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Facultad Regional Concepción del  
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**SELF-REFLEXIVE FICTION: THE RED NOTEBOOK IN PAUL AUSTER'S**

***THE NEW YORK TRILOGY***

BY: MARÍA VERÓNICA SIRI

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SUPERVISOR: Prof. Cecilia Chiacchio

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To Facundo, Gaspar and Delfina.

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## ABSTRACT

Postmodernism represents a fertile terrain for metafiction, which embodies the act of writing about writing and in which the boundary between fiction and reality is so narrow and elusive that it occasionally disconcerts the reader. There are two major assumptions underlying this work: first, that postmodernism challenges the status of reality and fiction by postulating their blurring boundaries; and second, the belief that texts produce meaning and, thus, the novel conveys an explanation of the world and the way we understand it. Within that frame, we work on the hypothesis that the red notebook in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987) is not just an ordinary object in the plotline; it represents literature and the act of writing, at the same time that it constitutes a meaningful space that gathers reader and writer and which serves them to interpret the world.

In order to demonstrate these ideas, first, we demarcate the theoretical framework around the concepts postmodernism, metafiction, self-reflexivity, mimesis and the status of fiction and reality. Then, we make a critical analysis of the red notebook in Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and we also examine his own *The Red Notebook* (1995) in order to find connections between both texts to the light of the theoretical concepts. On a broader frame, we take into consideration Auster's literary and critical position within American postmodern literature and American literary tradition.

## Introduction

Metafictional writing, understood as narrative that self-consciously deals with fiction is intimately related to postmodernism; during this period, more than ever before, the term has found a fertile ground to develop. Postmodernism represents a challenge by which the boundaries in the status of fiction and reality are often blurred. Self-reflexivity, and all its variants, are implied in the concept of metafiction and constitute the backbone of this kind of narrative because it provides the text the capacity to look inside and theorize about itself.

Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1997) is a clear example of a piece of fiction by which the author comments on fiction and its process of construction. Among many researches and studies about this American writer and his peculiar mode of narrating stories, *The World that is a Book* (2001), based on a thesis by Aliko Varvogli, has been a great contribution to our work. This book is divided in three chapters entitled "Legacies", "Austerities" and "Realities"; in which a selection of Paul Auster's novels are analyzed from different perspectives. Though it is mainly focused on Auster's *Leviathan* (1992), *Moon Palace* (1989) and *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), the last chapter has been of our interest because it portrays Paul Auster as a writer who self-consciously deals with fiction at the same time that in his narrative he includes a great amount of details connected with his own life. At the end of this chapter, Varvogli states that the lines that separate the text from the world are constantly blurred in Auster's fiction and that 'the

activities of writing and reading, far from producing a clear distinction between the 'real' and the textual, emphasise their interconnectedness'.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the novels that make up *The New York Trilogy* have several elements in common, there is an item that to our belief has not been given enough attention by the studies; a red notebook which, to our belief, transcends the mere functional object.

First, there is a homonym non-fiction work by Paul Auster, *The Red Notebook* (1995); a set of tales, anecdotes and memories distributed in thirteen chapters crowded with its author's life experiences. *Faber and Faber*, from the hand of Paul Auster, published a version of *The Red Notebook* (1995) which includes a group of interviews and essays in which the author reflects upon his own works making the boundaries between living and writing, flexible. This publication will serve as another instrument to illuminate our research since it constitutes a space that brings us to the author and lets us hear his voice.

Second, from a formal and functional point of view, the presence of the red notebook -and the act of writing- contribute to the cohesion of the three novels. Third, and here our hypothesis delineates, the red notebook in the novels comes to embody literature and the act of writing, in a more reflective and self-reflective way, which allows further exploration from the point of view of metafiction.

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<sup>1</sup>VARGOGLI, Aliko. *The World that is the Book Paul Auster's Fiction*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2001. 47p.

This research work, then, will be an attempt to prove that the red notebook in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* represents the act of writing by which fiction self-consciously deals with fiction, this being reinforced by the publication of Auster's *The Red Notebook*. It will be based on two major assumptions; first, the challenge postmodernism makes to the status of reality and fiction, by postulating their blurring boundaries; and second, the belief that texts produce meaning and, thus the novel conveys an explanation of the world and the way we understand the world. Our general aim is to analyse the three books in *The New York Trilogy* as novels which question the status of fiction and become self-conscious reflections on literature and writing; and examine Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook* in order to draw lines between these texts and the world they reveal and create.

The body of our work has been organized in three sections closely related to each other. The first chapter is devoted to explain the main notions that constitute the basis of this research: postmodernism and metafiction, the latter leading us to self-reflexivity as a key concept. Then, we define the term mimesis and reflect upon its implications on postmodern literature and upon the status of fiction and reality. The second chapter deals with the contextualization of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Red Notebook*. Here, our intention is to consider the positions of the texts within the American postmodern literature in relation to the socio-historical context of the period, American literary tradition and Auster's literary and critical position. So, we draw a general description of the American postmodern literature and, after that, we comment on *The New York Trilogy*, *The Red Notebook* and Paul Auster's biography. In the third chapter we address



'the red notebook' and its process of fictionalization in *The New York Trilogy*. Then, we deal with the analysis of the *New York Trilogy* to the light of *The Red Notebook*, of Paul Auster's biography and of a set of interviews given by him to Joseph Mallia, Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory.

## **Chapter I: Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1 Posmodernism, Metafiction and Self-reflexivity**

At the beginning of this chapter we will refer to two theoretical concepts, intimately related to each other, which have constituted the basis of our research: postmodernism and metafiction. The latter will lead us to the realm of 'self-reflexivity', a key concept in our analysis of Paul Auster's trilogy. Finally, we will have an approach to the term 'mimesis' and the status of fiction and reality in order to show the intrinsic relation between fiction and reality and their blurring boundaries within metafictional writing and within *The New York Trilogy* in particular.

First of all, we must say that postmodernism and postmodernity are not synonyms. However, postmodernism is an effect of postmodernity. According to Ihab Hassan's distinction of these terms postmodernity refers to the geopolitical scheme which has emerged in the last decades while postmodernism refers to the cultural sphere that involves literature, philosophy, architecture, among others. It must be also said that many changes occur in the world after the end of the Cold War together with the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 which had constituted the symbolic boundary between Capitalism and Communism for almost thirty years. Ihab Hassan also states that we must understand postmodernity as a world process that can be illustrated as

a vast umbrella under which stand various phenomena like postmodernism in the arts, poststructuralism in philosophy, feminism in social discourse, postcolonial and cultural studies in academe, but also multi-national

capitalism, cybertechnologies, international terrorism, assorted separatist, ethnic, nationalist, and religious movements.<sup>2</sup>

Our research pays special attention to postmodernism, the cultural phenomenon and it focuses, more specifically, on postmodern literature. This cultural movement can be better understood within the frame of the already mentioned historical process known as postmodernity. One of the changes introduced lies on the belief that there is no longer only 'one' truth but different manners of seeing and interpreting the world that surrounds us. There exists no absolute truth.

The postmodern mind no longer accepts the Enlightenment belief that knowledge is objective. Knowledge cannot be merely objective [...] because the universe is not mechanistic and dualistic but rather historical, relational and personal. The world is not simply an objective given that is 'out there', waiting to be discovered and known; reality is relative, indeterminate, and participatory.<sup>3</sup>

Postmodernism is a cultural movement that has its origins in Europe, the United States and Latin America by the second half of the twentieth century and covers various fields of thought and art like architecture, painting, literature, music and media. Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* says:

the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*. (...) ...typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>HASSAN, Ihab. From postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/Global Context. Retrieved July 6, 2015 from <[www.ihabhassan.com/postmodernism\\_to\\_postmodernity.htm](http://www.ihabhassan.com/postmodernism_to_postmodernity.htm)>

<sup>3</sup>GRENZ, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Cambridge, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996. 7p.

<sup>4</sup>MCHALE, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London and New York, Routledge, 1987. 12p.

Postmodern literature often violates writing conventions and employs different and innovative ways of dealing with fiction as a result of a permanent challenge towards old, traditional methods of writing. Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984 [1979]) declares that

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining Judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done.<sup>5</sup>

Another major theory about postmodernism is mentioned in *Beginning Theory*<sup>6</sup> and it comes from the French writer Jean Baudrillard, who introduces the idea of contemporary life responding to a system known as Simulacrum. He takes Saussure's theory by which through the use of language people do not refer to a thing that exists in the world, but to a concept or an idea of this thing. Words have no meaning in but in relation with other words. So language is the only real thing. Baudrillard says that if a sign is not a synonym of reality but a representation of other signs then, the whole system becomes a *simulacrum*. Later, he substituted the term *simulation* for *representation*.

Postmodernism constitutes a fertile ground for metafiction since it allows the author to play with postmodern values and conceptions such as the multiplicity of

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<sup>5</sup> LYOTARD, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester, Manchester University Press. 1984 [1979]. 81p.

<sup>6</sup> BARRY, Peter. *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press, 2002. 87p.

perspectives, loss of reality, broken binaries, questioning of everything that is taken as natural by constantly crossing the boundaries that separate fiction and reality. The term 'metafiction' seems to have its origins earlier but it is commonly associated to postmodern literature. It could be due to the fact that postmodern 'novelists have tended to become much more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fiction'.<sup>7</sup> Metafiction is a narrative strategy which shows the elements that make fiction possible. It is fiction about fiction or a kind of fiction that reflects upon itself, perhaps, in order to reach a further understanding of it. Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon are renowned not only for the recovery of the term 'metafiction' in the last decades, but also for the impact of their proposals in the field of contemporary literary criticism and theory. Waugh defines metafiction as

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.<sup>8</sup>

This writing technique does not allow the reader to forget that he is not in front of reality but of fiction. It constantly plays with the boundaries of fiction and reality. In attempting to define the concept, Waugh mentions that although the term metafiction originated in an essay by the American critic and self-conscious novelist William Gass, other meta terms as 'metapolitics', 'metarhetoric' and 'metatheatre' are a reminder of what has been, since 1960, a cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect and construct their experience of the world. In this sense

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<sup>7</sup>WAUGH, Patricia. *Metafiction The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. London & New York, Routledge, 1984. 2p.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality and history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures.<sup>9</sup>

Metafiction serves as a kind of warning that we are reading a book, an artifact, made up of invented characters and stories that do not really exist. According to Waugh's explanation of the term, this form of fiction 'is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels'<sup>10</sup> because of the representational nature, assimilation of everyday historical forms of communication and conflict of language and voices that they usually embrace. It is metafiction that has given the novel its identity; in other words, theorizing about itself has given the novel its own identity. She adds that the novel defies definition because the language it uses reflects the instability of the real world.

Metafiction pursues such questions through its formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory.<sup>11</sup>

Besides, there is no privileged language of fiction: the languages of memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, conversational registers, legal records, journalism and documentary compete for privilege to such an extent that they question and relativize each other, so the language of fiction is always self-conscious. Waugh comments that it was not an easy task for the novel to survive within a culture that apparently rejected its rules and conventions, so metafictional writers have found the necessity for this genre to

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<sup>9</sup>Id., p7.

<sup>10</sup>Id., p5.

<sup>11</sup>Id., p3.

theorize about itself. 'The traditional fictional quest has thus been transformed into a quest for fictionality'.<sup>12</sup>

Linda Hutcheon understands metafictional narrative as 'narcissistic'<sup>13</sup> writing in which fiction often mirrors its own process of fictional construction; 'narcissistic narrative[...] is process made visible'.<sup>14</sup> She also identifies the important role played by the 'commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity'<sup>15</sup> the text makes. Besides she emphasizes the complicity created between reader and writer and she states: 'narcissistic narrative transforms the authorial process of shaping, of making, into part of the pleasure and challenge of reading as co-operative, interpretative experience'.<sup>16</sup> In other words, she foregrounds the active role of the reader in the process of interpreting, ordering, selecting in order to make sense to the text.

Narrative self-reflexivity, self-consciousness and self-referentiality are similar concepts situated under the vast umbrella term known as metafiction. They become key concepts in our research about Paul Auster's trilogy. Self-reflexivity explains how fiction 'draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'.<sup>17</sup> In order to reach a further understanding of the notion of self-reflexivity within the field of metafictional writing, we have taken Waugh's description of metafiction as a mode of writing and its relation with

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<sup>12</sup>Id., p10.

<sup>13</sup> HUTCHEON, Linda. *Narcissist Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Ontario, Wilfred Laurier University Press. 1980. Xp.

<sup>14</sup>Id., 6p.

<sup>15</sup>Id., p1.

<sup>16</sup>Id., p154.

<sup>17</sup>WAUGH (1984), op. cit., p2.

postmodernism.<sup>18</sup> Some of the typical features of metafictional writing that are often displayed on postmodern fiction are: over-obstrusive, visible inventing narrator; explicit dramatization of the reader; Chinese-box structures; total breakdown of time and space; use of popular genres; explicit parody of other texts; self-reflexive images; critical discussions of the story within the story, among others. The use of these techniques brings forward the writing of the text as the major problem of the text itself. 'Contemporary reflexivity implies awareness both of language and metalanguage, of consciousness and writing'.<sup>19</sup> In regards to the loss of order, both in the world and in the art of writing, metafictional writers fertilize the idea that constructing fiction is basically no different 'from constructing one's reality.' 'Metafiction functions through the problematization rather than the destruction of the concept of reality'.<sup>20</sup>

Metafictional writers are constantly crossing the boundary that separates fiction and reality. This continuous shift could be due to the fact that in the construction of a literary work, the writer may be influenced by many elements such as his life experiences and level of education, his socio-economic condition, his view of the world, his audience, his knowledge of other texts and the historical moment when the piece of writing is produced. The same factors become crucial for the reader in the process of interpretation of a text and in the construction of meaning.

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<sup>18</sup>Id., p21.

<sup>19</sup>Id., p24.

<sup>20</sup>Id., p40.



## 1.2 Mimesis and the Status of Fiction and Reality

Exploring the relation between fiction and reality in contemporary fiction has led us to the concept of mimesis. For philosophers Aristotle and Plato, mimesis was the expression of reality through the production of a work of art. In other words, it could be understood as an aesthetic imitation or representation of the real world.

In more contemporary writing, the concept is taken and expanded; it is placed, for instance,

In the region between imitation, representation, perception and performance [...] Mimesis is an active process in which something new is created, even if it is based on what is previously known.<sup>21</sup>

On a similar line, Linda Hutcheon<sup>22</sup> proposes the use of mimesis in relation with metafiction as a continuum from *product* to *process*, the former embodied in realist fiction, the latter storytelling and language. The concept of mimesis, then, opens up to encompass production and perception (reception) and, as stated by Gebauer and Wulf,<sup>23</sup> theory and praxis. This characterization gives us the idea that mimesis is not interested in stressing the distinction between theory and practice in human spheres of experience, action and symbolic production but in assimilating them as a whole. Gebauer and Wulf assure that

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<sup>21</sup>MARAN, Timo. Mimesis as a Phenomenon of Semiotic Communication. Sign Systems Studies Vol. 31.1, 2003. 211p.

<sup>22</sup>HUTCHEON (1980), op. cit. px

<sup>23</sup>GEBAUER, Gunter and WULF, Christoph. Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society. Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1995. 3p.

the mimetic production of a symbolic world refers to other worlds and to the creators and draws other persons into one's own world. (...) mimesis implies the recognition of mediation between worlds and people<sup>24</sup>

and it also involves a question of power about the representation of the self and others and the interpretation of the world.

The concept of reality as fiction

is manufactured through the use of language and it is organized and perceived through 'frames'. It is produced by the interrelationship of apparently 'objective facticities' in the world with social convention and personal or interpersonal vision. These social forms operate within particular historical structures of power and frameworks of knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

Contemporary metafiction problematizes the use of frames, so that it accepts the assumption that real world and novels are constructed through frames but the difficulty or impossibility resides in how to clearly delineate either the limit between one and another frame or the limit that separates reality from fiction. Using frames is essential in all fiction; however, it becomes an explicit and conscious process in metafictional writing. In novels, this framing process can be identified through many different and varied devices used by metafictional writers such as stories within stories, characters reading about their own fictional lives or the author taking part in the story as a (fictionalized) character, as is the case of Paul Auster in *The New York Trilogy*.

In this sense, contemporary metafictional writing is permanently overflowed by mimetic elements that connect fiction and reality, but the emphasis on the process rather than on the product, never allows the reader to forget that what he is reading is a fictional work. If this connection is achieved through the use of language and this use of

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>WAUGH, op.cit., p50

language is discourse, 'metafictional texts show that literary fiction can never imitate or 'represent' the world but always imitates or 'represents' the discourses which in turn construct that world'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, these verbal constructions create 'alternative worlds' that implicitly address contexts of the real life.

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<sup>26</sup>WAUGH, op.cit., p100.

## **Chapter II: General Observations on *The New York Trilogy* and *The Red Notebook***

This chapter aims at providing a general contextualization of *The New York Trilogy* (1987) and *The Red Notebook* (1995) in American postmodern literature and in Paul Auster's career, and a brief summary of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Red Notebook* for the purpose of having a broader view of the texts. Besides, the fact that part of our analysis will be focused on autobiographical elements as part of the metafictional techniques used in *The Trilogy*, invites us to include some biographical data about the author.

In the United States, as in many other countries, the word 'postmodern' started being heard between the 1960s and 1970s. If we accept that Postmodern art works on the rejection of art's autonomy from the social world and the consequent re-establishment of *liaisons* with the political and social spheres<sup>27</sup>, then the many historical, social and political events of the period constitute the basement upon which American Postmodern Literature has been built; the struggle for Civil Rights, the battle against racism, the end of the Vietnam War, the organization of Feminist Movements, Martin Luther King's and J.F. Kennedy's deaths, the beginning of Gay Liberation Movements, Apollo landing on the Moon, Watergate break-in, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of World Wide Web, to mention but a few. This leads us to believe that literature is not only fertilized by the historical context but also impregnated of the social and cultural

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<sup>27</sup> PAYNE, Michael (ed). *Diccionario de teoría crítica y estudios culturales*. Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2002. 529p.

backgrounds. In addition to this, we cannot fail to mention the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday life and work. Means of mass communication like 'newspapers, radio, television have been decisive in bringing about the dissolution of centralized perspectives'.<sup>28</sup> There is no single reality any more but a multiplicity of images, ideas and interpretations of the world.

American postmodern literature, then, addresses many of the social and cultural issues that characterize the period but it also shows its postmodern status in the way its texts become 'anti-realistic', sometimes to the point of experimentation. As for metafictional writing, our concern in this study, American self-reflexive literature is especially represented by writers like John Barth (1930-), Donald Barthelme (1931-1989), Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007). All these have become iconic of the metafictional experimentation, a line of work on which we place Paul Auster (1947- ), American novelist, essayist, translator, scriptwriter and poet.

Paul Auster began reading literature at an early age, his favourite writers being Fedor Dostoevski, Edgar Allan Poe, Miguel de Cervantes, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Franz Kafka, Samuel Becket and William Shakespeare, and his favourite book, *Don Quixote*. He graduated from Columbia University in 1970, where he studied French, Italian and English literature. He lived in France for a period, earning his living with translations of French authors, like Mallarme, Sartre and Simenon. In 1974, he returned to the USA and started writing poems and essays, which provided him with the acceptance of a

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<sup>28</sup> VATTIMO, Gianni. *The Transparent Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. 5p.

specialized literary circle. He then experimented writing drama, without much success. It was the publication of *The New York Trilogy* in 1987 that made him well-known beyond the scholarly world. It is generally accepted by the critics that *The Trilogy* meant the beginning of a prestigious career as a novelist, one that continued and consolidated with the publication of more than ten novels, among them *Leviathan* (1992), *Mr. Vertigo* (1994), *Timbuktu* (1999), *The Book of Illusions* (2002), *Oracle Night* (2004), *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005), *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2006), *Man in the Dark* (2008), *Invisible* (2009), *Sunset Park* (2010). His non-fiction includes: *The invention of Solitude* (1982), *The Art of Hunger* (1992), *Hand to Mouth* (1997) and *The Red Notebook* (1995).

In regards to his private life, he married the writer Lydia Davis, with whom he had a son named Daniel, and later, in 1981, he contracted a second marriage with another writer called Siri Hustvedt and with whom he had a daughter named Sophie. Paul and Siri currently live in Brooklyn, USA.

On a first description, Paul Auster's stories appear related to chance, coincidences, impending disasters but also to everyday life, all these frequently converging on the search for personal identity and the knowledge of oneself. His books are about the human condition, man's relation with others, solitude and the search for happiness. But fiction itself is also a recurrent concern in his novels. It is not unusual to find in his stories notebooks of different colours so we can perceive his remarkable interest on talking about literature, the act of writing and reading.

## 2.1 *The New York Trilogy*

*The New York Trilogy* can be clearly framed within metafictional writing since it is essentially self-conscious, as shown by many elements and techniques employed by Paul Auster in the construction of the trilogy. He uses the form of the detective novel to reflect upon literature and upon the processes of writing and reading. This trilogy is composed of three novels: *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1987), first published independently but then published together under the title of *The New York Trilogy* (1987).

In *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn, the main character is a writer who lives alone in New York because his wife and son have died. Peter Stillman phones Quinn asking for a private detective called Paul Auster three times, so in the last call Quinn assumes the identity of Paul Auster and they arrange a meeting at the Stillmans' apartment, where Peter lives with Virginia, his wife. Peter Stillman is a young man who has been locked in a room by Peter Stillman, his father, for several years in order to carry out an experiment about language. His research fails so he goes mad and sets fire to all his writings associated with the project. Thereafter, Peter is rescued and taken to hospital. Now, his father has been released from an asylum for the criminally insane and Peter believes that he will try to kill him. So, Quinn as Paul Auster must find and follow Peter Stillman (father) in order to protect Peter Stillman (son). A curious detail is that both, Peter Stillman senior and Quinn have red notebooks which they take with them everywhere they go and which they use to take down notes. *City of Glass* is narrated by

a friend of Paul Auster (the character) and, in the end, not only the Stillmans but also Quinn disappear and the red notebook is the only remaining object in the Stillmans' apartment.

In *Ghosts*, the main character is a detective called Blue who has worked with Brown for a long time. One day, White hires Blue to follow Black and write reports about him. White rents for Blue an apartment situated just opposite Black's window. Blue begins his job as a detective but he finds out that Black's main activity is writing and reading. In the end, Blue goes into Black's apartment where Black sits with a gun pointing at him. Blue discovers that Black is actually White and while walking angrily towards Black, he asks him to shoot him but Black does not. Afterwards, Blue brutally attacks him and beats him unconscious. Next, he takes all Black's manuscripts and reads them till dawn. Finally, he puts on his hat and leaves the room.

In *The Locked Room* the main theme is literature, so everything turns around writing, reading, collecting information, editing and publishing. The narrator is a man who is a writer and lives alone. Fanshawe is the narrator's best friend since childhood. One day they separate and the narrator has not heard about his old friend anymore till now. Through a letter, Sophie asks the narrator to look for him. Sophie gives this man two large suitcases full manuscripts, notebooks and sheets of paper. Later on, they fall in love and get married. After that, they decide to publish Fanshawe's books and novels and the narrator begins to write Fanshawe's autobiography. He works as a detective looking for information, reading letters and notebooks, making connections, interviewing Fanshawe's relatives and other people known by him, observing at



photographs, visiting buildings and places. In the end, the narrator goes to see Fanshawe who gives him a red notebook.

## ***2.2 The Red Notebook***

*The Red Notebook* (1995) is considered, a non-fiction work in which Auster provides the reader with a collection of anecdotes, memories and life experiences that, in a sense, have constituted his source of inspiration for writing what he has written and how he has done it. Many of these tales and memories occur as a matter of chance which redirects the outcome of these stories, making the reader think deeply on them or merely surprising him. Interestingly, all these stories are related to Paul Auster in some way or another; either because he has lived such experiences or because he has heard the story from the lips of another person. They are short, simple and exquisite narratives with a complicated and uncertain undertone as life itself is.

### **Chapter III: *The New York Trilogy* and *The Red Notebook***

#### **3.1 The Red Notebook in *The New York Trilogy***

*The New York Trilogy* is essentially self-conscious. From the very first paragraph the author turns the novel into itself as he communicates: 'The question is the story itself,..'.<sup>29</sup> And by adding '...and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell'<sup>30</sup>, the author establishes a connection with the reader and his process of interpreting the text. The red notebook could be thought of as a metafictional object, since it acts as a means used by the author to reflect upon literature and writing.

After his encounter with the Stillmans and before starting with his promising case, Quinn decides to get a new notebook. He prefers notebooks with spiral and with narrow lines, the former suggesting a continuum of endless stories moving around a central point, the latter possibly alluding to the image of the narrow border that separates fiction and reality, writing and life, novel and autobiography. The red notebook epitomises a central point in the novel: literature, its process of writing and that process within postmodernism, which constantly questions and problematises the status of fiction and reality. This object is so crucial to the meaning of the story that the author not only gives detailed information about its shape, number of pages and size but also describes the exact moment when the character approaches the stationary shelves, where

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<sup>29</sup> AUSTER, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London, Faber and Faber, 1987. 3p.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

notebooks of different colours are displayed, and experiments such strong attraction to a red one that he feels obliged to buy it.

He looked through the pile, trying to decide which one to pick. For reasons that were never made clear to him, he suddenly felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook at the bottom. [...] He was at a loss to explain to himself why he found it so appealing. It was a standard eight-and-a-half-by-eleven notebook with one hundred pages.<sup>31</sup>

This moment is loaded with a great intensity of feelings because it expresses a contrast between a character who is at a loss to explain why he finds that red notebook so appealing and the red notebook, a simple standard device which could structure his life or, at least, his steps in the search for identity. But the red notebook also functions as an organizer of ideas. The act of writing is described as an arranged process in which the writer acts as and in this way becomes a detective who observes, thinks, makes questions and records. Thus, the red notebook constitutes a space which is considered the meeting point between fiction and reality in order to create new fictional worlds. In this sense, the red notebook serves to organize and give unity to the narrative from the beginning of *City of Glass* and marks a new step on Quinn's life and investigation since it gives order to the chaos of events and thoughts. And in the end, when it seems impossible to recover any kind of logical order in that investigation, it still serves as the recording of those events and thoughts which are relevant to the development and potential solution of the investigation. Even when the logical thread becomes blurry, the red notebook can be perceived as a tangible object, the basis of the whole narrative.

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<sup>31</sup> Id., p38.

It would be helpful to have a separate place to record his thoughts, his observations, and his questions. In that way, perhaps, things might not get out of control.<sup>32</sup>

After buying the red notebook, Quinn goes to his apartment, clears the table and places the notebook in the centre. Immediately, he takes off all his clothes and begins to write. Quinn does all this carefully as if he was performing a religious ritual: his desk, the altar; the red notebook, the chalice and him, just breathing, as if unwilling to disturb the sacredness of the moment. His first entry is: D Q (for Daniel Quinn). It has been a long time since he last wrote using his real name because he always does it under the pseudonym William Wilson. This scene lead us to think of an author who is interested in writing subjectively, showing himself as he really is, in other words, someone who wants to bare his soul. All human beings come to this world without a single piece of clothing and Daniel Quinn opens his writing totally naked likewise, a newborn novelist embarking on a newborn novel. At the same time, taking off all his clothes may signify the dismissal of his old self and the welcome of the new one, one in which the red notebook occupies a central position. This rebirth is prefigured at the beginning of the story when Quinn is lying in bed and waiting for the third strange phone call. He realizes that it is May nineteenth and that it is a significant date for him. It is his parents' wedding anniversary and, immediately, he adds a curious detail. He says that his mother once told him that he had been conceived at her wedding night. A moment later, the telephone rings and the story begins that will change him for the rest of his life.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

This fact had always appealed to him—being able to pinpoint the first moment of his existence—and over the years he had privately celebrated his birthday on that day.<sup>33</sup>

Daniel Quinn walks around the city every day but now he is stepping into a detective's shoes and a red notebook is his faithful companion. He follows Peter Stillman Sr, who thrusts himself into the city every day but in a sort of mysterious nonsensical walk. Everything is recorded in the red notebook by Quinn though in occasions, he does not fully understand the meaning of what he writes on it. Represented by the red notebook, the writer's mental space in which fiction develops occasionally contains mysterious details and facts, as mysterious as the writer's mind itself. Many of these details are perceived from the real world and kept in the writer's mind but he sometimes does not totally understand them.

What Stillman did on these walks remained something of a mystery to Quinn. He could, of course, see with his own eyes what happened, and all these things he dutifully recorded in his red notebook. But the meaning of these things continued to elude him.<sup>34</sup>

In one of these walks, Daniel Quinn finds out that Peter Stillman Sr also has a red notebook. Why does he say that there is a secret link between them? Is it just a coincidence or is it that one becomes the reflection of the other? If the latter is accepted, then we could interpret that Quinn's watch over Stillman Sr, both methodical and chaotic, renders his own search, a search for himself, for his own identity.

At the same time, it pleased him to know that Stillman also had a red notebook, as if this formed a secret link between them. Quinn suspected

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<sup>33</sup> Id., p10.

<sup>34</sup> Id., p58.

that Stillman's red notebook contained answers to the questions that had been accumulating in his mind,...<sup>35</sup>

Looking for identity as a writer and as a human being and, at the same time, reflecting upon literature are not simple tasks. In a sense, the red notebook functions as a linking thread that gives cohesion to the three novels, relates one character with some others and offers redemption to Quinn, Auster, Blue or whatever his name is as soon as he has an encounter with his inner self.

...it was the red notebook that offered him salvation. [...] the red notebook slowed Quinn's pace. There was no danger now of overtaking Stillman. The problem, rather, was to keep up with him, to make sure he did not vanish. For walking and writing were not easily compatible activities.<sup>36</sup>

While many other writers employ metafictional techniques covertly, Auster in *The New York Trilogy* does it explicitly. Throughout the trilogy, its main characters' major activity is 'writing' and he gives an account of this process.

For Quinn was now able to divide his attention almost equally between Stillman and his writing, glancing now up at the one, now down at the other, seeing the thing and writing about it in the same fluid gesture.<sup>37</sup>

The author does never divert attention from literature, the act of writing and the process of becoming a writer. Besides, he clearly demonstrates his devotion to books. He mentions, compares, analyses, alludes to many literary works like *Don Quixote*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Moby Dick* and, even, *Genesis*. He looks at them through the lens of literature but at the same time he introduces major themes related to history, philosophy

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<sup>35</sup> Id., p59.

<sup>36</sup> Id., p62.

<sup>37</sup> Id., p63.

and linguistics. He alludes to the process of writing influenced by the writer's knowledge of the books he has previously read and to the process of reading, since a broader interpretation of the text is achieved due to the reader's knowledge of the other texts mentioned in the book. Both processes become part of another process: the creation of meaning within the world of fiction. An instance of this is when Stillman Sr makes reference to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* by explaining Humpty Dumpty's little speech to Alice, in which he makes a connection between language and philosophy; and demonstrates the capacity of literature to convey sense. The reader will grasp the meaning of this elucidation if he has previously read that text and, similarly, the writer will be able to incorporate that text to his piece of writing only if he has had access to that information before. Besides, he pays attention to the process of reading and editing what he has produced. He admits that the red notebook contains not easily understandable sentences because of Quinn's trembling handwriting and on occasions they seem to be worthless to the solving of the Stillmans' case.

'...then settled down at his desk with the red notebook. He had been writing in it now for many days, filling page after page with his erratic, jostled hand, but he had not yet had the heart to read over what he had written. Now that the end at last seemed in sight, he thought he might hazard a look. [...] And when he did manage to decipher the words, it did not seem to have been worth the trouble. "Picks up pencil in middle of block. Examines, hesitates, puts in bag. . . . Buys sandwich in deli. . . . Sits on bench in park and reads through red notebook." These sentences seemed utterly worthless to him.<sup>38</sup>

But are these sentences really worthless? What do they reveal about the process of producing fiction? Picking up a pencil in the middle of the block could be connected to

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<sup>38</sup> Id., p65.

the writer's sudden revelation of an idea. On many occasions, he stops doing another activity and starts writing an idea. Then, he examines, hesitates, selects and revises what he has written.

Without an apparent reason, Daniel Quinn takes a clean page of the red notebook and draws a little map of the area Stillman has wandered. Immediately, he realises that letters are imaginary sketched on the streets and that they carry a message on.

And yet, the pictures did exist—not in the streets where they had been drawn, but in Quinn's red notebook. He wondered if Stillman had sat down each night in his room and plotted his course for the following day or whether he had improvised as he had gone along. It was impossible to know. He also wondered what purpose this writing served in Stillman's mind.<sup>39</sup>

This quotation expresses the physicality, the materiality of the red notebook, the words written on its pages becoming a mental space where fiction is revealed. Daniel Quinn could be compared with literary reviewers who sometimes find details, messages, symbolisms, parallelisms and images revealed in texts that perhaps the author has not taken into account at the moment of writing.

Quinn has been following Stillman for a long time. He is so aware of Stillman's every single action that it seems as if he is living another life. Quinn's first encounter with Stillman is tainted with an unusual quality, with light emanated from every object staging the significant meeting: two men in search of their truths, two writers and two red notebooks:

Stillman was sitting alone on a bench (...) the little red notebook on his lap. There was light everywhere, an immense light that seemed to radiate

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<sup>39</sup> Id., p71.



outward from each thing the eye caught hold of, and overhead, in the branches of the trees, a breeze continued to blow, shaking the leaves with a passionate hissing, a rising and falling that breathed on as steadily as surf.<sup>40</sup>

It is an immensely bright moment. Light is everywhere and Stillman's little red notebook is in centre of the scene. It is lying on his lap. It seems as if nature has prepared their encounter because there is a great amount of light and a gentle breeze. The great luminosity illustrates a moment of clarity in the novel in which both red notebooks and writers are together. One has got the questions and the other contains the answers. The leaves of the trees moving up and down by the wind might symbolize the writer's ideas constantly crossing the boundaries of fiction and reality; and coming and going 'as steadily as surf'.<sup>41</sup>

Quinn goes to the hotel where Peter Stillman was staying but he has already checked out. Stillman has gone and has become part of the city. He becomes a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks. Quinn says that he can walk through the streets every day and he might not find him anymore, which makes him feel really sad and lost. During the following days, he has an encounter with the real Paul Auster, tries to talk to Virginia Stillman on the phone on many occasions, walks long distances, devotes time to thinking and, of course, writes in the red notebook.

He found his red notebook, sat down at his desk, and wrote steadily for the next two hours. He did not bother to read over what he had written.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Id., p72

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Id., p106.

Quinn decided to eat something, entered one of the fast-food places on the ground floor, and leisurely consumed a sandwich as he did some work in the red notebook.<sup>43</sup>

He sat down on a stone bench in the plaza and breathed deeply, idling in the air and the light with closed eyes. Then he opened the red notebook, took the deaf mute's pen from his pocket, and began a new page.<sup>44</sup>

The image of Quinn's writing on the red notebook with the pen of a person that is not able to communicate orally strengthens the importance of fiction as a valid way of expression that contributes to the construction of the world. Quinn walks and pays attention to numerous details he has never taken into account. Then, for the first time since buying the red notebook he writes something that has nothing to do with the Stillman case. He feels a great need to record certain facts so he starts writing them in the red notebook. Walking and trying to identify Stillman among people, he has perceived the most vulnerable population of New York: the homeless, street artists, drunks and the insane. Besides, he describes women and men coming and going carrying varied types of bags and having different masks or appearances. Each of these urban characters represents a part of Quinn, a moment in Quinn's life or the people who have taken part in Quinn's life.

It was almost evening. Quinn closed the red notebook and put the pen in his pocket. He wanted to think a little more about what he had written but found he could not. The air around him was soft, almost sweet, as though it no longer belonged to the city.<sup>45</sup>

Darkness is coming, the Stillman case is nearing its end, the story is finishing and Quinn closes the red notebook. He stops writing and he cannot even go on thinking about what

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<sup>43</sup> Id., p107.

<sup>44</sup> Id., p108.

<sup>45</sup> Id., p111.

he has written. This change in the atmosphere is connected with the process of writing and its influence in the author's perception of the world that surrounds him.

Since this story is based entirely on facts, the author feels it his duty not to overstep the bounds of the verifiable, to resist at all costs the perils of invention. Even the red notebook, which until now has provided a detailed account of Quinn's experiences, is suspect. We cannot say for certain what happened to Quinn during this period, for it is at this point in the story that he began to lose his grip.<sup>46</sup> (Auster, 1987: 114).

The author (the narrative voice but, we could wonder, why not Auster the writer of *The New York Trilogy* as well, and Auster the fictional writer...) experiences moments of uncertainty and doubt. He cannot make a clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The narrow alley, where Quinn lives and hides himself for a long time, possibly represents the narrow line that separates fiction and reality. The red notebook is also there in this sort of limbo where fiction and reality meet. Quinn begins to suspect everything, even the information in the red notebook. This fact seems to be the root of Quinn's loss of control of the case or of his own life.

There is a fact that cannot be denied and it is that the red notebook is always there, beside Quinn. It becomes a primary necessity for him like eating, drinking, sleeping, having a shower.

...once, in an *emergency*, he was *forced* to use a page from the red notebook.<sup>47</sup> (our emphasis).

Using the red notebook as a pillow, he lay down on a grassy mound just north of the tree and fell asleep.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Id., p114.

<sup>47</sup> Id., p117.

<sup>48</sup> Id., p121.

When Quinn comes back to his apartment, he finds a girl living there. So, he decides to go to the Stillmans' apartment:

Quinn put the red notebook on the floor, removed the deaf mute's pen from his pocket, and tossed it onto the red notebook. Then he took off his watch and put it in his pocket. After that he took off all his clothes, opened the window, and one by one dropped each thing down the airshaft: first his right shoe, then his left shoe; one sock, then the other sock; his shirt, his jacket, his underpants, his pants. He did not look out to watch them fall, nor did he check to see where they landed. Then he closed the window, lay down in the center of the floor, and went to sleep.<sup>49</sup>

The red notebook remains the main object in the story, so literature and its process of writing continues being the central theme in the story. By taking all his clothes off and dropping them through the window, Quinn writes in the red notebook freely with no prejudices or fears. He is as naked as at the beginning of the story. He tries to leave all material things aside. Not even time is important for him. The window is what separates him from reality. He prefers closing it and staying alone in this room which shelters fiction.

Most of the times that he writes on the red notebook, he is eating something or is about to eat. It seems as if the red notebook constitutes another kind of food for Quinn, an abstract one, a spiritual one but as essential as real food. And besides that, we could say that for Quinn writing becomes more important than eating.

After his meal, he began to write in the red notebook. He continued writing until darkness returned to the room.<sup>50</sup>

He ate what he could of the food and then went back to writing in the red notebook.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Id., p127.

<sup>50</sup> Id., p129.

<sup>51</sup> Id., p130.

When it was dark, Quinn slept, and when it was light he ate the food and wrote in the red notebook.<sup>52</sup>

It seemed to him that he had less and less time to eat his food and write in the red notebook.<sup>53</sup>

Once, for example, he finished his food and discovered that there was only enough time to write three sentences in the red notebook. The next time there was light, he could only manage two sentences. He began to skip his meals in order to devote himself to the red notebook, eating only when he felt he could no longer hold out.<sup>54</sup>

The red notebook and the process of writing are associated to moments of light and, in this case, to Quinn's moments of light which become shorter and more transient as the number of clean pages of the red notebook diminishes. As the story itself, Quinn, its main character, is coming to the end.

This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. Little by little, Quinn was coming to the end.<sup>55</sup>

...he tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage. He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again.

The last sentence of the red notebook reads: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?"<sup>56</sup>

This significant last question makes the reader think about the end of writing, the end of the story, the end of the author's life. And the answer could be that although a writer could not continue writing, his soul and his voice will exist forever and their refuge will be literature and its readers.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Id., p131.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Id., p132.

In a small room at the back, impeccably clean as all the other rooms were, the red notebook was lying on the floor.<sup>57</sup>

As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now. I have followed the red notebook as closely as I could, and any inaccuracies in the story should be blamed on me. [...] The red notebook, of course, is only half the story, as any sensitive reader will understand. As for Auster, I am convinced that he behaved badly throughout. If our friendship has ended, he has only himself to blame. As for me, my thoughts remain with Quinn. He will be with me always.<sup>58</sup>

Paul Auster violates more traditional writing conventions by introducing himself in the story as a character. This metafictional technique allows Auster to highlight the relationships between the writer and his work; the writer and his characters and the writer and the reader. The story is told by a friend of Paul Auster. Does Paul Auster's friend embody readers and their interpretations of the story? Why does friendship between them not last? Why do his thoughts remain with Quinn? Possibly because the story will be the only thing that, in the end, will last; its readers will make sense of it through their interpretations, thus constituting an essential element in the process of creating literature. That could be understood as the other half of the red notebook mentioned by the author. In order to elucidate the relationship between the author and his story, Dennis Barone (1995) cites Jorge Luis Borges, who asks:

‘Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* or Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*?’ and Barone adds: ‘Why....does it disturb us that “Paul” is a character in, is the narrator of, Paul’s own fiction?’<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Id., p133.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> BARONE, Dennis (ed.) *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*. Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. 5p.

Again, he cites Borges, who answers: '...if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators can be fictitious.'<sup>60</sup>

*Ghosts*, the second novel in *The Trilogy* reinstates some of the concerns in *City of Glass*. In both novels the main character is following another individual whose only visible work is writing on a notebook. They follow them all the time so they begin to live the life of the individual they follow. One of their differences could be that in *City of Glass*, Quinn, its main character, is a writer who starts working as a detective, and in *Ghosts*, Blue is a detective that is hired by White to follow Black and to write reports about him. Blue spends so much time observing and writing that he finally becomes a writer. We can see how Auster finds a strong connection in both activities: writing and investigation.

Before moving to an apartment rented by White for him to work on the case, Blue takes a thirty-eight, a pair of binoculars, a notebook and lots of other belongings. From the point of view of storyline, taking a gun is understood as natural, Blue being a detective on a case, but symbolically the gun anticipates the old Blue dying and giving birth to a new life of nothingness. Day after day, he watches another individual whose only job is writing on a notebook. The pair of binoculars, apart from being another logical object in the context of detective work, may symbolise 'observation' because a writer, like a detective, needs to watch and record in order to write in the endless notebook of literature. The 'notebook' stands for literature, thus writing on its pages is

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

what joins both characters, Blue and Black, who permanently observe each other through those windows that connect them with their real and fictional worlds.

Blue is an old hand at such compositions and has never had any trouble with them. His method is to stick to outward facts, describing events as though each word tallied exactly with the thing described, and to question the matter no further. Words are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there. Oh, there are moments when the glass gets a trifle smudged and Blue has to polish it in one spot or another, but once he finds the right word, everything clears up. Drawing on the entries he has made previously in his notebook, sifting through them to refresh his memory and to underscore pertinent remarks, he tries to fashion a coherent whole, discarding the slack and embellishing the gist. In every report he has written so far, action holds forth over interpretation.<sup>61</sup>

By explaining Blue's writing method, Auster illustrates the writer's relation with fiction and reality. Words, he says, are transparent for him and they constitute the glass through which he sees the world he wants to describe.

He also says that writing consists of phrasing, revising, organizing, understanding the text as a whole, discarding trivial ideas and attending to aesthetic elements. As days pass, Black continues writing on his notebook and Blue also writes on his. Blue learns almost everything about Black. But he realizes that, in fact, he knows nothing about him.

Oddly enough, this thought reminds him of some sentences from *Walden*, and he searches through his notebook for the exact phrasing, fairly certain that he has written them down. We are not where we are, he finds, but in a false position. Through an infirmity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> AUSTER (1987), op. cit., p148.

<sup>62</sup> Id., p.170-171



Regarding this quotation, Aliko Vargogli<sup>63</sup> says that Blue does not know where he is situated because he is trapped in two fictions at the same time. On one side he is part of Paul Auster's book and on the other side he is part of the plot he himself is creating in order to solve the case.

For the fact remains that none of this is possible. It is not possible for such a man as Black to exist.<sup>64</sup>

Blue begins to think that Black does not really exist. He must be the product of his own imagination. Both, Blue and Black are different aspects of the figure of the author. When looking through the window, Blue sees not only a man writing on his desk but also his inner self as a writer reflected in that man. Being there and looking at a man whose major activity is reading and writing produce in Blue a sense of idleness. Thus, looking into his deeper self and writing on his notebook becomes a way of maintaining himself busy.

In *The Locked Room*, the red notebook appears almost at the end of the story in the right moment when the narrator goes to see Fanshawe. They have a short but weighty conversation.

“I have some things to give you. At a certain point, I realized that I owed you an explanation for what I did. At least an attempt. I’ve spent the past six months trying to get it down on paper.”

“I thought you gave up writing for good.”

“This is different. It has no connection with what I used to do.”

“Where is it?”

“Behind you. On the floor of the closet under the stairs. A red notebook.”  
I turned around, opened the closet door, and picked up the notebook. It was a standard spiral affair with two hundred

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<sup>63</sup> VARGOGLI, op. cit., p49

<sup>64</sup> Id., p172.

ruled pages. I gave a quick glance at the contents and saw that all the pages had been filled: the same familiar writing, the same black ink, the same small letters.

[...]

"It's all in the notebook. Whatever I managed to say now would only distort the truth."<sup>65</sup>

"It's finished. Take the notebook and go back to New York. That's all I ask of you."<sup>66</sup>

In allusion to the sentence 'whatever I managed to say now I would only distort the truth', we can say that the author stresses the importance of the written language as more truthful than the oral one and he also considers the process of reading and interpretation of the text.

After the dialogue, the narrator does not remember anything at all. He finds himself outside the house with the umbrella in one hand and the red notebook in the other. This moment of amnesia suffered by the narrator emphasises the mysterious presence of Fanshawe and opens a question: is Fanshawe real or is he just a figment of the narrator's imagination? One character seems to be a projection on the other, especially if is taken into account that the narrator slips into Fanshawe's life, falling in love with Fanshawe's wife and taking care of Fanshawe's child. Auster plays with the matter of what is real and what is fiction. Then, he goes to the railway station and sits down on a wooden bench with the red notebook on his lap. This image leads us to think about Quinn's encounter with Peter Stillman Sr. The red notebook remains there in the

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<sup>65</sup> Id., p311.

<sup>66</sup> Id., p312.

centre of the scene. After ten minutes, the narrator opens the red book and reads it for almost an hour trying to interpret what Fanshawe has written.

Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation. I had for it. These were not the words of a man who regretted anything. He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me.<sup>67</sup>

Here, both characters are separated by a door. They are, as Blue and Black, two sides of the same coin. The narrator represents 'the man' who has family and friends and, at the same time, he is 'a writer' (Fanshawe) who is self-enclosed in his fictional world. They have had many encounters and under different names and in different disguises during *The Trilogy*; however, this last encounter is decisive. The author shows a man who abandoned his family and friends for a long time but he does not seem to regret anything. He has been locked into his own thoughts, in his own fictional worlds. He becomes a prisoner of his own fiction. The bridge between the writer and the man is the red notebook.

And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail—even to the point of failing himself. I could be wrong, however. I was hardly in a condition to be reading anything at that moment, and my judgment is possibly askew. I was there, I read those words with my own eyes, and yet I find it hard to trust in what I am saying.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Id., p313.

<sup>68</sup> Id., p313-314.

Many sentences in the red notebook are difficult to understand but at the same time the narrator experiments a moment of lucidity, similar to the great light present in Quinn and Stillman's meeting. By reading the red notebook, the man faces his own strengths and weaknesses. Words are loaded of confusion and lucidity, madness and coherence, cowardice and bravery, love and hate.

One by one, I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out.<sup>69</sup>

This is the answer to the question: 'What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?'<sup>70</sup> When the red notebook has no more pages the story ends and the writer initiates his journey to other fictional places.

### **3.2 Autobiographical and Mimetic Elements in *The New York Trilogy***

There are, undoubtedly, autobiographical elements in *The New York Trilogy*, elements which are seen as a means to self-consciously blur the boundaries between fiction and reality and to question the status of both. The relation between certain moments in the plot and the author's life experiences will be relevant to the analysis of metafictional and postmodern writing. By finding the connection between *The New York Trilogy* and *The Red Notebook*, we intend to portray Auster's figure and have a deeper understanding of the relation between writing and life, fiction and reality.

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<sup>69</sup> Id., p314.

<sup>70</sup> Id., p132.

After reading *The New York Trilogy* and having approached Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook*, some interviews and his biography, we find that Daniel Quinn is almost a portrayal of Paul Auster's figure. Quinn is a 35-year-old writer of mystery novels who lives alone in an apartment in Brooklyn because his wife and son are 'now' dead. While writing *City of Glass*, Paul Auster was in his middle thirties and he was living in Brooklyn, too. A couple of years before starting *City of Glass*, he had been living alone because his first marriage had ended between 1978 and 1979 and his wife and son lived in another house.

L and I were married in 1974. Our son was born in 1977, but by the following year our marriage had ended. (...) We were both living in Brooklyn then, about three or four blocks from each other,...<sup>71</sup>

Daniel Quinn has published novels, books of poetry, critical essays and plays and he has worked on a number of translations.

In the past, Quinn had been more ambitious. As a young man he had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations.<sup>72</sup>

Under the pseudonym William Wilson, he started writing and publishing novels whose main character is Max Work. Auster devotes some lines to talk about Quinn's relationship with them both. In regards to William Wilson, he declares:

...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 even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life. Quinn treated him with deference, at times even admiration, but he never went so far as to believe that he and William Wilson were the same man.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> AUSTER, Paul. *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*. London, Faber and Faber, 1995. 12p.

<sup>72</sup> AUSTER (1987), op. cit., p4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Then, he refers to Max Work, his Private Eye narrator, as follows:

Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise.<sup>74</sup>

Paul Auster, as we have already mentioned, is a writer of novels, poems, critical reviews; and translations from French into English especially when he lived in France. Until that moment his novels were being published under the pseudonym Paul Benjamin. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, he talks about his feelings and sensations while writing under a pseudonym:

..., I felt as though I were writing with a mask on my face. It was an odd experience, but I can't say that it was unenjoyable. Posing as someone else was quite a bit of fun, in fact- but at the same time disturbing and provocative. If I hadn't gone through that experience of pseudonymity myself, I never would have been able to develop Quinn in the way I did.<sup>75</sup>

In his spare time, Quinn enjoys reading, walking, looking at paintings; and watching movies, opera or baseball matches. In one of the anecdotes in *The Red Notebook*, Paul Auster reveals his taste and knowledge about works of art: 'I remember a Carabaggio he once did that struck me as utterly remarkable',<sup>76</sup>

Quinn, Peter Stillman senior, Blue, Black, Fanshawe and the narrator of *The Locked Room* can be considered the showcase of Paul Auster's passion for literature. All the time, they are surrounded by books, notebooks and pens and occasionally theorize on or serve as instrument for others to theorize about literature, the act of

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<sup>74</sup> Id., p6.

<sup>75</sup> AUSTER (1995), op.cit., p139.

<sup>76</sup> Id., p14

writing or reading and interpreting texts. A clear example of this is when Peter Stillman refers to and makes a review about Auster's favourite book, *Don Quixote*, a book which is also discussed by (the fictional) Paul Auster himself. Also, through Auster's description of Quinn's way of writing, he outlines his own narrative. He depicts mystery novels as follows:

What he liked about these books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant.[...] Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.<sup>77</sup>

The idea of a shifting centre is frequently present in metafictional and postmodern fiction. Ideas come and go in a non-linear way since metafictional authors play with time, space, characters and genres. They play with conventions; Auster's narrative is a good example of this way of writing. In an interview with Joseph Mallia, he declares that although he used many elements of detective fiction, *The New York Trilogy* is not a detective novel at all, thus, he used all these elements for different ends. 'I tried to use certain genre conventions to get to another place,...'<sup>78</sup> 'Why detective novels? Perhaps because the 'detective is a very compelling figure (...) He is the seeker after truth, the problem solver, the one who tries to figure things out.'<sup>79</sup> and this seems to be the real intention of Auster's books. He looks for truth because he needs to solve a question of identity. Quinn, Stillman, Blue, Black, Fanshawe and the narrator of *The Locked Room*

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<sup>77</sup> AUSTER (1987), op.cit.,p8.

<sup>78</sup> AUSTER (1995), op.cit.p109.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

are different masks worn by Paul Auster in order to show the human being's process of maturity as a man and as a writer and to reflect upon the human existence and literature.

A curious detail in *The New York Trilogy* is that Auster includes in *City of Glass*, a character called Paul Auster, whose wife is called Siri. In an interview, Auster told that he started writing *City of Glass* in a special moment of dramatic improvement in his life. He was in love with Siri Hustvedt and they moved together to a new apartment in Brooklyn. He defines *City of Glass* as a homage to Siri because he imagines that his life would have been like Quinn's if he had not met this extraordinary woman. 'That's why I had to appear in the book as myself, but at the same time Auster is also Quinn, but in a different universe...' <sup>80</sup>

In the last chapter of *The Red Notebook*, Auster explains how a wrong phone call gave birth to *City of Glass*. Auster was alone in his apartment in Brooklyn, sitting at his desk and trying to write something when the telephone rang. It was a man who was asking if he was talking to Pinkerton Agency. Auster told him that he had dialed the wrong phone number and hung up. The next afternoon the telephone rang again and it was the same person asking for Pinkerton Agency. He again told the caller that it was the wrong phone number. But after hanging up the phone he wondered: 'What if I had pretended to be a detective from the Pinkerton Agency? (...) What if I actually taken on the case?' <sup>81</sup> A year later, when he sat down to write *City of Glass*, 'the wrong phone call had been transformed into the crucial event of the book, the mistake that sets the whole

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<sup>80</sup> Id., p108.

<sup>81</sup> Id., p36.



story in motion' <sup>82</sup> Quinn is given another opportunity and when the phone rings for the third time he says: Yes, 'I'm Paul Auster-and at that moment the madness begins.' <sup>83</sup> Auster declares that he wanted to be faithful to his original impulse and that was a way of implicating himself to the action of the story.

In *The Locked Room*, Fanshawe sends the narrator a letter with a message which says: 'Must talk to you. 9 Columbus Square, Boston; April 1st. This is where it ends, I promise.' <sup>84</sup> (Auster, 1987: 301) Beyond the story, this address actually exists. It is the address of Paul Auster's friends who live in Boston and where he has spent night in several occasions. Once, he told in an interview that one day, after having fictionalized it in *The Locked Room*, he decided to go this house. He climbed into a cab and when he told the address to the cab driver he began to laugh and told him extremely strange stories that happened in that house. It was all so mysterious that it is hard for him not to feel that he had invented this cab driver. 'The ghost of 9 Columbus Square!' <sup>85</sup>

As suggested by our findings in the search of autobiographical and mimetic elements in *The New York Trilogy*, fiction and reality are mixed up all the time in this trilogy. It shares so many details with Paul Auster's life and experiences that it leads us to believe that we are in front of another version of Paul Auster's *The Red Notebook*, only that this is fictionalized in the red notebook that appears in the trilogy.

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<sup>82</sup> Id., p37

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> AUSTER (1987), op. cit., p.301.

<sup>85</sup> AUSTER (1995), op. cit., p.123.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this work has been to explore *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster as novels which question the status of fiction and become self-conscious reflections on literature and writing, which makes it possible to frame it within metafictional and postmodern writing. As for metafictional writing and following Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction, Auster's *Trilogy* is an instance of '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'.<sup>86</sup> Besides it is considered postmodern writing because it represents a challenge to the status of fiction and reality by hypothesizing their blurring boundaries.

We have focused on the red notebook in *The New York Trilogy* as a structural element in the story. Why a structural element? Because it is a standard object with no apparent uniqueness on it but it is present in the three novels, becoming a thread that unifies the work by giving cohesion to the piece. This trilogy wears the disguise of a detective novel but the author's real intention does not seem to be to solve a case but to discuss and theorise about other themes like the human being, identity, craziness, and the one of our concern, literature and its writing process.

This research has been part of an effort to demonstrate that literature and the act of writing is embodied in that red notebook and with this assumption we have made an exhaustive analysis of the instances in which this element was employed in the story,

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<sup>86</sup> WAUGH (1984), op.cit., p2.

transcending its mere functional presence as an object of use and the result of this investigation is that this tangible object symbolises and represents a space for reflection on literature and the act of writing. Since the beginning of the story when Daniel Quinn buys the red notebook and starts working on the case, we can witness the beginning of the process of writing and his first steps on the search for an identity. His identity pursuit is symbolised by the act of showing himself naked and it signifies the dismissal of his old self and the welcome of a new one for whom the red notebook occupies the central position. The red notebook is relevant to the development of the story since it functions as an arranger of ideas and as the recording of the main events and thoughts, as well as, in the end when chaos invaded the story and the plot seems to have no possible unity and organization this element is the one which gives order and cohesion to the three novels.

In *The New York Trilogy* the status of fiction and reality is constantly being questioned because of its confusing boundaries and then we have noticed that there are certain mimetic and autobiographical elements within the story that allow us to demonstrate it. First, we have explored and revised Auster's biography; however, our analysis was based upon Auster's *The Red Notebook* (1995), a short book divided in thirteen chapters that is a collection of this American author's anecdotes and memories, frequently considered a non-fiction work. This publication reinforces the idea that the red notebook in *The New York Trilogy* represents the act of writing and by which fiction self-consciously deals with fiction.

After having approached *The Red Notebook* critically and worked on its relation to *The New York Trilogy*, we can affirm that Auster becomes subject and object in his

fictions or fictionalised versions of himself within fiction. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory<sup>87</sup> and having been asked about one of his fictional works, he told that 'he had to objectify himself in order to explore his own subjectivity'. That is exactly what he did in the trilogy because the connection of writing and living can be seen from the very beginning of the *City of Glass*. The novel begins with a wrong phone call to Quinn and the curious detail is that it truly occurred to Auster, differing from this, Quinn received a third call and it is the exact moment when the chaotic story was born. This is just an example of how fiction and reality, writing and living are intermingled in Auster's *Trilogy*.

Our work has explored the status of fiction and reality in a postmodern novel and more specifically it has studied the red notebook in *The New York Trilogy* and its relation to Auster's own red notebook entitled *The Red Notebook*. By doing so, we have found that the question of the blurring boundaries of fiction and reality in *The New York Trilogy* allows other possible readings. In our opinion, the *Trilogy* could be addressed from literature but together with other branches of study and research like philosophy, anthropology or psychology focusing on the human being, his identity, his strengths and weaknesses, madness and sanity and its relation to the world. To conclude we want to make clear that addressing these issues may not be an easy task since postmodernism is permanently challenging fiction and reality and, on many occasions, fiction seems to be real and reality seems to be fictional.

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<sup>87</sup> AUSTER (1995), op. cit., p147.

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