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The Pervasive Narrative of Authorial Identity:

Metafiction in the Works of Paul Auster and Tom Stoppard

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In a 1986 interview with London's *Sunday Times*, author Paul Auster mused that "As human beings we have a real hunger for stories. Similarly we compose and create a sense of ourselves in the world. We construct a narrative for ourselves, and that's the thread that we follow from one day to the next. People who disintegrate as personalities are ones who lose that thread. In real life it's very easily severed" ("Searcher for meaning"). Both Paul Auster and playwright Tom Stoppard chronicle the lives of poets, authors, playwrights, and other literary artists in four of their collective seminal works: Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and *Oracle Night*, and Stoppard's *The Real Thing* and *The Real Inspector Hound*. Because of the literary nature of the protagonists, metafiction, the layering of stories within stories, features heavily in all four stories. The protagonists all submerge themselves in worlds of the fantasy that they create. It is thus easy to come away believing that Stoppard and Auster consider this to be a viable solution, a viable escape from harsh certainties of real life. However, a closer examination of the texts reveals that art and language propagate exaggerated forms of reality, which the characters strive to imitate, but often fail to achieve. In both the works of Auster and Stoppard, the protagonists become absorbed in their work as they seek out connections between their own lives and the literary world they live in as writers, playwrights, actors and theater critics, in an attempt to escape their unsatisfactory lives. As both authors caution, reality falls short compared to the embellished portrayals of life captured in literature and theater. As a result, the protagonists each find themselves incapable of living up to the alternate identities they create, and thus in critical moments of realization serve as both Auster and Stoppard's ultimate warning: find meaning beyond one's work and beyond fictitious creations, or fade into nonexistence.

The protagonists in Auster's and Stoppard's works are all trapped in unsatisfactory lives, usually either wrestling with marital problems, frustrating jobs, or both. Unhappy marriages and relationships prominently litter the writings of both Auster and Stoppard. In Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Max, after realizing that his wife, Annie, has been cheating on him "kicks the radio savagely. [. . .] He flings himself upon ANNIE in something like an assault which turns immediately into an embrace. ANNIE does no more than suffer the embrace, looking over MAX's shoulder, her eyes blank" (Stoppard 36, sic). Max, though not the main protagonist of *The Real Thing*, is one of the characters who tries to imitate fictional characters to escape from the hard truth of his life — the fact that his wife is cheating on him. Stoppard demonstrates Max's unfortunate position: after he desperately questions Annie about the affair, he turns to violence and assault, and then pathetic grief. Stoppard further reinforces the misery that Max suffers through with Annie's emotionless response, her face remaining "blank" as she "suffer[s] the embrace." In Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, theater critics Moon and Birdboot become drawn into a murder mystery play that they are watching. Birdboot, much like Max, suffers from an unhappy marriage, on account of his frequent flirtations with other women. Birdboot and Moon both allude multiple times to Birdboot's marital issues. In the middle of a heated discussion, Birdboot reveals that he has overheard some of the rumors about him and "know[s] what goes on behind [his] back—sniggers—slanders—hole-in- corner innuendo—" (Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 9). Birdboot's admission that he is aware of some of the rumors "behind his back" hints at deeper issues with his image. He is quick to dismiss the rumors initially, yet recounts multiple types of disgraces that have been directed towards him ("sniggers," "slanders," and "hole-in-corner innuendo"). This suggests that he is not only aware of his peer's opinions of his marital life, but sensitive about it too, since he refuses to admit the truth.

One of the other central themes of unhappiness in Stoppard and Auster revolves around unsatisfactory jobs, a problem with which all of the protagonists deal. Moon, from Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, is a "secondary" theater critic who only gets called to review a play when the company's primary critic can't. Moon reveals how distraught he is over this fact multiple times: "MOON (*sharply at first, then starting to career . . .*): It is merely that it is not enough to wax at another's wane, to be held in reserve, to be on hand, on call, to step in or not at all, the substitute—the near offer—the temporary-acting" (15). Moon's repetition of comma phrases and em dash phrases reinforces Moon's declining mental state and his distress. In combination with the stage direction which suggests that Moon should "career" as the speech progresses, this gives the impression of increasing agitation. Stoppard intends to show Moon's unhappiness with his life *and* job. Daniel Quinn, Auster's detective novelist in *City of Glass* (the first section of *The New York Trilogy*), is likewise unhappy with his career. He tells his friends that a "part of him had died [. . .] and he did not want it coming back to haunt him. [. . .] Quinn was no longer the part of him that could write books, and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself" (4). Auster's juxtaposition of the intangibility of the ghost imagery ("coming back to haunt" and "no longer exist[ing]") and the concrete descriptions of Quinn's real self emphasizes his deep unhappiness with his work and with writing, and his detachment from the outside world.

For Blue, the protagonist of *Ghosts* (the second book of Auster's *New York Trilogy*), the source of unhappiness, although stemming from his job, would be better classified as an existential crisis of identity, and a struggle with extreme boredom. Blue is a private detective who is asked to sit in a room and keep tabs on a man named Black, who lives in the apartment across. Blue is not to leave the room, and spies on Black for months on end, doing nothing but sitting and writing endlessly, and as a

result “this new idleness has left him at something of a loss. For the first time in his life, he finds that he has been thrown back on himself[. . .] He has never given much thought to the world inside him, and though he always knew it was there, it has remained an unknown quantity, unexplored and therefore dark, even to himself” (171). As a result of the monotony Blue has a lot of time for self reflection, and thus time to tear holes in his fragile identity. The resulting consideration of the world inside him is “unexplored and therefore dark.” Isolation, and self-introspections force Blue to come up against the darkness inside himself, in a crisis of identity. Sydney Orr, the protagonist of Paul Auster’s *Oracle Night*, is another example of a man struggling with his identity. Orr’s unhappiness stems initially from his unnamed sickness, which causes extreme physical weakness, dizzy spells and confusion, and leaves him “damaged goods now, a mass of malfunctioning parts and neurological conundrums” (3). The debilitation from the illness has deeper impact than the psychological effects on Orr. In particular, Orr’s crippled sense of self is immediately evident as he discusses his illness: “I had been sick for a long time. When the day came for me to leave the hospital, I barely knew how to walk anymore, could barely remember who I was supposed to be” (1). Juxtaposing Orr’s physical strength (knowing “how to walk”) and identity (“remember[ing] who [he] was supposed to be”), Auster reinforces Orr’s identity crisis, and consequently demonstrates the multiple shortcomings that dominate his life. Both Blue and Sydney Orr succumb to this depression caused by disrupted identities.

In order to escape from or deal with their lives, the protagonists in Auster’s and Stoppard’s works become absorbed in their jobs as authors, playwrights or theater critics, often identifying with one or more characters from the literature or theater that they write or watch. Because marital and relationship issues plague Auster’s and Stoppard’s characters, the allure of a fictional identity is all the more prominent. In *The Real Inspector Hound*, after Birdboot falls in love Cynthia Muldoon (a fictional

character in the play the critics are watching), Birdboot seizes the opportunity to be absorbed into the world of the play, in order to meet her. When Mrs. Drudge, the maid informs Birdboot that Cynthia is inclined to meet him, he :

BIRDBOOT. You mean . . . you mean, she wants to meet me. . . ?

MRS. DRUDGE. Oh yes, sir, I just told her and it put her in quite a tizzy.

BIRDBOOT. Really? Yes, well, a man of my influence is not to be sneezed at—I think

I have some small name for the making of reputations—mmm, yes, quite a tizzy, you say? (Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 34)

At first Birdboot protests this merging of metafictional layers, but in the moment that Mrs. Drudge suggests Birdboot meet Cynthia, Birdboot identifies the possibility of taking the place of the character, “Simon,” in order to meet Cynthia. In her essay “The Paradox of Parody: *The Real Inspector Hound*,” Katherine Kelly agrees that “the promise of meeting Cynthia [. . .] traps him into staying. At this moment, the dialogue and gesture of the inner and frame plays begin to cross” (Kelly 84). The metafiction in *The Real Inspector Hound* begins to decompose, as Kelly points out, not when Birdboot and Cynthia actually meet, but when it is proposed that they meet. Stoppard, in effect, shows that the “promise of meeting Cynthia” is the key factor, and that Birdboot is making a choice the moment he identifies a path towards his goal — taking on the character of Simon, and thus amalgamating elements from both “the inner and frame plays.”

While some of the characters use an alternate identity or the guise of a fictional character in order to justify new love, many others use the same techniques to distance themselves from preexisting relationship issues in their lives. For example, Max identifies with a character he has played the part of in an attempt to conceal his anguish over his wife’s adultery:

MAX. How's Julie?

ANNIE. Who?

MAX. Julie. Miss Julie. Strindberg's Miss Julie. Miss Julie by August Strindberg, how is she? (Stoppard, *Real Thing* 35)

Max replicates the diction used by his character in *House of Cards*, which starts with a mis-interpretable question ("Good sale?"), then restates the question ("Good sale."), clarifies the question ("Was the sale good?"), and then inverts the order of the question several times ("The sale in Geneva, how was it? Did it go well in Geneva, the sale?") (12). Max idolizes the suave character he plays in *House of Cards*, whose witticism and cleverly-worded detachment allow the character to come out with the upper hand after accusing his wife of having an affair. In the height of his distress, Max tries to imitate the mannerisms of his alter-ego while he accuses his own wife of adultery, trying to become his fictional counterpart in order to segregate his feelings from the situation. In *City of Glass*, Quinn's alternate identity, "Paul Auster," works in a similar way to distance Quinn from the painful truth of his past relationships, at which he hints occasionally. After agreeing to work under the name Paul Auster,

Quinn remembered visiting Nantucket with his wife long ago, in her first month of pregnancy, when his son was no more than a tiny almond in her belly. He found it painful to think of that now, and he tried to suppress the pictures that were forming in his head. "Look at it through Auster's eyes," he said to himself, "and don't think of anything else." (Auster, *New York* 63)

Quinn uses the alternate identity of "Paul Auster" to numb the painful memories of his past. He recognizes the ability of taking on Auster's identity to "suppress the pictures" of the wife and son that he

misses so much. By looking at the world through a stranger's eyes, he is able to ignore the problems of his past, because they are not problems Auster would have encountered.

Just as with relationships, the protagonists in Auster's and Stoppard's metafictional works rely on alternate identities to cope with their dissatisfaction over work. In *City of Glass* Quinn's pseudonym, "William Wilson" frees him from the anxiety of his writing: "Because he did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart. William Wilson, after all, was an invention, and [. . .] now led an independent life" (Auster, *New York* 5). Even though Wilson is "an invention" he has "an independent life" from Quinn, and is thus a separate identity — even a separate person. This allows Quinn to defer responsibility for his work, and escape his dissatisfaction with his job. In fact, as a whole "[t]he effect of being Paul Auster," allows Quinn to feel "as though he had somehow been taken out of himself, as if he no longer had to walk around with the burden of his own consciousness. By a simple trick of intelligence, a deft little twist of naming, he felt incomparably lighter and freer" (Auster, *New York* 62).

As both authors caution, literature is an embellished portrayal of reality, compared to which reality falls short, and metafictional parallels remain incomplete. Auster and Stoppard both work to extoll their warning that literature and theater are embellished, but not incorrect portrayals of reality. For example, once Birdboot begins to be absorbed into the structure of metafiction in *The Real Inspector Hound*, Birdboot's actions begin to parallel the previous scene, repeating Simon's lines from earlier, with a unique convolution to fit the circumstances onstage. Unlike his own life and relationships, which are rather dull and boring, his onstage relationship with Cynthia is not so:

BIRDBOOT. I don't care! Let them think what they like, I love you!

CYNTHIA. Don't—I love Albert!

BIRDBOOT. He's dead. (*Shaking her.*) Do you understand me—Albert's dead!"

(Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 35).

Even though Birdboot thinks he is talking to the actual Cynthia, the audience understands that the play he is watching has sucked him in, since Birdboot's scene with Cynthia is the word-for-word repeat of Simon's scene with her (18). Birdboot declares his love for Cynthia, but because he is actually in a play, his actions, such as dramatically shaking her, are far more embellished and exaggerated than those of his real life. Moon, of Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* also plays into the altered and exaggerated universe of theater, allowing himself to believe, because he is watching a murder mystery, that "getting away with murder must be quite easy provided that one's motive is sufficiently inscrutable" (31). In *The Real Inspector Hound*, the inner play contains displays of emotion, and extraordinary capabilities that are only achievable with the language and performance of theater. This heightened portrayal of reality also motivates the characters' ambitions, such as with Moon's secret desire to murder his superior critic, Higgs, and thus become first-critic. Seeing how easily the unknown killer in the inner play gets away with murder because, supposedly, his "motive is sufficiently inscrutable," Moon's private fantasies to kill Higgs are further aroused.

Because the characters allow themselves to idolize the hyperbolized world of "art," reality is viewed as substandard, and cannot meet the expectations that theater and literature set for the way real interactions must be enacted, and lives can be lived. In other words, the protagonists are incapable of living up to the identities or worlds they create for themselves. For example, when Max is faced with the hard truth of his wife's infidelity, whereas the fictional "Max" remains calm and witty, the real Max only holds his composure for a little while before breaking down into tears and insults, calling Annie a "filthy cow" and feebly hitting her (Stoppard, *Real Thing* 36). As a result, Stoppard demonstrates a

fundamental difference between theater and reality: witty words and clever language can't be sustained in an emotionally charged situation. Theater is not an imperfect form of reality, but a hyper-real form of reality. The incomplete parallels between theater and reality result from an inability to sustain the heightened emotions portrayed by characters in a play.

The flawed nature of the embellished fictional universe is also occasionally acknowledged by the characters themselves. Even when not in the direct context of metafiction, both Stoppard and Auster portray theater and literature as embellished conceptions of the world. In *The Real Thing*, Henry becomes attuned to this altered state of reality that only exists in theater and art: "I don't believe in debonair relationships. 'How's your lover today, Amanda?' 'In the pink, Charles. How's yours?' I believe in mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of self-respect, nakedness" (Stoppard, *Real Thing* 71). This is a direct attack on the suave witticism Max's character uses and Max tries to emulate. Henry puts down the concept of the "debonair relationship," and of course "debonair," (meaning stylish, confident and charming) is the perfect description of Max's original character. Henry is one of the few characters who understands the exaggeration of the fictional world, and that what really exists is "mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of self-respect, nakedness." In *Ghosts*, Blue also concedes that his fictional world might be an impossible substitute for his flawed reality. He admits that "[i]f he is able to invent a multitude of stories to fit the facts concerning Black, with the future Mrs. Blue all is silence, confusion and emptiness" (Auster, *New York* 174). Blue accepts that when it comes to stories, the universe is able to "fit the facts;" stories while "invent[ed]," are better than the alternative. The alternative, reality, which for Blue is represented by his fiancée, "the future Mrs. Blue," feels painful and hard to handle, and is filled with "silence, confusion and emptiness." In other words, the reality of Blue's relationship with his girlfriend cannot live up to the lofty idealism of the world of stories he is attempting

to inhabit. Even Moon's inhabitation of the fictional inspector character is short lived. As he puts it when asked if he is "the Real Inspector Hound": "You know damn well I'm not!" (Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 43). Moon is unable to become the inspector, because reality is not able to live up to the exaggerated portrayals of character in theater. He is forced to confess to the shortcomings of his identity, and as a result of his choice to pursue this fictional identity, he can no longer exist. Immediately afterwards, he is shot, and thus erased from existence.

One of the most fascinating similarities between all of the thusly examined works of fiction is that a critical moment occurs in each story — a moment of realization brought about by the immersion in the world of fiction, immediately after which the characters all make the choice to either continue to inhabit a fictional world or identity and thus cease to exist, or ground themselves in reality. When the characters take on a new identity, they do so to escape from themselves, and the pressures on their lives. However, the moment of revelation in each case makes it clear that the protagonists' worlds are still acting upon them, and that they are not the subject, as they wished to be, but the object. In her essay, "Tom Stoppard's Metadrama: The Haunting Repetition," Christine Dymkowski postulates that "Repetition carries emotional overtones intimately bound up with the drive for knowledge. The 'still centre' (the vanishing point) is made all the more poignant as it remains invisible" (Dymkowski). Especially in *The Real Thing*, but also in the other three books and plays, the moment of revelation comes after many repetitions, many iterations of identity. Max becomes his character, Annie becomes her character, Henry becomes Max's character; Birdboot becomes Simon, Moon becomes the inspector; Sydney becomes Nick, who becomes Lemuel Flagg; Daniel Quinn becomes Max Work and William Wilson, Paul Auster and Don Quixote, and Blue becomes Black, and the narrator becomes Fanshawe. Only after many repetitions is the "drive for knowledge" satisfied. It is that drive which

motivates the epiphanic moments, such as Moon's compulsion to reveal the entire situation of the mystery, Agatha Christie-style, exclaiming "Ah! The final piece of the jigsaw! I think I am now in a position to reveal the mystery" (Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 42). Moon's rage and grief about Birdboot's death drive him almost to the point of insanity. It is at this point that Moon becomes completely entangled in the play he was watching, identifying with the character of the inspector. To illustrate this transformation, Stoppard uses language that most would associate with that of the detective. Dingley clarifies of Agatha Christie's works that "[t]he end towards which [Agatha Christie's] narratives progress is [. . .] the public revelation of factual truth (the identity of a murderer and the means by which the crime was committed)" (Dingley). Stoppard plays on the conventions of the "Golden Age" detective novelists, particularly Agatha Christie, whose detectives reveal the identity of the killer to everyone having put together all of the clues. And it is thus at this point, after numerous iterations of identity, that Moon is finally able to come to the revelation about how Birdboot was killed, and knowledge of the situations is attained. However, at the moment Moon makes the realization that there is more going on to the mystery, he makes the fatal mistake of ignoring this knowledge, and throwing away his true identity in favor of pressing on as the Inspector.

For both Sydney in *Oracle Night*, and Henry in *The Real Thing*, the revelatory moment is a realization of the truth about the state of their marriages. Confronting Annie, Henry accuses her that he 'know[s] it's him. Billy, Billy, Billy, the name keeps dropping, each time without significance, but it can't help itself. Hapless as a secret in a computer. Blip, blip. Billy, Billy'" (Stoppard, *Real Thing* 69). For both Stoppard's Henry and Auster's Sydney, who are both writers, the revelation is that the fictional worlds and invented identities have not solved the problems, and that their wives are cheating on them. In other words, just as with all of the protagonists, Henry comes to understand that he is being acted on

by the universe, that his attempts to gain control using by delving into his work have failed. Henry finally puts together the little clues, “the name [that] keeps dropping,” and realizes that his wife and Billy are having an affair. In a parallel ordeal, Sydney realizes that Grace has been having an affair with their family friend John Trause. Syd finally puts the clues together in an epiphany: “There had to be a story behind Grace’s dumbfounding shifts of mood, her tears and enigmatic utterances, her disappearance on Wednesday night, her struggle to make up her mind about the baby” (Auster, *Oracle Night* 212). As with Henry, the moment of realization is paralleled by the failure of reality to live up to fiction, and thus his failure to gain control of his life by trying to imitate fiction in reality.

Both authors warn that those protagonists who become too involved in the work or inextricably intertwined in a fiction are doomed to fade away into nonexistence. For the critics of *The Real Inspector Hound*, the concept of nonexistence is far more literally interpreted as immediate death. In both of the critics moments of realizations, the persistence of their alternate identities results in their swift demises: “BIRDBOOT. Now—finally—I see it all—— / (*There is a shot and BIRDBOOT falls dead.*)” (Stoppard, *Real Inspector* 40). Similarly, with Moon:

MOON. (*backing*) Puckeridge! You killed Higgs—and Birdboot tried to tell me——

MAGNUS. Stop in the name of the law!

(MOON *turns to run*. MAGNUS *fires*. MOON *drops to his knees.*) (44)

In the moments immediately following both Birdboot and Moon’s revelations about the solution to the murder mystery, they are both shot dead. In Moon’s case this is particularly significant, as the revelation was the culmination of Moon’s dissolution into the identity of “The Inspector.” Taking on this detective-esque identity, Moon finally pieces together the clues and realizes who the real murderer is — Puckeridge. Moon persists in a false identity, so his existence is terminated and he’s shot.

The whole world quickly slips away once the protagonists lose sight of reality. After Quinn's many-month mental breakdown in an alleyway, his return to society gives a perspective on Auster's nihilistic interpretation of nonexistence. Once Quinn finds out that his apartment has been given to someone else, he reaches the conclusion that "[i]t didn't matter anymore. [. . .] he wouldn't get his apartment back. It was gone, he was gone. Everything was gone" (Auster, *New York* 150). Quinn's world crumbles because he makes the choice to continue his assignment as Paul Auster. Quinn comes back to find that, just as his apartment is gone, so is his identity. He gave up his identity to become Paul Auster, and as a result loses his whole world and thus "[e]verything was gone." Just as with Quinn, the narrator of *The Locked Room* becomes so obsessed with Fanshawe that when he is finally able to distance himself from Fanshawe, to disconnect himself from the fiction he has become trapped in, he finds it is too late, lamenting that "[Fanshawe] was gone—and I was gone along with him" (Auster, *New York* 346). Auster repeats the phrase "was gone" from *City of Glass*, emphasizing the duality of identity, and the connection between the two identities — if one goes, so must the other. In his essay "Mirrors and Madness: Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*," Steven Alford theorizes about this effect of the "other" on the existence of "self": "Quinn ceased to exist when he completed the red notebook. Blue ceased to exist when he completed reading Black's manuscript, which, we are told, Blue already knew by heart. When the words of the other ceased, the self ceased to exist" (Alford). While Alford's concept of the "other" as an external force that affirms identity only applies when the "other" is synonymous with "self," the "other," in all of the cases examined in Stoppard and Auster *is*, in fact, the external identity created from fiction. Thus, Alford's theory provides an interesting insight — the creation of an alternate identity (an "other") from oneself is inherently dangerous, because the identities created are fragile by their invented and fictitious natures. Alford recognizes the peril of the termination

of the “other” identity as complete erasure from existence. This concept is illustrated in the last line of *Ghosts*: “the story is not yet over. There is still the final moment, and that will not come until Blue leaves the room. [. . .] For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing” (Auster, *New York* 232). Auster confirms Alford’s theory of dependence on an “other” by creating a moment of suspense that highlights the important aspect of Blue’s “final moment.” By noting that “the story is not yet over,” Auster draws attention to the fact that as soon as “Blue leaves the room” the story is over. Once he’s done that, Auster immediately confirms that “from this moment on, we know nothing.” Thus, Auster equates the “final moment” with the end of “knowledge.” In other words, the moment Blue’s story ends, and his “other” ceases to exist, he ceases to exist.

In the realms of Stoppard and Auster, the only hope for those protagonists who have given themselves over to a fictitious identity is to ground themselves with something meaningful in their lives. For Sydney and for Henry, the only two protagonists who successfully break free from the temptation of fiction, the foundation in reality turns out to be love. Henry achieves some semblance of balance in his life, by accepting what he calls “[d]ignified cuckoldry” as “modern marriage” (Stoppard, *Real Thing* 25). Even after he finds out that Annie is having an affair, he is still able to love her unconditionally. Henry and Annie continue to live together afterwards, and while Stoppard doesn’t hold their relationship on a pedestal, or claim that it is perfect, they are able to move on with life. Sydney, too, is able to overcome the horrifying predictions of his fictitious identities, because he realizes that his relationship with Grace is more important to him than any escape from reality. Sydney praises the fact that Grace “wants to stay married” to him and confesses, “I don’t know if it’s fact or fiction, but in the end I don’t care. As long as Grace wants me, the past is of no importance” (Auster, *Oracle Night* 219). Richard F.

Patteson points out in his essay, “The Teller’s Tale: Text and Paratext in Paul Auster’s *Oracle Night*,” this confession “performs a cathartic function,” because it “enables Orr to begin his life all over just at a point when it seemed to be disintegrating” (Patteson 123). As Patteson concludes, those protagonists who are able to make the right choice (according to Auster and Stoppard), and find something outside of the world of fiction to ground themselves, the “process of writing,” transforms from a destructive influence to perform a “cathartic function.” It allows the protagonists to start “life all over again,” and move on.

While Stoppard and Auster recognize the destructive power of fantasy acting upon those submerged in a fictional identity, both also acknowledge that one’s concept of self is never truly fixed or unchanging. The surrounding world must guide identity, and as long as one has a firm grasp on reality, then the constant reinvention of one’s personality is not only natural, but must be an essential aspect of humanity.

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