fictio* vs *fictum*; and critical vs non-critical metafiction (Wolf 37–38). Intracompositional metafiction refers to metafiction containing narrator’s comments on the text itself, whereas extracompositional metafiction comments on works existing outside the work, mainly other literature. *Fictio* refers to those works that, while containing metafictional elements, never question the authenticity of itself, that is, they are presented as truthful. *Fictum*, on the other hand, openly ponders the validity of the narrative, more often than not undermining the truth of it. Explicit metafiction directly addresses the fictionality of the text, whereas implicit only hints it.

Finally, critical metafiction contains an analysis of itself as a work, and non-critical metafiction does not.

These four pairs will be used as the theoretical basis for the analyses in this work. In the following chapters, I will examine the three novels through the prism of these typologies and argue that this perspective helps identifying metafictional elements in the novels by Auster. Wolf also insists that, for metafiction to be fully realized, the message has to be intentionally encoded in the text for the reader to recognize it (Wolf 25). Since intention is difficult to prove, Wolf opts to call the insertion of these messages “non-accidental” (Wolf 26) and thus all metafiction discussed in this work will be assumed as non-accidental. Following McHale’s thesis on the ontological dominant in postmodern literature, I will also use my analysis to identify the ontological questions as well as the methods used to reach them in each of the three analyzed novels. Ultimately, this paper aims to combine the two theoretical parts by illustrating ways in which Auster implements metafiction – a non-accidental self-reference that draws attention to the fictional status of a literary work with the purpose of posing ontological questions within it – to highlight the ontological dominant in his work.

2. In the Country of Last Things

Auster's second book of fiction, *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), is most often described as a dystopian epistolary novel. Presented in the form of a found manuscript, the story follows Anna Blume as she arrives in an unnamed city in an unnamed Country that is suffering hardships under the dictatorial rule. The city is in a siege-like state – all entries and exits closely monitored, the industry is non-existent, food and supplies are scarce, and the streets are overrun by either criminals or the police, as the two groups have barely differ now. People starve to death, kill or are murdered over anything with value, commit suicides, or just barely survive in the harsh conditions. Anna searches for her brother who has previously been sent to the city as a foreign correspondent for a newspaper agency, but has since been missing. Upon arriving, Anna realizes that the situation in the Country is much worse than she anticipated. She loses most of her money very quickly and turns to scavenging on the streets for a living. From the streets, she first moves in with an older woman Isabel, a fellow object collector, and her husband Ferdinand. However, once the two die, she is forcefully removed from their apartment. Anna is back on the streets for a while until, running from a conflict, she enters the city library. In it, she learns that the library is the last safe haven for the religious and academic groups. She meets Samuel Farr, her brother's last point of contact, but he tells her that he does not know where her brother is and that she should assume the worst. Samuel is consumed by his writing project – a detailed book on the Country – and works feverishly to interview citizens and research as much as he can on the history and political causes that led to the current situation. Anna offers him help with the project and a share of the funds that she kept from selling Isabell's belongings in exchange for a stay with Samuel. They soon start a romantic relationship and Anna gets pregnant. Not long after, Anna is lured into a human slaughterhouse, but she manages to escape by jumping through a

window and is found by a charity organization belonging to the Woburn House. It is the only remaining charity providing medical services to the public, run by Victoria, a granddaughter of the famous philanthropist Dr. Woburn. Anna recovers from the injuries but suffers a miscarriage. She is told that the library was destroyed in a fire with everyone in it, Samuel included, presumed dead. Anna starts helping with the charity and becomes a valuable member of the organization, helping with sharing the medical supplies, searching the streets for those in need, and caring about patients and other employees. One day, Samuel appears in the Woburn House and, after an emotional encounter, he is invited to stay as a staff member. The charity does not have a doctor anymore and the medicine and funds are in short supply so they need any help they can get. Finally, the story ends with Anna saying that the Woburn House has ran out of supplies and all possessions have been sold in order to obtain travel permits. The group prepares to leave the Country, but it is unknown whether they succeed in this or not.

2.1 In the Country of Last Things as implicit metafiction

Auster introduces the novel as epistolary in the first sentence: “These are the last things, she wrote” (*In the Country of Last Things* 1), and has Anna later refer to the manuscript she writes as a letter several times. This seemingly simple framing device introduces a metafictional motif wherein the novel itself is a manuscript being read by an unknown reader. This frame, however, does not mean that the story should necessarily be considered an embedded narrative as there is no primary narrative in which it is being embedded – the only signs of the existence of the implicit primary narrator (Schmid 58) are occasional comments such as “[...] she wrote,” (2), “[...] she went on,” (5), or “[...] she continued” (39). The reader does not know who is reading

Anna's letter, nor for whom it was intended. This layer of uncertainty inserted in the opening sentence remains dominant throughout the entire novel – while Anna addresses the person she writes to several times, there is no way of knowing if the manuscript reached the right recipient. The absence of any other, more substantial, extradiegetic comments creates a feeling of someone looming over Anna's story, nested between Anna and the reader, thus duplicating the sensation of the book being read.

Throughout her letter, Anna writes directly to the unknown intended recipient of the manuscript and reflects on their relationship and events leading up to her leaving for the Country. However, while Anna indicates a significant level of closeness to the recipient, she does not address him by name at any point². Furthermore, Anna's own name is not introduced until the second quarter of the novel, when Isabel talks about her as "[...] my darling Anna who came to me from God" (49). This lack of introductions signals a level of intimacy and familiarity between Anna and the recipient, which is then transferred to the 'real' reader of the book. Having Anna address 'you' instead of a proper name allows Auster to achieve the impression of Anna's letter being intended to the real reader, creating a closer relationship between them and Anna. Still, the occasional comments by the implicit reader manage to produce an uneasy sensation of someone else's presence and remind the reader that they are the one outside the frame, thus allowing them to simultaneously stay within the fictional world and outside of it.

Anna frequently writes about the process of writing the letter itself. She explains that the notebook containing her letter was initially used by Isabel who was unable to speak towards the

² Auster later confirmed that the person Anna is writing to is David Zimmer, another character referenced in several of his books and the main protagonist of *The Book of Illusions* (Siegumfeldt, 125). This does not affect the analysis as neither Zimmer exists as a character in this book, nor is it indicated that he received Anna's letter in the end. I will, however, refer to the intended recipient as 'he' for the clarity of writing.

end of her life and resorted to writing her notes to Anna (79). She starts writing towards the end of her stay at Woburn House, when she finds the notebook by accident. This serves as a trigger for Anna as “[a] thousand things came rushing back to [her] at once” and she begins writing it all (182). Having both characters rely on the same notebook for expressing themselves, Auster draws a parallel between Isabel and Anna. In a sense, both women write to survive. While Isabel asks for water or help from Anna, Anna finds refuge and relief in putting her thoughts and memories on paper, sharing her troubles and tragic destiny with someone who is not in the same situation as her: “By now it is the one thing that matters to me: to have my say at last, to get it all down on these pages before it is too late” (79). Anna is aware of how important this letter is to her and she repeatedly acknowledges the role Isabel plays in her survival. She takes Anna in when she is living on the streets, her death makes Anna financially stable for a while, and the notebook provides Anna with a way to express herself and tell her story: “If Isabel had not lost her voice, none of these words would exist. Because she had no more words, these other words have come out of me” (79). The emphasis on the words Anna writes reiterates the metafictional idea of using language to construct worlds. Furthermore, only through the act of writing it all down does Anna start to process the events that had transpired and think about them, mirroring the metafictional notion of “exploring fiction through [...] writing fiction” (Waugh 2). The accidental discovery of a misplaced notebook proves to be crucial as not only does it serve as a catalyst for Anna to experience her own emotions and thoughts, but it also provides her with the tools to comprehend them. As Mark Brown notices, “Auster demonstrates that language and storytelling also have the power to create an illusion which is able to obscure the reality of a cruel, incomprehensible and intolerable existence. However, storytelling can also supply a refuge from an unstable and complex world” (Brown 130). Writing the letter gives a new purpose to Anna, but also a tool that

helps her share her destiny with either the intended recipient, a close friend, or whomever the letter reaches. The letter also comforts her, allowing her to process everything at her own terms and to take control. For Anna, it does not matter who finally reads her letter, the process of writing it was valuable enough.

In Anna's self-referential comments about writing the letter, there are numerous clues indicating that Anna is an unreliable narrator. She repeatedly pleads with the reader to "bear with [her]" (38) as her mind is "not quite what it used to be" (38). She is uncertain of the order of some events (125), unable to track the passage of time, doubts the validity of certain events (19), or she simply labels them unexplainable (22), maintaining a notion of opaqueness throughout her letter. While these issues might seem in line with potential difficulties of summarizing events that took place years ago and are deeply traumatic in most cases, they also support the idea that Anna's story may be fictional, at least to a certain extent. Anna reinforces her inability to describe the world around her by introducing the Country as an incomprehensible, almost fantastical place:

[T]he best approach is to believe only what your own eyes tell you. But not even that is infallible. For few things are ever what they seem to be, [...] with so many things that defy understanding. [I]t is easy to get confused, to be unsure that you are really seeing the thing you think you are looking at. It could be that you are imagining it, or mixing it with something else, or remembering something you have seen before – or perhaps even imagined before. (18–19)

Buildings disappear overnight, fold onto themselves, whole neighborhoods are erased, streets turn into a labyrinth impossible to navigate, and, consequently, life becomes a series of chance encounters, random events, and coincidences. Tim Woods points at this structure of Anna's world stating that "reality itself is called into question; and thus the basis on which ideas might be

verified are themselves unreliable” (Woods 117). Anna’s convoluted description of the Country can therefore be interpreted as implicit metafiction in which Auster, through Anna’s unreliability, signals the potential fictionality of the text.

Implicit metafiction is reinforced in several other ways in the novel, primarily in the way Anna describes her narrative process or when she talks about the act of writing the letter. As Maya Merlob writes “[t]he reader [...] is engaged not only with Blume’s experience in the city but also, and predominantly, with her writing about it” (Merlob 33). This implies that the reader is unable to “suspend disbelief, as he or she is continually aware of the fictiveness of the narrative, of its construction by the writer” (Merlob 33). Anna actively reinforces this fictiveness in her letter. When reminiscing about her childhood relationship with the man she is writing to, she mentions how she enjoyed telling him stories and constructing elaborate fairytales:

You could never get enough of my stories, of the worlds I used to make up for us to play inside of. The Castle of No Return, the Land of Sadness, the Forest of Forgotten Words. [...] How I loved to tell you lies, to trick you into believing my stories [...] Then I would tell you it was all made up, and you would start to cry. (10, 11)

This passage appears early on and suggests Anna’s propensity towards fictional narratives. Her ‘loving to tell lies’ for the purpose of storytelling asks the question whether her letter might simply be fictive. Furthermore, the names of the worlds she would invent – The Castle of No Return, The Forest of Forgotten Words – follow the same structure as the title of the novel – The Country of Last Things – giving even more indication that the story she tells is yet another fabrication set in the same style as her childhood tales. She describes the city she is in as “[seemingly] consuming itself, even as it remains” (21–22), an act she cannot explain. “I can only record, I cannot pretend to understand” (22). This description of the city corresponds with the

fantastical nature of the fairytales she used to tell, and, while Anna opens the letter by mentioning “the last things”, the Country is never referenced in the same manner as in the title, implying that Auster himself followed Anna’s pattern when naming the novel.

Furthermore, Anna again likens her story to a narrative when she refers to the time she spends in the Country before meeting Isabel as “prologue” (45), outright telling the reader which part of the book they have just read, equating her story to a work of fiction. Anna identifying the prologue of the book could refer to the fact that there are no chapters or any sub-headings in it – the entire book is a single text unit with no indicated divisions. Having no chapters in the book, Auster creates a sensation of a story told ‘in one breath,’ something that signals no premeditation.

However, the complexity of the narrative and descriptions contradicts this, once again drawing the attention to the process of story creation. Additionally, according to Wolf, the lack of chapters can be recognized as a typographical device (40), a conscious choice of subverting the genre conventions, thus being another example of implicit metafiction. In the same vein, Anna addresses the visual aspect of the text (something that the real reader cannot experience, only the implied one), stating that the notebook has very few pages left: “That explains why my handwriting has become smaller and smaller as I’ve progressed. [...] The words get smaller and smaller, so small that perhaps they are not even legible anymore” (183). While the reader cannot see Anna’s handwriting, the description of the paratextual elements is prominent in the letter and, together with the title of the book borrowing the format from Anna stories, signal metafictionality through the act of self-reference.

Language use in literature is often interlaced with metafiction, most commonly to draw parallels between discourse creation and world building in novels (Waugh, 3). Auster employs this in his work as his characters emphasize the importance of language and (story)telling in their lives. Not

only does Anna find solace in being able to write her letter and create her story, but talking is also shown to provide comfort for many citizens of the Country.

But when hope disappears, when you find that you have given up hoping even for the possibility of hope, you tend to fill the spaces with dreams, little childlike thoughts and stories to keep yourself going. Even the most hardened people have trouble stopping themselves. Without fuss or prelude they break off from what they are doing, sit down, and talk about the desires that have been welling up inside them. Food, of course is one of the favorite subjects. [...] These conversations sometimes go on for hours[.] (9)

In a world with very few material riches, daydreaming becomes the only form of escapism that one can afford themselves. Here, Auster illustrates the greatest power of language – despite all its limitations, it remains inexhaustible and available to everyone, even in the hardest of times. It becomes a force with mythical properties, with some people going as far as to “say there is nutritional value in these food talks” (10). Anna calls this “language of ghosts” (10), a type of language developed by the people of the Country as their final feat of hope.

There are many other possible kinds of talks in this language. Most of them begin when one person says to another: I wish. What they wish for might be anything at all, as long as it is something that cannot happen. [...] Absurd and infantile things, with no meaning and no reality. [...] [B]y talking of the world that existed before you went to sleep, you can delude yourself into thinking that the present day is simply an apparition, no more or less real than the memories of all the other days you carry around inside you. (10)

Using language to blur the lines of reality, many find strength to survive the cruelty of daily life. And, while Anna firmly refuses to speak the language of ghosts citing that she outgrew this fantastic use of language, she finds her purpose in writing down the real events that she lived

through. In doing so, she too relies on language as a tool for expressing herself and hope for future. Although she struggles to accurately describe the world around her, even in failure language proves useful.

As another instance of implicit fiction, Auster introduces a manuscript in the making, using Samuel who is in the process of writing a book about the Country. Unlike Anna, however, Samuel aims to write a history book, detailed and factual. He does so by frantically interviewing people and researching in the library. By presenting Samuel's mission to write a book chronicling the downfall of the Country, Auster shows the futility of such a task as, more than a year later, Samuel is no closer to finishing the book than he was when he started. It is of no help that Samuel is well versed in history of the Country (108); his knowledge does not help him conjure a clear image of the Country, nor help him find a way out of it. And, while Anna at first helps Samuel with his work, the progress they make is insignificant and only serves as a temporary motivation. Ultimately, hundreds of pages of his manuscript are lost in a fire, reinforcing the pointlessness of Samuel's attempt. Ironically, it is Anna who succeeds in writing a book about the Country, although a very different book from the one Samuel set out to write. The parallels between the two manuscripts are obvious and serve to show how pointless it is to try to write about the Country and everything that happens in it in a logical, realistic, historiographic way. Such a fantastical place can only be described through fantastic writing.

2.2 Distorted dystopia

Implicit metafiction can also be seen in the way the novel interacts with the genre conventions.

Auster seemingly sets his story firmly within the dystopian framework. Anna describes a

typically dystopian environment, with many of the common tropes present: dictatorial government, heavily policed cities, lack of resources and safety, state controlled information and narratives, limited movement for citizens, and political prisoners and victims. However, despite the detailed description of the current state of the Country, it is never explained what caused it and how long has the Country been that way. Merlob writes: “it is through its duration that the ongoing apocalypse eclipses that which had occurred prior to its initiation, for it encourages us to believe there is and was no past. The apocalypse has no beginning, as it has always existed” (Merlob 27). This setting creates the impression that the dystopian state of the Country is a constant. It cannot be changed and, more importantly, has no apparent cause that led to it. “Blume cannot point toward a certain agent, whether human, natural, or supernatural, that elicited it and led to the city’s horrific condition, and thus her story begins in medias res with Blume already in the city” (Merlob 27). Without a warning, both Anna and the reader are inserted in a situation they know nothing about and the only way they can unravel the chaos of the Country is to rely solely on the immediate impressions. Having Anna open her letter describing the Country without any explanation, Auster mirrors the confusion in the reader with the one Anna faced when she first reached the country. There is no background story explaining the history of the Country as it exists only in relation to Anna’s story and, as such, is no different from any other of Anna’s fantasies, a children’s tale with little logic and reason.

Auster creates a dystopian setting that is both a ‘realistic’ dystopia and a fantastic place, something that is decisively different from the conventional tone associated with dystopias. While the overall tone of the book is grounded and realistic, Auster introduces almost fantastical elements which, at a glance, fit well within the narrative, yet feel unbecoming when seen through the prism of the genre. One of the first descriptions given in the book is of people so thin they

must tie themselves to each other with ropes and chains to avoid being blown away by the wind (3), emphasizing the lack of food and all-encompassing starvation. Not only do people believe in sustenance from ‘food talks,’ but they also pretend to be fatter than they really are, stuffing sheets of paper under their clothes in an attempt to fool others and themselves that they have plenty of food (23). The weather conditions are described as nearly supernatural, consisting of sudden temperature changes, impossibly long-lasting rainfalls, and general unpredictability (25–26). This results in some people believing that the weather is caused by bad thoughts, so they force themselves to stay cheerful despite all the hardships, receiving a nickname ‘Smilers’ (26). The fantastical weather situation begets people to create an equally fantastic narrative in order to cope with the uncertainty surrounding them. This allows Auster not only to reiterate the implicit metafiction of his narrative, but also to illustrate the powers of story as a coping mechanism once more.

Auster introduces a complex system of suicidal groups, consisting of Runners, Leapers, and Assassination clubs (11–16). Runners, as their name suggests, try to kill themselves by running to exhaustion; the groups are seen constantly running, building up stamina in preparation for their final, ‘death run’ that is supposed to be so exhausting that they die from it. Leapers, on the other hand, commit suicides by jumping off high buildings, providing entertainment and short-lasting distraction for the everyone witnessing it:

You would be amazed at the enthusiasm of the crowds: to hear their frantic cheering, to see their excitement. It is as if the violence and beauty of the spectacle had wrenched them from themselves, had made them forget the paltriness of their own lives. The Last Leap is something everyone can understand, and it corresponds to everyone’s inner longings: to die in a flash, to obliterate yourself in one brief and glorious moment. (13)

Finally, Assassination clubs provide anyone, for a reasonable fee, a promise of “a quick and violent death in the not-too-distant future” (15). The main advantage of this method is that the assassination is always a surprise and one cannot know when it can happen, thus relieving them of concern and stress from planning their own suicide. Some, however, might change their mind and, in an outburst of survival instinct, try to defend when attacked. To survive and break the contract signed with the Assassination club, they must kill their assassin and are then given a chance to become assassins themselves. By inventing these eccentric ways in which citizens of the Country are committing suicides, Auster draws the attention to the absurdity of the act itself, but also of the entire situation. Making the suicides equally unusual as the living conditions, Auster enhances the fantastical nature of the story, thus bringing it into contrast with the more realistic tone that is also present.

Auster stated that he borrowed many elements of the Country from real life events and circumstances. The decrepit alleys of the main city are inspired by WWII Warsaw ghetto, the garbage collecting system that is described in great detail is based on the one used in Cairo (Hutchinson 36), while the pivotal scene in which Anna is lured into a cannibal butcher shop (125) is based on the horrors taking place during the siege of Leningrad (Siegumfeldt 114). “I wanted to create the impression it could have been anywhere. Crumbling New York City from the late sixties[,] somewhere in South America from any moment in the twentieth century – first world, third world, second world” (Siegumfeldt 115–116). Relying on historical events helps Auster build a believable, convincing world. This, however, results in a bigger contrast when some of the more fantastical scenes are introduced, no matter how well they are crafted within the story. Through this duality, the constant interplay between the believable and fantastic of the Country, Auster signals to the reader, both the implicit and the ‘real’ one, that they should

suspend their belief. This is why the scene describing Ferdinand and his hobby feels so distinct. When Ferdinand decides to give up on the outside world, he dedicates himself to building model ships in bottles and spends his days crafting progressively smaller and more delicate boats. “From whiskey bottles and beer bottles, he worked his way down to bottles of cough syrup and test tubes, then down to empty vials of perfume, until at last he was constructing ships of almost microscopic proportions” (55). The dedication Ferdinand applies to his craft allows him to do seemingly impossible things, and he even states that his goal is to make a ship that is invisible to a human eye (55). Auster nearly enters the territory of magical realism, constructing a very realistic environment that within itself contains inexplicable, magical events. This fantastic element reappears when Anna mentions that her handwriting is getting smaller due to lack of pages and is going to become invisible to human eye just like Ferdinand’s ships, drawing further connection between Anna’s story and fiction. While this comparison can be read as a joke, it can also be a warning for the reader – Anna’s fantastical story is so fickle that it might disappear in front of their eyes, despite being written.

2.3 Asking and answering the ontological

The ubiquity of implicit metafiction in the book could warrant one to classify *In the Country of Last Things* as a postmodernist novel; however, in line with the aim of this work, to satisfy the key characteristic of postmodern literature according to McHale, the ontological dominant in the work must be determined. As McHale states, the function of the dominant is to “[specify] the order in which different aspects are to be attended to,” and in postmodern literature “it is more urgent to interrogate it about its ontological implications” (McHale, 11). In other words, the

ontological questions in postmodernism require primary focus, while the epistemological ones are backgrounded. In the book, this is manifested through numerous Anna's observations that seem to ponder on the deeper, ontological questions rather than the epistemological. A clear example of this is the absence of any background information on the Country and its state. As a metafictional element, this omission emphasizes the artificiality of the text; as an ontological one, however, it diverts the focus from the factual and highlights the ontology of Anna's situation. In fact, Anna's entire letter can be interpreted as an answer to an epistemological question – what had happened to Anna? – yet, this answer is clearly ontological; Anna's writing is convoluted, packed with meaning and deeper insights, rather than clear answers to a clear question. Anna herself refers to the futility of looking for simple answers: "Every time you think you know the answer to a question, you discover that the question makes no sense" (85). To highlight this, Auster contrasts her letter with the book Samuel is writing. While Samuel contemplates historical facts and attempts to find meaning in fixed events through interviewing people, Anna notes the atmosphere of the Country, the mood of its people, and the philosophy of survival in such a state. Anna's letter can therefore be seen as the ontological response to Samuel's epistemological book. The fact that Anna's manuscript manages to reach someone, while Samuel's burns to ashes, serves to show which type of manuscript Auster finds more meaningful and more appropriate when addressing such topics.

Observing the passages analyzed in the previous chapter, one theme seems to be prevalent – the idea of *being alive*, or *existing*. Whether it is reflected in the impossible construction of the Country or in the eccentric life of those in it, a clear ontological dominant of *surviving* can be identified. Auster himself stated that the "essence of the book is about how to remain human in a world that's falling apart" (Siegumfeldt 116). In looking for this answer, Auster also pondered

the question of what it is to be alive in the first place. Dystopian setting encourages this as it more often than not exposes the worst in people. When Auster introduces extreme poverty and pervading starvation, he counters those descriptions with numerous ways in which people endure them. They may range from brutal (cannibal butcher shops) to fantastical and delusional ('food talks'), yet they represent a clear desire of people to survive and maintain some semblance of life. Those who give up and resort to suicide are presented in opposition to others who fight with all their might to stay alive. The Assassination clubs combine both of those sides – through them, Auster illustrates how strong the will to live can be. Some fight their assassins so fiercely that they succeed in killing them and taking their place, proving not only that they are strong enough to live, but also strong enough to take others' lives. This is also very much true about Anna. One of her key characteristics is that she refuses to die, to give up and give in to the horrors of the Country. Every action she takes is a step towards survival, something that she does instinctively, her resolution even contradictory: "I will hold off death as long as I can, even if it kills me" (11). And, while she does not take anyone's life to save her own, she shows that she is more than capable of it when Ferdinand attempts to rape her. She strangles him long enough for the act to stop being self-defense, and once she recognizes this, she is overcome with pleasure (65). This realization, however, does not make her question herself; she merely accepts it as something that is now part of her, as if she has embraced the duality of life and death within herself. Auster represents this duality and Anna's perception of it when he introduces her to Samuel. When they first meet in the library, Samuel points out her last name is Blume, "[a]s in doom and gloom," to which she responds: "That's right. Blume as in womb and tomb. You have your pick" (101). This self-referential word play, a metafictional element according to Hutcheon (Hutcheon, 101), illustrates how Samuel, feeling desperate and lost, associates Anna's last name (which is also an alternatively spelled 'bloom') only with negative connotations, whereas she feels that both good

and bad reside in her. In fact, both Anna's examples later prove correct, as she becomes the only woman to get pregnant within the Country in years, only to lose her child when escaping the butcher.

Anna is successful at balancing these two sides because she accepts death as a certainty, yet manages to have enough hope to postpone it indefinitely. She is also aware that hope can only come from understanding death and living with it. Perhaps the first time she becomes aware of this is when she and Isabel take Ferdinand's dead body to the roof with the aim of throwing it to the streets and making it look like he committed suicide. The two small women drag and push a large lifeless body, exerting incredible amounts of effort, constantly reminded of death throughout the toil. Yet, once they finally reach the roof and exit the building, Anna is overcome with emotion at the sight of the blue sunny sky, wind on her face, and ocean on the distant horizon. Suddenly, she feels dead, "as dead as Ferdinand" (74) and this fills her with calm and she is happy, for the first time in a long time. Then, she starts sobbing, unable to shake the feeling she, too, is dead. Death brings Anna peace but also unsettles her. It is hope, however, what keeps her going. The sight of the ocean and the open space of the roof show her that the Country is not all-encompassing, that there must be an escape from all of this. With this hope, she and the remaining residents of Woburn house leave and she ends her letter proving that having hope in uncertainty is better than hopeless certainty.

Anna's letter shows how obsessed with and respectful of death she is as she writes about it in fascinating ways. When she describes the different types of suicide that exist, she points out that "[d]eath is one thing we have feeling for, our art form" (13). It consumes those who sign up for Assassination clubs: "Death is no longer abstraction, but a real possibility that haunts" (15). Yet she also sees the positive effect of it: "those marked for assassination tend to become more alert,

more vigorous in their movements, more filled with a sense of life – as though transformed by some new understanding of things” (15). In the Country, death presents a twofold opportunity – for those that are unable to continue living in such conditions, it is an escape, a bittersweet ending that is as close to a relief as it can be. Those with stronger survival instincts, however, can take advantage of the death around them. Anna experiences both situations, which is why she is able to see death as a dignified art form, but also say that “[c]lever person can live quite well off the death of others” (13). When Ferdinand dies, Anna and Isabel work hard to allow him one last chance of dignity with his ‘jump’ (72–75). Similarly, when Isabel dies, Anna takes her body to the designated incinerators and insists that Isabel is cremated in her favorite dress. She even offers good money, money that she desperately needs, to the worker in exchange for an unconvincing promise to honor her wish (81–82). Auster illustrates Anna’s resolution to ‘remain human’ despite all the horrors that befall her and pairs it with her strong survival instinct, as if showing that her only instinct with higher priority than remaining alive is remaining human.

Anna goes to great lengths to stay alive; when she needs to go scavenging on the streets by herself, she cuts her hair and makes herself as less appealing to men as possible. When she is in desperate need of shelter, she enters Samuel’s room in the library, despite him threatening her with a gun, and insists that she stays. Confronted by the possibility of being butchered and sold for meat, she does not hesitate to jump through a third-story window, with no time to think of the consequences she and her unborn child might face. Ultimately, perhaps the most important thing she does to stay alive is to write. She points out several times that writing her letter is what keeps her alive when there are no other dangers lurking, proving that the fate she fears more than physical death is not telling her story. In metafictional sense, this can be seen as an example of a

character writing themselves into existence. In ontological, however, it shows that, for Anna, living consists of more than a heartbeat and pure survival.

Admittedly, Anna has some help in keeping alive. The world Auster constructs is saturated with examples of ‘survival-against-all-odds,’ with coincidences determining major events in Anna’s life, matters of life and death decided by accidents, mirroring the unpredictability of life itself.

Anna’s chance encounter with Isabel comes at a time when she needs it the most, gaining roof above her head and a support system she has not had before. Once Isabel and Ferdinand are gone, she stays alive selling their possessions until she, again by accident, enters a library and meets her brother’s last point of contact in Samuel. She escapes the cannibals by, quite literally, falling in front of the Woburn house rescue patrol. This amount of coincidences, somewhat common for Auster’s prose, can at times be jarring and distracting, yet it fits with the metafictional of the novel as it draws the reader out of the world of the story only to remind them of its fictionality. Auster had claimed before that his use of chance and coincidences simply reflects the unpredictability of real life and some of the bizarre events that had happened to him³, however, this seems more deliberate. It rather resembles a thought experiment in which Auster uses Anna to craft situations that will explore the ontological questions. Anna herself reinforces this when she writes what she considers “the most interesting question of all: to see what happens when there is nothing, and whether or not we will survive that too” (29), echoing Auster’s own goal for the book. Using the embedded narrative as a framing device, Auster manages to make Anna both the writer of her story and a character in it. It is only this way that she can truly comprehend the

³ See *The Red Notebook* (1995), Auster’s collection of true stories, short vignettes describing impossible coincidences from in his life.

real weight of survival; Anna cannot merely live through these events, she must also write about them.

3. Man in the Dark

Man in the Dark was published in 2008, more than twenty years after *In the Country of Last Things*. This, however, does not mean that Auster has not written metafiction during this long span. *Leviathan* (1992), a story about two writers whose lives and work interlace, contains numerous instances of self-reference and features a common trope in which the book being read is the manuscript of a fictional character. *The Book of Illusions* (2002), book whose title inspired the title of this thesis, follows a writer as he explores the life and work of a 1920s silent film star. A mixture of genres, it contains several very detailed film synopses and reviews, almost verging on film critique at times. It is also highly (self-)referential and an example of extracompositional metafiction – the main character being David Zimmer who previously appeared in *Moon Palace* (1989) and was the intended recipient of Anna's letter from *In the Country of Last Things* – in addition to containing a manuscript within. *Oracle Night* (2003) bears some resemblance to the *Man in the Dark* as it also features an old man turning towards a narrative he constructs for himself in an attempt to cope with his personal life. The book allows for the two narratives, the main one, and the one invented by the protagonist Sidney Orr, to interlace, while at the same time backstory and explanations of Orr's life are given in extensive footnotes that sometimes occupy more than half a printed page. *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), Auster's arguably most metafictional book, precedes *Man in the Dark*. It tells a story of (yet another) old man, Mr. Blank, who wakes up in a hospital room with no previous memory. There, he meets his previous 'agents' – characters from his previous novels – as they try to explain to him his current situation. While the old man does not bear much resemblance to real-life Auster, the characters he meets are all written by Auster, including Anna Blume and Samuel Farr, and Sophie Fanshawe and Daniel Quinn (from *The New York Trilogy*, 1987) while numerous other characters are

mentioned. In a prime example of circular storytelling, towards the end Blank finds a manuscript in the room entitled *Travels in the Scriptorium* written by Fanshawe from *The Locked Room* (1986), which begins with the same passage as the real book. While it is a very successful metafictional experiment, the obvious reason why this novel was not selected for the analysis in this work is that it requires extensive knowledge of previous works by Auster and as such, it would warrant a much more in-depth introduction.

The plot of *Man in the Dark* is seemingly simple and covers one night in life of August Brill. Brill is an old man (a common protagonist in Auster's later work) who is staying with his daughter Miriam and granddaughter Katya while recovering from an injury. Throughout the night, the reader is privy to Brill's thoughts and learns about his life story, but also about Miriam and Katya's situation. Brill suffers from insomnia, but also wishes to avoid reminiscing about his late wife Sonia. He therefore invents a story about a man called Owen Brick who has magically been transported in an alternative universe in which the United States are fighting a civil war. Brill's narration is often interrupted by either his thoughts or Katya who comes and joins him at one point, eventually causing him to abandon the fictive narrative and resort to telling himself and Katya anecdotes and, ultimately, revisiting his relationship with Sonia whose loss he still has not come to terms with. Seemingly lacking in straightforward structure, the novel sees multiple stories overlapping and interrupting each other, some to be continued at a later point, some to be dropped. The common thread in all is Brill and his unwillingness to surrender to silence, as he knows that silence inevitably brings pain.

The embedded narrative, one imagined by Brill, is more structured and linear, despite being interrupted on several occasions. It follows Owen Brick, a magician that wakes up in an alternative universe in the midst of a second US Civil war. Brick has no recollection of how he

found himself there, is unaware of the war and the situation, and has no idea how to get back to his own reality. It is implied that Brick comes from ‘the real world,’ one he think he shares with Brill and that is closest to the real world – Brill references real events such as 2000 presidential elections, 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the political climate of the Bush presidency (31)⁴. Brick meets his fellow soldiers and realizes he is in the alternative universe in which the terrorist attacks never happened, there is no war in Iraq, but a civil war is raging through the United States. The story quickly becomes metafictional as Brick is briefed by his superiors that his mission is to find August Brill, the man responsible for the War by inventing it, and kill him. Brick is having a difficult time accepting the mission, both due to its absurdity and the fact that he cannot imagine himself killing another person. He goes through several adventures and encounters in the alternative universe, learning more about the life in the parallel United States, until he is finally captured by the militia that gives him an ultimatum – he must kill Brill within a month or he and his wife will be murdered. Brick is then transported back to his ‘real’ universe, cohabitated by Brill (despite this universe still being a figment of Brill’s imagination) and he explains the situation to his wife. She dismisses it as a nightmare or a figment of his imagination, but when Brick’s superiors visit them and repeat their threats, she finally believes him. Brick ponders killing Brill and sets off for Vermont to find him, but the next time he falls asleep, he awakes back in the alternative universe. The house he finds himself in is under attack by militia and Brick is shot dead on the front lawn.

⁴ Auster himself stated that the entire novel was written in response to the Bush election and his general dissatisfaction with the state of the US after it (Siegmundfeldt 258). Brill not only shares Auster’s views on this, but also, like Auster, invents a narrative criticizing the political situation of the US.

Brill's narrative, on the other hand, reads more like a stream of consciousness. The story Brill tells himself is often interrupted by his urges (thirst, coughing, or peeing), reminiscing, or simply by commenting on the Brick's story and its quality. These comments, too, feel narrated to an implied reader, as if Brill is not only using Brick's story to entertain himself, but everything that comes to his mind. The reader then learns about Brill's injury that left him nearly immobile and forced him to move into his daughter Miriam's house, about Brill's late wife Sonia and their marriage, and finally about Brill's granddaughter Katya and her story. The latter two are the biggest inspiration for Brill's stories, but in different ways. Brill cannot handle thinking about Sonia as he knows it will prompt his depression because he misses her too much, so he distracts himself numerous other stories. On the other hand, what happened to Katya seems to have inspired the theme of Brick's story. Katya's ex-boyfriend Titus, a young aspiring writer whom Brill was very fond of, joined the Iraq war. Sadly, he was quickly captured by the Taliban and executed on live television. Ever since, Katya has been devastated and on a leave of absence from her studies. Both she and Brill feel responsible for Titus' death, as they believe they could have done more to prevent him from going to Iraq. Finally, scattered throughout the book are anecdotes from Brill's life and the life of his friends, as random episodes that come to him in moments when his narrative stalls or when he gets distracted by something. These are usually not connected and are merely fillers in Brill's night, yet they all serve the same purpose – distraction.

3.1 Intra- and extracompositional metafiction in Brick's story

Brill's night is interlaced with countless narratives. Still, throughout the majority of the book, the focus is on the fictional story following Owen Brick. Within this story, however, we find

references both to the real world and the world the story is originating from, Brill's world, thus combining both intracompositional and extracompositional metafiction. This becomes obvious as soon as Brick meets other soldiers and one of them informs him about the war. Brick asks his superior, sergeant Tobak if they are in Iraq since "America's fighting a war in Iraq. Everyone knows that" (8), but Tobak dismisses it: "This is America, and America is fighting America. [...] Civil war, Brick. Don't you know anything?" (8). The clash between real and fictional is immediate; Brick, aware of the real US war in Iraq, assumes he is still in the world that seems real to him, however, Tobak quickly breaks this illusion. He informs Brick that his task is to kill the one responsible for the war, referencing Brill: "We're not even sure of his name. It could be Blake. It could be Black. It could be Bloch" (9). This wordplay is the first insinuation towards Brill from within the embedded narrative. Tobak continues to explain that Brill must die because "he owns the war. He invented it, and everything that happens or is about to happen is in his head. Eliminate that head, and the war stops" (10). This represents metafiction in its most overt form (Athanasίου Krikelis 80). The reader is aware that Brick's embedded narrative is fictional because Brill introduces it as a story he is making up to distract himself, however, now the main character of that story is also aware that he is a fictional character. This is something that Brick struggles to accept.

For all intents and purposes, Auster (through Brill) creates Brick as a part of the real world and this is evident through numerous extracompositional references Brick makes. The main conflict of his story could therefore be interpreted as the fight between the intracompositional and extracompositional: the imminent threat in his life (and life of every other character he encounters) is Brill and the war he creates. On the other hand, the one thing that keeps Brick motivated is the idea of getting his life back to normal, 'real' world, and this is expressed through

extracompositional references to the real world. He cannot reach his reality without confronting the creator of the fictional narrative he found himself in. He asks Tobak what would happen if he were to kill Brill, but there is no definite answer: “Everything goes back to normal. Or maybe we disappear. Maybe. But that’s the risk we have to take” (10). This uncertainty plagues Brick, but it also intrigues the reader; the initial suspense of metafictional narrative alters once it is revealed that characters of Brill’s story know they are part of it. Instead, the focus is then shifted towards the future resolution – will Brick succeed in killing Brill and, if so, how will that affect the story and the book?

In an attempt of processing his current situation, Brick tries to learn more about the world he was put in. When he reaches a diner, Brick asks the server Molly if the words ‘September eleven’ or ‘World Trade Center’ mean anything to her, to which she replies with confused indifference (31). He later tries again, asking Molly if she knows about the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and the New York Yankees, earning sarcastic comments from her (50). However, when he asks who the president was, she tells him that there was no *de facto* president, although the position belonged to George W. Bush at the start of the war (51). This allows Brick to gain some footing in the new world he finds himself in, learning that the civil war started looming in the early 2000s and that the United States had bigger problems within the country than outside of it.

Brick finds himself in a pastiche or a parody (in itself a type of extracompositional metareference) of both the real world and a war story, and is forced to navigate his way through it. He meets a woman he vaguely recognizes that introduces herself as Virginia Blane: “Don’t you remember? You had a crush on me in tenth grade” (35). An introduction formulated in such a way is something that can only come from Brill, as we know that Brick has no real past. While Brick expresses doubt towards the incredible encounter with Virginia (36), she manages to gain

his trust. Brill is here making an intracompositional reference by addressing fictional past for his fictional character, but his unskilled storytelling gives it away, alerting Brick of the fictionality of his story. Nevertheless, Brick accepts it and continues without thinking twice about it, because this is how Brill imagined the scene. Brick's credulity varies and he exhibits inconsistent behavior, which directly reflects Brill's skills as a storyteller.

In another instance of intracompositional metareference, Brick learns more about Brill. Frisk, head of the military responsible for killing Brill, confronts and briefs Brick. "His name is August Brill. [He] doesn't write anything down. He's telling himself the story in his head. [...] He didn't invent this world. He only invented the war. And he invented you, Brick. This is your story, not ours. The old man invented you in order to kill him" (70). Frisk then describes Brill the only way Brill could do it:

A retired book critic, seventy-two years old, living outside Brattleboro, Vermont, with his forty-seven-year-old daughter and twenty-three-year-old granddaughter. His wife died last year. The daughter's husband left her five years ago. The granddaughter's boyfriend was killed. It's a house of grieving, wounded souls, and every night Brill lies awake in the dark, trying not to think about his past, making up stories about other worlds. (71)

This is Brill speaking through his character, lamenting his family in the form of a short military report. It serves as a reminder for him, but also for the reader, pointing out the real main character of the book. This story has always been about Brill and Brick only plays a small role in it.

The caveat of Brick's story is that a positive resolution for him is simply not possible. He is unaware of it, but both the reader and Brill know that what Brick considers 'real world,' place he wishes to return, exists also within Brill's narrative. Brick will cease to exist once Brill finishes the story, showing that the story takes precedence over the character. It is obvious from the

beginning that this story serves as a mere distraction for Brill, yet for Brick, it is everything he has. By making the reader invested in Brick's story, Auster demonstrates the power of narratives and world building. Reader has no other choice but to sympathize with Brick as this character is doomed from the start, despite doing nothing to deserve such faith.

Brill goes further and allows Brick to return to what he considers real world. In it, he believes that he exists in the same plane as Brill and looks him up. Brick learns that what Frisk had said was true. Brill indeed is a retired book critic living in Vermont and Brick can easily reach him and kill him, thus ending the war (93). This creates a paradox since Brick is still in a story narrated by Brill, but from his perspective, Brick has returned to his normal life. Brill even addresses this when pondering the story: "The story is about a man who must kill the person who created him, and why pretend that I am not that person? By putting myself into the story, the story becomes real. Or else I become unreal, yet one more figment of my own imagination" (102). This "complicated jig," as Brill puts it, is deemed necessary as Brill thinks it is only fair that Brick learns more about the man who is responsible for his tragedy. Once again, Auster diverts the focus from Brick to the true main character – the one that creates the story. Highlighting the importance of the storyteller, Auster reveals that the true purpose of creating stories is precisely that – creating stories.

When Brick researches Brill, he discovers books that Brill has written about and starts reading them, hoping to connect with his creator and establish another connection. The books are extracompositional: "So far, his most important discoveries have been Chekhov, Calvino, and Camus" (97), once again hinting that both Brill and Brick now belong to the 'real' world, despite both existing on different planes of narrative. The connection that Brick and Brill share through other books only strengthens Brick's resolution not to kill Brill. However, after a month passes,

Brick and his wife Flora are visited by Frisk, proving that the war is still at large and that Brick's time in that world was not simply a bad nightmare. He is given seven more days to assassinate Brill, otherwise Frisk will come and kill him and Flora. Unwillingly, Brick sets out to find Brill only to be interrupted by Virginia (109). She offers him a ride to Brill, unveiling that she has been working for Brill all along (114), likening the relationship between the character and its creator to commander and operative (which represents a callback to *Travels in the Scriptorium*). Brick falls asleep during the drive and once he awakes, he finds himself back in the fictional world. He and Virginia stay in a house that has not been affected by the war yet, however, in the middle of the night they are attacked by the opposing army and Brick is shot dead on the front lawn (118). He disappears just as quickly as he appeared in Brill's head.

3.2 Intracompositional metafiction in Brill's story

Intracompositional referencing in *Man in the Dark* works in two directions – Brill's narration of the story is referenced on numerous occasions and he often comments on it, while the characters in it talk about him and are aware of existing within a fictional story. Brill begins the story by describing setting in which Brick is placed: "I put him in a hole. That felt like a good start, a promising way to get things going. Put a sleeping man in a hole, and then see what happens when he wakes up and tries to crawl out" (2–3). This is quite interesting phrasing since it implies both active, deliberate action from Brill, but also passive notion of "see what happens," as if he has no control over the story, he can just watch it unfold. This is reiterated when Brill states that "Brill character wasn't in my original plan" (102) but that his mood has worsened and the idea of sending Brick to kill him, even if only in a story, seems fitting. Auster appears to imply that no

storyteller has full control over the narrative they create, a sentiment that is repeated from *Leviathan*: “No one can say where a book comes from, least of all the person who writes it” (36). This seems fitting as Brill loses control over his own story, but also gets distracted by countless other events. Furthermore, Brill is shown as someone who has very little control over his own life after his accident, drawing parallel between storytelling and life itself. This is reflected in a scene when Brick first learns that he is in a story and that the war is imaginary. He asks if it is an act of God, but Tobak corrects him: “Not God, just a man” (10). The story and the life are controlled by ‘just a man,’ and Brill is shown to be struggling with both.

Brill often comments his own storytelling. He is not always satisfied with the story he is creating and even states that he has never had a desire to write a book, only to read them (14). At times, his voice seeps over through the characters, like when Brick first meets Virginia, she tells him that she knows “[the situation is] a bit disorienting at first, but [he’ll] get used to it” (36), or the description of Brill given by Frisk. Other times, he simply ponders if the story is progressing well enough, sometimes even asking the questions as a part of narration: “How can this be America if Tobak knows nothing about Iraq?” (23). All these are metafictional references that serve to divert the attention to the process of story creation itself, rather than the story. Ultimately, when Brill abruptly finishes Brick’s story, he wonders if the ending is too cruel:

Does it have to end that way? Yes, probably yes, although it wouldn’t be difficult to think of a less brutal outcome. But what would be the point? My subject tonight is war, and now that war has entered this house, I feel I would be insulting Titus and Katya if I softened the blow. (118)

Brill justifies his choice by stating that real life is equally harsh. Just as he initially constructed the story influenced by the tragedy of Titus, he ends it in the same manner, allowing his real life to influence the story he creates, once again blurring the line between the fictions.

The reader can follow, almost in real time, how Brill creates and solves problems within his narrative, and even ponders on that entire idea himself. Through Frisk, Brill contemplates the nature of his story:

There's no single reality, Corporal. There are many realities. There's no single world. There are many world, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world. Each world is the creation of a mind. (69)

Not only is Brill trying to process the issues within his story, but he is also reiterating the core principles of metafiction – creating a story is no different than creating an entire world.

3.3 Extracompositional metafiction in Brill's story

Metafiction is also reflected in a number of extracompositional references contained within Brill's night. Some relate to the story he is imagining, drawing on real life events to make Brick a more believable character, but also closer to Brill. When Brick is trying to comprehend the war he is thrown into, his first instinct leads him to previous conflicts: "Is it North against South again? East against West? Red against Blue? White against Black?" (23). He refers to the real situation in Iraq, the tragedy of World Trade Center, and presidency of George Bush, trying to establish a connection between the real world and the one Brill creates for him. All discrepancies

between the two additionally signal artificiality of the story, for both Brick and the reader. At the same time, Brick and Brill are plagued by the same political situation, drawing a parallel between them – the two characters are equally real or fictional.

Brill also relies on extracompositional references to other works of fiction with the intention of connecting his world with the real world. In addition to mentioning real writers such as Calvino, Chekhov, and Camus, a number of films is also discussed. Disturbed by Titus' death, Katya left her university where she was a film studies major. However, after Brill moved in with her and Miriam, the two bonded over old films. As both have a penchant for stories, they start watching old classic films and discussing them. In these parts, the book effectively transforms into a film analysis or review; Katya and Brill take turns in discussing four films – *Grand Illusion* (1937), *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), *The World of Apu* (1959), and *Tokyo Story* (1953) – and they analyze elements and common motifs. Earlier in the evening, Katya offered an interpretation of the use of inanimate objects in the films as representation of characters' emotions. However, her analysis begins like this:

Think about the opening scenes of *The Bicycle Thief*. The hero is given a job, but he won't be able to take it unless he gets his bicycle out of hock. He goes home feeling sorry for himself. And there's his wife outside their building, lugging two heavy buckets of water. [...] The husband is so wrapped up in his own troubles, he doesn't bother to help her until they're halfway to the door. (16)

Both Katya and Brill spend several paragraphs to explain each film and give a synopsis of the scenes, which is something they do not do for each other, considering that they had watched the films only a few days ago. The film descriptions are, it appears, intended for the reader, allowing

them to follow the conversation. This way, the illusion of this being just a discussion between a grandfather and granddaughter is broken and the fictionality is once again put into the forefront.

Finally, Auster introduces one more extracompositional reference in the form of Miriam's current project. Since before Brill moved in, she has been working on a biography of Rose Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's youngest daughter⁵. As a retired book critic, Brill now helps his daughter by proofreading and commenting on her writing. This shows an interesting dynamic between the three inhabitants of the house. All three are consumed by other narratives; Miriam is working on her book on Hawthorne, Katya starts obsessively watching films, which means that the two of them are occupied by works that would be considered extracompositional references. Brill, however, manages to involve himself with both the intracompositional reference – the story of Brick he creates – and the extracompositional ones – story of Hawthorne and films he watches with Katya. As the central character, he is aware of the both 'real' world, and the fictional one he creates, being both the creator of a story and a character in one.

3.4 The ontological purpose of narratives

Throughout the book, the narrative threads that Brill occupies himself with become increasingly ephemeral. Brill kills off Brick and stops with the story without any satisfying conclusion. Instead, he turns to telling anecdotes before finally having a conversation with Katya and ultimately Miriam. This shows both how meaningless the Brick episode was, but also how important it was for Brill as it distracted him for long enough, until he was ready to talk to his

⁵ Auster himself frequently refers to Nathaniel Hawthorne in many of his novels and he lists him as an important influence (Hutchinson xvii, 128).

granddaughter and daughter. In fact, the true purpose of the story is stated at the opening of the novel:

I think about Titus's death often [...] but I don't want to go there now, I can't go there now, I have to push it as far away from me as possible. [...] That's what I do when sleep refuses to come. I lie in bed and tell myself stories. They might not add up to much, but as long as I'm inside them, they prevent me from thinking about things I would prefer to forget. (2)

Brick reiterates this in several places of the novel, allowing Auster to announce the true purpose of it – ponder on the true nature of narratives and see how they can be used for coping with tragedies.

This is explored through all three characters in Brill's household, but is also seen in Brick. When confronted with the 'real life' version of Brill and the idea of killing him, Brick starts reading Brill's old book reviews and the books that are mentioned in them. He hopes that, through those books, he will get to know Brill better and that might help him understand the situation he finds himself in. Furthermore, time he spends reading means he can afford himself not to think about how he must kill a man. The escape he finds in books provides him comfort, but as soon as he is visited by the military from the other reality, he is once again forced to face his mission. With this, Brill mirrors his own state in Brick – having Brick escape from the harshness of his reality via books is no different from Brill crafting a narrative in order to avoid facing his own problems. Brill understands how comforting it is to hide from reality in a fictional story and so he allows Brick to do the same.

Katya also uses stories to escape her own depression. After Titus' death, she leaves her university and is unable to return to the real world, choosing to stay with her mother and watch old films with her grandfather. Brill even comments on this:

After a while, though, I began to see this obsessive movie watching as a form of self-medication, a homeopathic drug to anesthetize herself against the need to think about her future. Escaping into a film is not like escaping into a book. Books force you to give something back to them, to exercise your intelligence and imagination, whereas you can watch a film – and even enjoy it – in a state of mindless passivity. (15)

He notices a difference between his escape and Katya's, and perhaps that is why he tries to entice her into discussing films with him, hoping that their semi-academic debates will not only "exercise her intelligence," but also motivate her to return to university soon. Still, he allows her to indulge in this escapism and tries to keep the illusion going by not addressing the situation. He loses focus once – "You're a brave girl, I said, suddenly thinking about Titus" – but Katya is quick to change the topic: "Stop it, Grandpa. I don't want to talk about him. Some other time, maybe, but not now" (18). She is not ready to deal with the real world and makes Brill aware of that, and so the stories continue.

Out of the three characters, Miriam is the one that distracts herself the least. Although she cannot afford to hide completely in a story since she is responsible for both Brill and Katya, she does keep herself occupied by working on the Rose Hawthorne book. Perhaps that is why she is the only one to use non-fiction for her escape; it is what keeps her grounded in the real world. Still, her work introduces Brill to a line of Hawthorne's poetry that intrigues Brill: "*As the weird world rolls on*" (45). In fact, Auster chooses to end the book with this quote, handing over the final words to someone other than himself, in a way also escaping into a story. The message of the

quote remains clear in the end: the world will keep going, despite how mad it is, and despite how difficult it is for everyone to comprehend it. The narratives keep it going.

Brill is very open about his escapism. He uses narratives to avoid multiple things: his current state brought upon his injury, Titus' death, but also the death of his wife Sonia that he still struggles to process. He mentions to Katya that he stopped writing his memoir because the events he was writing about were becoming increasingly sad, showing that Brill prefers to stay in the fictional stories he tells himself, rather than think about all the bad events in his life. Still, all of these prove hard to avoid as his mind keeps coming back to them. His health is constantly reminded by either fits of cough or general discomfort that he experiences; Titus' fate is reflected in the story he constructs, with war being its main theme. However, it becomes obvious early on that the main thing he tries to avoid is thinking about Sonia: "I don't want to start thinking about Sonia, It's still too early. Stick to the story. That's the only solution. Stick to the story, and then see what happens if I make it to the end" (22). He tries hard to push the thoughts of Sonia away, and even when he catches himself slipping, he tries to correct himself: "Why am I doing this? Why do I persist in traveling down these old, tired paths?" (47), or: "I shouldn't be doing this. I promised myself not to fall into the trap of Sonia-thoughts and Sonia-memories, not to let myself go (101–102)". For most of the night, he succeeds in this. If Brick's story halts, Brill is quick to start an anecdote. In fact, he tells several of them. He describes how he avoided being drafted for the Vietnam war due to a false diagnosis (79), how he witnessed the 1967 Newark riots (an event Auster later writes about in *4 3 2 1* in more detail) with a friend (81–83), and then a series of vaguely connected anecdotes about his and Sonia's acquaintances (119–128). The last group of stories comes right after finishing Brick's narrative and it is clear that they are intended to fill in the void left after the main story was concluded. They are all about WWII in one way or another

and contain some highly improbable coincidences, very much like the ones Auster is so fond of, thus drawing attention to the possible fictionality of these stories as well. One of them mentions Jean-Luc, Sonia's relative from Belgium, who, hiding in the German occupied Brussels in 1940, spent eighteen months in an attic reading every book he could find (120). This shows another character finding solace in stories, equating Jean-Luc with Brill, Brick, and nearly everyone else in the novel. The reader cannot know whether the Jean-Luc story is real to Brill or if it is yet another figment of his imagination. This is further blurred when, just a few pages later, Brill comments on another story he has told, "wondering if I might not be able to tense a story out of that awful business, [...] something I can make up as I go along" (129). In fact, it feels that it does not really matter if those stories are real to Brill or not; he is ready to escape in them because to him they serve a bigger, ontological purpose.

The stories Brill occupies himself with have very little of epistemological value. Most questions that are asked remain unanswered, and the incredulity of some of the narratives makes them seem impossible. This is true of Brick's story as well. When the Civil war Brick finds himself in is finally addressed, there is no proper explanation for it. The only information the reader gets is a series of interrupted phrases, something vague enough to sound plausible, yet without proper explanation and details:

The election of 2000 ... just after the Supreme Court decision ... protests ... riots in major cities ... a movement to abolish the Electoral College ... defeat of the bill in Congress ... a new movement [...] secession ... passed by the state legislature in 2003 ... Federal troops attack [...] New York City bombed, eighty thousand dead ... but the movement grows ... in 2004, [seven states] join New York in the Independent States of America [...] the European Union recognizes the existence of the new country[.] (62)

The reader is lead to believe that Brick receives a full story without omissions, yet it is clear that this is how Brill actually tells the story, not bothering to include any details. Both Auster and Brill know that it is the purpose of the story that matters, not facts. Which is why, in the end, Brill is finally able to tell the story of him and Sonia.

Towards the end of the night, awoken by Brill's coughing fit and unable to sleep herself, Katya joins Brill and the two start talking. Katya first asks a few questions about Brill's life and gets him to open up before asking him directly about Sonia. Brill realizes that, at that moment, the story he has been trying to avoid the entire night is a story Katya wants to escape into, avoiding her own troubling thoughts about Titus. Only when the true purpose of the story changes is Brill able to confront it and use it as an escape for Katya. And so, he tells her everything. How he and Sonia met, how they got in love, married, became parents, how he cheated on Sonia and they separated, how he remarried but left his second wife, and ultimately, how becoming grandparents reunited him and Sonia, and how they stayed together until she died (134–163). Upon hearing the story, Katya brings herself to talk about Titus and their relationship, showing that stories can provide escape, but also strength to face the bad thoughts everyone is having. With both being in a better mood after opening up, Brill makes several attempts of amusing Katya with ideas such as writing a film together, or renting an RV and travelling the country, starting a travel blog. He starts telling her another one of his stories, but soon sleep reaches them both, providing the ultimate escape.

In the end, *Man in the Dark* is a metafictional book about a man creating a metafictional story to distract himself from the bleak reality he inhabits. Auster provides the reader with an insight into an old storyteller's mind. He shows the extent of the stories that inhabit it and their purpose.

More importantly, he shows how far Brill is willing to go to provide comfort for himself and his granddaughter, and how he uses stories to do so.

4. Invisible

The final novel to be analyzed in this work, *Invisible*, was published in 2009 and was received with mostly positive reviews. However, perhaps the most (in)famous review of the book is a negative one written by James Wood for *New Yorker* (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/11/30/shallow-graves>). In it, Wood criticizes Auster's formulaic approach, repeated tropes, and his characteristic language. While some of this might be true on the surface level, *Invisible* is at the same time unlike any other Auster's novel on a structural and deeper level. Indeed, the novel contains numerous 'Austerisms' throughout: a protagonist who is a young liberal arts student with a passion for books and writer aspirations; general fascination with Paris and French literature; a series of unlikely encounters culminating in a dramatic event; and of course, a number of metareferences and metafictional elements. Yet, nearly all of these are utilized to a greater extent than before, resulting in a more daring story⁶. It is also a novel that contains perhaps the highest number of references to Auster's real life, making it impossible for anyone familiar with his life and work not to notice the connections. Having all this in mind, it could be said that *Invisible* is the most 'Austerian' novel Auster wrote at the time⁷.

The story in the novel is told through multiple perspectives and its structure is significantly more complex than the two previously analyzed novels. Separated in four parts (I, II, III, and IV), the novel contains three separate stories following a life of one Adam Walker. The first part of the

⁶ The aforementioned *Travels in the Scriptorium* could be argued as a more experimental novel, however, its simple structure means that the novel relies mostly on the metareferencing of Auster's previous work rather than more interesting storytelling techniques.

⁷ Auster later published *4 3 2 1*, a novel that could rival *Invisible* in terms of similar narrative techniques and references to Auster's real life. Yet, the novel's length of nearly 900 pages stands well above his standard 200–300 pages, making it more atypical than typical.

novel, later renamed into *Spring*, represents the beginning of Walker's memoir, describing his final year at Columbia University in the spring of 1967. In it, Walker writes about meeting an eccentric guest lecturer from France, Rudolf Born, and his girlfriend Margot. After spending an evening together at a party, the three develop a relationship over the next weeks with Born inviting Walker to his and Margot's place for dinners and eventually suggesting that he and Walker start a literary magazine. Born offers to provide the funding and Walker would be the main editor. Walker is skeptical at the beginning, both due to his incredulity that Born is willing to invest a large sum of money with a young university student he had just met, but also due to Born's occasional violent character and strange behavior. When drunk, he talks at length about the benefits of war and violent conflicts: "War is the purest, most vivid expression of the human soul" (7). At one point, he demonstrates to Walker his knowledge of Walker's family details, as if he were a spy that obtained intel (41). He also teases Walker into starting a sexual relationship with Margot while the three are having dinner together, waving it off as a joke (38). Despite all this, Walker accepts the partnership and starts working on the magazine. When Born is out of the country, Walker and Margot do become intimate, causing Born to end his relationship with Margot and send her back to Paris. The partnership, now tense, continues until one night Born and Walker are attacked by a young African-American teenager with a gun, trying to rob them. Walker complies with his demands, but Born takes advantage of the fact that the gun is empty and stabs the young man in the stomach. Distraught, Walker runs off to try to find help, much to Born's dismay, but when Walker returns he finds no trace of either Born or his victim. The next day, Walker learns that the young man was found dead in nearby park with over a dozen stab wounds and he alerts the police, despite Born's threats, but Born leaves the country before he can be caught.

The second part begins with a different narrator, Jim, Walker's old university classmate, saying that he received the first part of Walker's memoirs through mail. It has been around forty years since the two last saw each other, but Walker followed Jim's successful writing career throughout, admiring him. Walker sent the manuscript of *Spring* with the hopes that Jim could help him continue writing. He also states that he is dying from leukemia and that he does not have much time left and asks Jim to meet him in a month's time. Jim gladly accepts and, suggests Walker to try to change the perspective of his writing, instead of using the first person as he did for *Spring*. Soon after, Walker responds with new pages, praising Jim for his advice, but also warning Jim that he will be disgusted by what he reads. The *Summer* part of the manuscript begins, following Walker's summer after the incident with Born. Having been accepted to an exchange program, he is supposed to leave for Paris in the fall. He spends the summer working in a library and sharing an apartment with his sister Gwyn who is a graduate student in the city. The two have been close from early childhood and share a family tragedy – their younger brother Andy died at the age of seven, causing Walker and Gwyn to get even closer due to their parents' inability to cope with the tragedy. Eventually, their relationship becomes incestuous and the two spend the final days of Walker being in New York behaving like a couple. The day Walker leaves for Paris ends the second part.

In the third part, Jim travels to finally meet Walker, only to learn that he had passed few days before. However, Walker's adoptive daughter hands him the final batch of pages containing the draft of the *Fall*. The manuscript is written in third person this time and describes Walker's first month in Paris. Upon moving into a small decrepit room in the city center, he meets with Margot and the two reignite their relationship. However, Walker soon runs into Born who is engaged to H  l  ne, the widow of his best friend. He assures Walker that there is no animosity between them

and that Walker was right to report him to the police. To prove that, he invites Walker to meet H       and her eighteen-year-old daughter C      . Walker sees this as an opportunity for revenge and decides to get close to C       and tell her and H       what had happened in New York. He succeeds in this, but is soon arrested on false accounts of drug possession and promptly sent home, proving that Born does in fact have connections in the French secret service. The third part ends here and the final part sees Jim trying to determine what to do with Walker's manuscript and how to finish it. He contacts Gwyn who proclaims some parts of the manuscript are false and meets C       who confirms other parts of it. C       says that Born never married her mother and died not long ago. She then gives Jim excerpts of her own journal describing her final encounter with Born, finishing the novel from her point of view.

4.1 The multiple perspectives

While the narrator remains the same for the majority of the novel, that is, throughout the entire main story, there are multiple changes in perspective. The obvious change of perspective comes with the change in the narrator. *Invisible* relies on three different narrators to tell the story, which is a first for Auster, as he has never had multiple narrators in his previous books (Siegumfeldt 274). The three narrators, Walker, Jim, and C      , all tell a different part of the story: Walker writes about his spring, summer, and fall of 1967, Jim narrates about the correspondence with Walker and his involvement in the creation of Walker's manuscript, while C       shares her diary entries from visiting Born before his death.

The reader is alerted to each of these changes as Jim directly address it. His first sentence in the book addresses his and Walker's friendship from the university days (75) before directly

recounting how he got the manuscript: “A little less than a year ago (spring 2007), a UPS package was delivered to my house in Brooklyn. It contained the manuscript of Walker’s story about Rudolf Born (Part I of this book), along with a cover letter from Adam” (76). Not only does Jim mention Walker’s manuscript, but he directly addresses the existence of a finished book, “*this book*” that we are reading. Athanasiou Krikelis refers to this metafictional trope as “novel-in-the-making” (Athanasiou Krikelis 84), a variant of novel-within-the-novel. As the reader follows Jim’s efforts to reach Walker and help him continue writing and find out the truth about his story, they are also witnessing Jim writing the book that they are reading. In a way, this means *Invisible* contains a novel that is twice in the making – first when Walker starts writing it, and then when Jim writes about the entire process. This amplifies the metafictionality of the story as it addresses the act of writing the story doubly, at the same time raising the question of the validity of either of the two stories. As the final author of the book, Jim is given the task of announcing these changes in perspective. Right before the pages of *Summer* begin, Jim writes: “I braced myself for something unbearable, a story that would be even more harsh and troubling than *Spring*” (94). He navigates the reader, drawing them in and out of the story, alerting of the shifts and preparing for the continuations. Auster uses Jim as a substitute, making him the creator of the story and someone that comments on it. Jim both experiences Walker’s story through his manuscript and creates it by writing about it.

The other change of perspective comes from Walker’s style of writing. He writes *Spring* in first person, making it a deeply personal recounting of the events. Walker’s youth and vulnerability are evident through his relationships with Born and Margot. He is swayed by Born’s suggestion and accepts the proposed partnership despite the concerns he has. When he starts his relationship with Margot, he is worried about Born’s reaction, but also about the age difference (Margot is

almost ten years older than Walker). This makes him insecure and he gets too emotional and attached very quickly. Finally, Walker is deeply disturbed by Born's murdering the young man that tried to rob them. He spends the night crying and decides to do the right thing and report Born (66–67): "I had to step forward. If I didn't talk to the police, I would lose all respect for myself, and the shame of it would go on haunting me for the rest of my life" (69). Unfortunately, Born escapes the police and this further upsets Walker:

I felt crushed, humiliated, numb. Born had defeated me. He had shown me something about myself that filled me with revulsion, and for the first time in my life I understood what it was to hate someone. I could never forgive him – and I could never forgive myself. (71)

Walker is more reflective and emotional in *Spring* than in any other part, hinting at the possibility that he is his truest self in that part. The intimacy of first person narration also makes the story appear more trustworthy, despite Jim's comments about it being implausible. However, after writing the lines above, Walker struggles to continue the story and resorts to contacting Jim.

To help Walker defeat the writer's block, Jim talks about his own experience with it:

By way of example, I told him about the problems I had encountered while working on an early book of mine – also a memoir (of sorts), which had been divided into two parts. Part One was written in the first person, and when I began Part Two, I [...] grew more and more dissatisfied with the results, and eventually stopped. [...] 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. I needed to separate myself from myself, to step back and carve out some space between myself and my subject (which was

myself), and therefore I returned to the beginning of Part Two and began writing it in the third person. *I* became *He*, and the distance created by that small shift allowed me to finish the book. (89)

Not only does this advice inspire Walker to write the second part of his book in second person, but it is also a significant extracompositional metareference, directly alluding to Auster's first book of prose, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982). As Jim correctly states, *The Invention of Solitude* is a memoir of sorts. In the first part of the book, Auster reminisces about the relationship with his father and writes about his family history. In the second part, however, Auster writes a more personal autobiographical story focusing on himself. This part is written in third person, just as Jim mentions when talking about his own book, drawing once again direct comparison between Auster and himself.

When Walker changes the perspective, the words flow from him. He writes *Summer* in only a few days, feeling inspired and liberated. The change is obvious in both the tone and content; by addressing himself as *you*, Walker appears more assertive and confident. Sentences are more direct and while descriptions are still prominent, they feel less intimate and more matter-of-factly: "For you it is the summer after the spring of Rudolf Born, but for the rest of the world it is the summer of the Six-Day War" (94). "You live in a two-bedroom apartment in a building on West 107th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. [...] You and your sister have always been close – best friends, co-conspirators, obsessed guardians of your dead brother's memory, fellow students of literature, confidants" (95). However, the distance of second person also allows Walker to be more critical of himself and more observant of his own flaws or feelings. When he asks himself what would he do in case he runs into Born in Paris, the Walker who is narrating almost teases himself about the idea of able to ignore Born and walk past him on

the street: “That is what you tell yourself, in any case, but in your innermost heart of hearts you play out scenes in which you do not turn your head, in which you confront him in the middle of the street and strangle him to death with your bare hands” (95). When he describes his summer job in the library, Walker emphasizes: “you are alone, always and everlastingly alone[. . .] You are shut off from the world for hours every day, inhabiting what you come to think of as an airless bubble” (99). The distance of second person allows Walker to become even more introspective, ironically, shifting his own position from subject to the observed object. The analysis is, at the same time, less and more intimate, giving Walker space to observe himself seemingly impartially.

It is this distance that also allows Walker to write about the two events from his life that are the most harrowing to write about: his brother’s death and the incestuous relationship with Gwyn. The two are inexplicably linked. When Gwyn and Walker were eleven and ten years old, Andy, then a seven-year-old boy, drowned in a lake while the family was on a vacation (109). This nearly destroyed Walker’s parents as his mother felt solely responsible, leading to her attempted suicide and later hospitalization. In turn, young Walker and Gwyn had to cope with the tragedy by themselves. Losing not only the younger brother but also parents to a large extent, strengthened the bond between the siblings forcing them to rely on each other more than ever before. This results in them having a different relationship from the one most siblings have. They feel no boundaries between each other, both physically and emotionally. They share everything, confide in each other, and express love very intensely. Even as children, they had no inhibitions towards their bodies; they often bathed together and were curious about their own anatomy, touching and feeling each other out as if it were the most normal thing. Then, when they were fourteen and fifteen, the two decided to conduct “the grand experiment” (115). While their

parents were away, Walker and Gwyn spent an entire night exploring each other bodies: “You were going to do it once, just once. It was supposed to be an experiment, not a new way of life, and no matter how much you enjoyed it, you would have to stop after that one night” (116). They never addressed the experiment again until the summer of 1967, when they lived together before Walker left for Paris. The two have a tradition of celebrating Andy’s birthday every year since his death and that year, after drinking too much, they cannot control their desires anymore and they have sex. Walker writes about this relationship in great detail, calling it a “monthlong marriage” (146), and it seems as if he feels relieved to be able to write about something that is such a taboo. Once again, the distance of the second person allows him to fully express himself, to comprehend this relationship that is both beautiful and abominable to him. When he calls Jim to tell him that he wrote *Summer*, Walker warns Jim: “It’s disgusting, Jim. Every time I think about it, it makes me want to puke” (91). Walker knows how wrong his relationship with Gwyn is, yet, writing about it feels liberating, as if he is finally telling a secret he has kept all his life. It is no wonder, then, that when he finishes writing *Summer*, he needs another change of perspective.

Before dying, Walker leaves the notes for *Fall* hoping that Jim will help him turn them into the final part of his book. This time, the notes are in third person, introducing the largest distance between the Walker who is writing and the Walker that is being written. In fact, the notes are not even fully formed sentences. Rather, as Jim describes them: “Telegraphic. No complete sentences. From beginning to end, written like this. Goes to the store. Falls asleep. Lights a cigarette. In third person this time” (166). A sensible explanation for this is Walker’s declining health. He is aware that he does not have much longer left and so he writes quickly, with no time for descriptions and details. However, this distance allows Auster to insert even more ambiguity in the validity of the manuscript. Not only is the final part of the story written by a sick man at

the end of his life, but it is also re-written by someone, giving the reader even more reason to doubt what is written. Jim tries to absolve himself – “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” (166) – but this somehow rings hollow. The fact that *Fall* had to be written twice – once by Walker and once by Jim – alerts the reader to its fictionality, asking them to believe not just one author, but two.

With the second change in perspective, *Fall* appears even more distant than the previous two parts. Walker is now further away from himself, observing the story with the objectivity of an impartial narrator. The reader is given less insight into his thoughts and the long descriptions and inner monologues are sparse. This results in a more streamlined narrative as Walker is focused and driven. As soon as he arrives in Paris, Walker reaches out to Margot and once they meet he tells her everything that has happened with Born (173–174). Once he runs into Born, he devises a plan of getting close to Hélène and Cécile, gaining their trust, and exposing Born as a murderer (188). Everything he does from that point on serves this plan and this is reflected in the storytelling. When the story reaches the point when Walker is about to tell Hélène and Cécile about Born’s murder, the narration becomes even more rudimentary. Jim documents this and makes a note: “Even earlier, over the course of the first twenty-eight pages, I had noticed a slow but ineluctable dwindling of strength, a loss of attention to detail, but now he is too incapacitated to put anything but the bedrock essentials. [...] By the last three pages, the collapse is nearly total” (235–236). The narrative then changes again, reflecting the change in the notes: “H. and W. at the kitchen table. Coffee, bread and butter, a pot of yogurt. There is little left to talk about concerning C. Before it is too late, he must push H. in a new direction[.] Must confirm that facts are correct before diving in” (236). It is no coincidence that the narrative becomes so fragmented

right before Walker tells the truth about Born. The damage that he does to both H       and C       is great and it cannot be easy for Walker to live through those moments again. H       appears devastated and C       finds him despicable and spits in his face (239). Presenting those events in a telegraphic style makes it easier for Walker to face them, absolving some of the responsibility for hurting H       and C      . It also makes it easier to deal with the aftermath, being framed for drug possession by Born and deported back to New York.

Finally, the last part of the book presents the final perspective change as it is given in the form of diary entries. When Jim meets C      , she confirms those parts of Walker’s story that she was a part of, but is unable to give a definite answer to the question whether Walker told the truth in his manuscript. Jim then asks her about Born, hoping at least to confirm that part of the story. He asks her about the last time she met Born, but the answer she gives is far from satisfactory: “I’m sorry, I don’t think I can talk about it. Why not? Because if I tried to tell you what happened, I couldn’t begin to convey what a strange and disturbing experience it was for me. [...] To use your terms, I can’t *tell* you anything, but you can *read* about it if you want to” (273). C       frames her story as something incredible, warning Jim that it might be difficult to believe in from the start. This is also meant to alarm the reader as well, introducing yet another narrator that may or may not be untruthful. Additionally, Auster adds another layer of text manipulation: “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” (274).

It is important to note that both Walker’s and C      ’s writing have been edited or translated by Jim, indicating that the possibility that Jim altered their pages is always present (and the reader later learns is true) and that he is the only character that has seen the original versions of the manuscripts. In a way, this once again equates Jim with Auster, making him a singular author

responsible for the entire story and drawing attention to the fictionality of the story. This is further emphasized by the fact that Jim is never certain whether Walker's story is fully true or not. His initial response to the pages of *Spring* is to believe that it is entirely fiction:

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[.]

(79)

Apart from a quick reference to Auster's *City of Glass*⁸, this sets the groundwork for all future doubts about the validity of the manuscript. Much like any other form of metafiction in this novel, the perspective changes constantly draw the reader's attention to the fictionality of the text.

4.2 The Metafiction of the Invisible

Metafiction in *Invisible* is multifaceted and contains a combination of different types of metafiction. Implicit and explicit, intracompositional and extracompositional metareferences are all present, yet, the most dominant aspect of metafiction in the work is *fictum* – or as Wolf calls it “truth or fiction-centred metareference” (Wolf 41). All other types of metafiction in the book are subordinate to *fictum* and serve to ask the question: is this true or not? While the two books I previously analyzed dealt with truth in an implied manner, asking the reader to assume that

⁸ The first story in *The New York Trilogy*, *City of Glass*, contains a character named Paul Auster. Auster, a writer, lives in New York with his wife and son Daniel, just like real Auster did at the time of writing.

whatever they are reading is indeed true, *Invisible* changes this, constantly challenging both the reader and the characters in the story to question whether what they are reading is true.

Throughout the novel, both intracompositional and extracompositional metareferences can be noticed. An obvious example of intracompositional metareference starts from the second part, with Jim as the second protagonist addressing the manuscript he receives from Walker, advising him how to proceed with writing, and commenting on the story. Extracompositional references, on the other hand, can be found from the very beginning of the novel, when Walker is introduced to Born. He immediately thinks of Bertran de Born (1140s–1215), a French poet he knows from Dante's *Inferno*: "When he introduced himself as Rudolf Born, my thoughts immediately turned to the poet. Any relation to Bertran? I asked. Ah, he replied, that wretched creature who lost his head. Perhaps, but it doesn't seem likely, I'm afraid" (4). Even though Born does not share ancestry with the poet, they do share the same passions. Walker gets a first hint of who Born is when he tells him more about the poet: "[H]is subject, the one thing he seemed to care about with any genuine passion, was war. He absolutely reveled in it. I see, Born said, giving me an ironic smile. A man after my own heart" (8). The numerous references to de Born aim to connect his gory obsessions to Born's character. His violent side appears multiple times throughout the novel, strengthening this connection. As the true nature of Born's work remains unclear throughout the book, Auster uses this description of de Born to indicate what the reader can expect from Born, connecting the fictional character with the real de Born.

Perhaps the most important extracompositional metareferences are references to Auster's life and his previous work. For one, the punctuation of *Invisible* resembles other Auster's work; he removes all speech marks in instances of direct speech, something he has done previously in *The Book of Illusions* and *Man in the Dark*. Auster also draws from parts of his own life and work,

inserting those elements as parts of the story, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Both Walker and Jim bear resemblance to Auster. Just like Walker, Auster was a student at Columbia University, and he too spent time in Paris upon completing his studies. Auster also translates French poetry and even lends his own translation to Walker: when writing a proposal for the magazine, Walker includes his translation of a poem by de Born, hoping to entice Born with it (22–24). On the other hand, Jim resembles Auster at a later point in his life. A successful writer living in New York, also a Columbia graduate, and with an opus that overlaps with Auster's. Namely, the aforementioned "memoir of sorts" (89) that is in *Invisible* described almost in the same manner as Auster talks about his *Invention of Solitude*. These metareferences undermine the truthfulness of the book, drawing the reader's attention directly to Auster as the creator of the story. The steady reminders that Auster is unavoidably involved with the story breaks the illusion and signals fictionality.

Implicit metafiction can be found in numerous allusions that Walker is an unreliable narrator. From the very beginning, he confesses to forgetting certain parts of the story: "I have no memory why I was there. Someone must have asked me to go along, but who that person was has long since evaporated from my mind. I can't even recall where the party was held [...] nor my reason for accepting the invitation in the first place" (4). Other times, he skips over parts of the story, as he cannot remember the exact details. Yet, he claims that his story is true despite all that. He never once questions his own memory of the events, but other characters do. In addition to Jim finding the entire *Spring* hard to believe, both Born and Gwyn proclaim parts of his manuscript as lies. Born claims that he is not the one that stabbed their attacker a dozen times; he only did it once in self-defense and then left the young man in the park. Walker has no way of either confirming or disproving the story, yet he sticks to what he believes is true. Gwyn, on the other

hand, is utterly shocked by Walker's description of their incestuous relationship and denies it entirely:

[T]he book had clobbered [Gwyn] into a state of puzzled disbelief.

I don't understand, she said. Most if it so accurate, so exactly right, and then there are all those things he made up. It doesn't make any sense.

What things? I asked, knowing full well what she was referring to.

I loved my brother, Jim. When I was young, he was closer to me than anyone else. But I never slept with him. There was no grand experiment when we were kids. There was no incestuous affair in the summer of 1967. [...] What Adam wrote was pure make-believe.
(255)

Gwyn's proclamation brings into question everything that Walker writes, making him an even more unreliable narrator. She continues, raising even more doubts about what Walker wrote about the nature of their relationship:

[T]he only answer I've come up with is that those pages are a dying man's fantasy, a dream of what he wished had happened but never did. [...] I am not denying those feelings were in the air, but I had no interest in acting on them. Adam was too attached to me, Jim. It was an unhealthy attachment, and after we'd been living together for a while that summer, he started telling me that I'd spoiled him for other women, that I was the only woman he could ever love, and that if we weren't brother and sister, he would marry me in a second. [...] To be perfectly honest, I was relieved when he went to Paris. (256)

It is impossible to know whether Gwyn is telling Jim the truth or not. At this point in the book, the implied fictionality of the story is all but confirmed. However, this conversation between Jim and Gwyn leads to the biggest twist of the entire book.

In a grand example of explicit metafiction, Auster brings the *fictum* to the forefront of his novel, undermining the truth of everything that was read. Not knowing what to do with Walker's manuscript, Jim asks Gwyn for an opinion. She is torn between her brother's dying wish to publish his memoir and the repercussions it could have on her own life; if the story came out, regardless of whether it is real or not, the incest described in it would harm Gwyn's family and relationships. She then instructs Jim to edit the manuscript to protect her, but keep the story and publish it. Skeptical at first, Jim complies and finally, confesses to the reader the extent to which he has altered the story:

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, and the reader can therefore be assured that Adam Walker is not Adam Walker. Gwyn Walker Tedesco is not Gwyn Walker Tedesco. Margot Jouffroy is not Margot Jouffroy. Hélène and Cécile Juin are not Hélène and Cécile Juin. [...] Not even Born is Born. His real name was close to that of another Provençal poet, and I took the liberty to substitute the translation of that other poet by not-Walker with a translation of my own, which means that the remarks about Dante's *Inferno* on the first page of this book were not in not-Walker's original manuscript. Last of all, I don't suppose it is necessary for me to add that my name is not Jim. [...] New York is not New York, Columbia University is not Columbia University, but Paris is Paris. Paris alone is real. I managed to keep it in because the Hotel du Sud vanished long ago, and all recorded evidence of not-Walker's stay there in 1967 has long since vanished as well. (260–261)

Auster masterfully *pulls the rug* from beneath the reader's feet, collapsing the entire story that was built. The entire narrative crumbles into incredulity. Not only can the reader not trust

‘Walker’ anymore, but it shows that ‘Jim’ cannot be trusted either, despite several confirmations that the edits he made were just polishing the language. Auster makes it impossible to believe in the truthfulness of the story after this, and it seems that he also poses the question “Why should one believe it?”

4.3 The Ontology of Truth

As with the two novels previously discussed, *Invisible* asks a number of epistemological questions, and the book seemingly tries to answer them. Jim spends most of the fourth part of the book trying to find conclusive answers to what truly happened in 1967 to Walker and Born, yet he fails in his pursuit. Furthermore, the reader now has no guarantee that those answers would actually be true or that Jim would even include them in the manuscript. The trust between the reader and the book is broken and it seems that Auster does not want to see it fixed. In fact, it is difficult not to conclude that this was Auster’s plan all along. The emphasis of the metafictional *fictum* signals to the reader that the focus of the story is truth itself. By subverting the reader’s expectations and openly telling them that they have been lied to, Auster attempts to decode what is the role of truth in storytelling.

Auster shows that truth is not necessary in character building. Using the real poet de Born and his fascination with war and violence, Auster builds the character of Born. Yet, when it is revealed that Born is not really Born and has no connections to the poet, the comparison does not fade. In fact, Born himself accepts it: “My faux ancestor was a true samurai madman, wasn’t he? But at least he had the courage of his convictions. At least he knew what he stood for” (27). The lie succeeds in describing the character, affirming his motivations, and demonstrating his traits with

a stronger effect than a simple description could. It allows the reader to look into the real world and find a reference for Born, making it true to them.

In fact, the entire character of Born is built on the uncertainty of truth. While it is heavily implied that he is a spy, or even a double agent, this is never truly confirmed. Both Margot and Cécile believe that he is connected “[w]ith the police, with the military, with the government” (205), yet these are all speculations. He shows that he does have certain influence, demonstrated when he frames Walker for drug possession and forces him to leave Paris, but he never admits doing it. He spends his final years on a fictional Caribbean island of Quillia, and it is alluded that he stayed there in hiding. The closest he comes to confession is when he talks to Cécile in Quillia, but since he spends her entire visit lying to her, she proclaims that she “no longer believed a word he was saying” (295). This also underlines the true purpose of finishing the book with excerpts from Cécile’s diary. Jim includes them since they are the last known reference to Born, but the content of that manuscript provides no satisfying conclusion to Walker’s story. During her stay at Quillia, Cécile attempts to find answers to questions about her father, or Born, yet she does not learn anything new or anything that is true without a shadow of doubt. Auster concludes the novel without uncovering the truth about Born, confirming that he never planned to do so.

Auster shows that truth is also not necessary to describe Walker and Gwyn’s relationship. Both siblings present the relationship in a different light, and it is safe to assume the truth is in neither of the stories, but perhaps somewhere in the middle. Whether or not the two had engaged in an incestuous relationship, whether Walker was overly attached to Gwyn or not, it is clear that the relationship they had is an unusual one. Ultimately, Gwyn herself says that it does not matter whether what Walker wrote is true or not, the claims of incest would hurt her and tarnish Walker’s memory either way. Auster illustrates that consequences of the story do not depend on

the truth. This is echoed by Born in Paris. When Walker confronts him saying that the gun of the attacker was empty, Born states: “The fact that it wasn’t loaded doesn’t really change anything, does it? As long as we thought it was loaded, it was loaded” (185). With this, Auster shows that truth is subjective and everyone makes their own.

The tradition Walker and Gwyn have for Andy’s birthday also subverts the truth. The celebration essentially consists of a “conversation in three parts” (136). During this conversation, the two talk about Andy in three tenses – past, present, and future – mirroring Walker’s own story told in three different persons – first, second, and third. In the first part, the two “talk about Andy in the past tense, dredging up everything [they] can recall about him while he was still alive” (138). In the second, they talk about him in the present tense, imagining what kind of person he would be if Andy was still alive today (139). Finally, they talk about Andy in future tense, discussing what will happen to him until his next birthday (140). This tradition relies on both Walker and Gwyn to first embrace the truth, relying on their memories to talk about Andy with as much detail as possible. They then have to reject the truth, ignoring the fact that Andy is dead, and talk about him as if he were still alive. By avoiding the truth, Walker and Gwyn keep the memory of their brother alive. Auster shows how the absence of truth can heal and provide the two with a coping mechanism, helping them get through the horrifying loss.

Ultimately, Auster proves that the factual truth was never important for his story. It was never his intention to confirm or deny Walker’s encounters with Born, relationship with Gwyn, or Born’s true identity. By using Jim, Auster admits to this, yet the story never suffers because of it.

Uncertain as it might be, the story fulfills its true purpose – pondering on the nature of truth using a book of lies.

5. Conclusion

An implied goal of this thesis was to make a case for Paul Auster as a prominent writer of metafiction. While some of his works are considered metafictional, he is not always credited as such. While the analysis given here encompasses only three of his novels, a fraction of his opus, many other instances of metafiction are mentioned and cross-referenced throughout the study, proving that Auster, indeed, is well-versed in metafiction. However, the primary aim was to examine these metafictional elements defined by Werner Wolf, and relate them to the postmodern dominant – the ontological dominant – of each novel.

In the first book, *In the Country of Last Things*, implicit metafiction was determined as the prominent type of metafiction. Creating a story-within-a-story in a dystopian setting, Auster continuously alludes to the fictional nature of the novel, both through the main character and by defying the genre conventions. It was demonstrated that Anna's description of the Country is incredibly detailed and that she is able to encapsulate the complicated atmosphere of such a lost place. However, the lack of any background information on the history of the Country, and the abrupt ending that leaves the story unfinished, signal that the focus of the book is on the ontological. Through analyzing Anna's adventures and experiences in the Country, it was shown that Auster uses this epistolary novel to ponder on one of the deeper questions – what does it mean to be alive?

The second book, *Man in the Dark*, uses both intracompositional and extracompositional metareferences to create the world of August Brill. The titular man in the dark creates a fictional narrative about Brick, a magician-turned-soldier, who is transported from his own world into a parallel universe where he is supposed to end a war by killing none other than Brill himself. The

analysis examined how the metareferences are used to craft a metafictional narrative with the purpose of distracting Brill from his own tragic story. It was established that the ontological dominant of the novel examines the true nature of narratives and stories that Brill tells himself and his granddaughter, allowing Auster to comment on the function of stories.

Finally, the last novel analyzed in the thesis is *Invisible*. It features the most complex structure of the three and relies on several types of metafiction, however, the dominant metareference was identified to be the truth or fiction-centered metareference – *fictum*. The story of the novel is told through multiple perspectives and characters, drawing the attention to the fictionality of itself. It was demonstrated that the complex structure and changing perspectives contribute to overall incredulity of the manuscript, questioning the veracity of the story. Auster purposefully deprives the novel of a conclusion, but rather shifts the focus on the ontological question – what is truth and is it necessary for the story?

Ultimately, this thesis examined both the technical aspects of Auster's metafiction as well as the overall impact they have on the reader, ways in which they contribute to the story, and the end-result of their use. It also illuminated the connection between metafiction and postmodernism in Auster's works, and reinforced my claim for Auster as an author of metafiction.

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Abstract – English

This paper examines metafictional elements of three novels by Paul Auster, with the aim of determining the role metafiction plays in supporting the postmodern dominant of Auster's work. The analysis relies on Werner Wolf's types of metareference: implicit and explicit metereference, intra- and extra-compositional metareference, and fictum or truth-centered metareference. The novels in focus are *In the Country of Last things* (1987), *Man in the Dark* (2008), and *Invisible* (2009). Through close readings of the three novels and the analysis of metafictional elements in each of them, it is established that the true purpose of metafiction in Auster's work is to emphasize and illuminate the ontological dominant of the novels, thus making a case for Paul Auster as a writer of metafiction.

Abstract – German

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit metafikionalen Elementen in drei Romanen von Paul Auster. Das Ziel ist es festzustellen, welche Rolle die Metafiktion in der Hervorhebung postmoderner Aspekte in Auster's Werken spielt. Die Analyse basiert auf den Metareferenz-Modellen von Werner Wolf: implizite vs. explizite Metareferenz, werkinterne vs. werkexterne Metareferenz und fictum- oder referenzbezogene Metareferenz. Die Romane, die im Fokus dieser Arbeit liegen, sind *Im Land der letzten Dinge* (1987), *Mann im Dunkel* (2008) und *Unsichtbar* (2009). Durch ein gewissenhaftes und genaues Lesen und eine tiefgründige Analyse der metafikionalen Elemente in jedem einzelnen Roman wird nachgewiesen, dass der eigentliche Zweck der Metafiktion in den Werken Austers ist, die ontologische Dominante zu erläutern und hervorzuheben, wodurch man Paul Auster als Autor von Metafiktion bezeichnen kann.